

The Dimensions of the Kingdom of Heaven in Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Commentary on Matthew*

MATTHEW L. MARTIN
Saint Paul, MN

IN HIS INAUGURAL LECTURE as a Master of Theology at the University of Paris, Saint Thomas Aquinas states that the three Synoptic Gospels “are distinguished according to the three dignities which relate to Christ the man. Of these, Matthew defines what pertains to the royal dignity; hence, in the beginning of his Gospel he shows that he had descended from kings according to the flesh, and shows him adored by the royal Magi.”¹ Thus, Aquinas’s commentary on Matthew makes a natural place to start investigating the Angelic Doctor’s treatment of the theme of the Kingdom of God.

Earlier scholarship dated the *Lectura super Mattheum* to Thomas’s first period as a *Magister in Sacra Pagina* at the University of Paris from 1256 to 1259.² However, more recent work has concluded that it belongs to the second Parisian period, most likely during the academic year of 1269–1270.³ This means that the Matthew commentary is an immediate predecessor to Aquinas’s better-known commentary on John, and as Jeremy Holmes points out, it is the work of “Aquinas at the height of his powers, with the entire patristic

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Hic est liber*, in *Principium [Inaugural Lectures]*, transl. Ralph McNerney, in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1998), revised and html-edited by Joseph Kenny, O.P., isidore.co/aquinas/english/Principium.htm.

² See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, rev. ed. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 55–56, and Jeremy Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura in Matthaeum*,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, edited by Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 75–76.

³ See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:55–56, and Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 75–76.

tradition at his fingertips and a complete command of scholastic theology.”⁴

Unfortunately, the text available to us may not represent Aquinas at his full brilliance. As Holmes notes, “the *lectura* come down to us through *reportationes*, that is, notes taken down by person in the audience and later filled out from memory or other sources to look more like the actual transcript of a lecture.”⁵ Unlike the commentary on John, Thomas does not appear to have reviewed these notes for publication.⁶ In addition, the manuscript tradition is limited—only four manuscripts, from two sources, survive. “Peter [d’Andria] seems to have written down the comments on chapters 1–12 of Matthew, while Leodegar [of Besançon] recorded the lectures from 6.9 through to the end of the Gospel.”⁷

The tradition is further complicated by the fact that the manuscripts are “not only incomplete but erroneous.”⁸ Key portions of the text of chapters 5 and 6—dealing with the Sermon on the Mount—were missing from all the manuscripts available until recently; the commentary’s first editor, Bartholomew of Sina, filled in the gaps with a commentary by Peter de Scala, a late-thirteenth-century Dominican.⁹

Fortunately for scholars of Thomas, in 1955, a copy of Peter d’Andria’s *reportatio* containing the missing material was discovered in a library at Basel.¹⁰ Until recently, only fragments of this text were available to the public.¹¹ However, as of September 2013, the Aquinas Institute of Lander, Wyoming, has published a Latin–English edition of the commentary on Matthew which, though primarily based on the earlier Marietti text, uses the Basel manuscript to correct the lacunae and replace the interpolated portions.

While a final critical edition awaits the work of the Leonine Commission, for the first time, the academic community has easy access to a complete and uncorrupted version of the commentary text. Whatever faults remain in what has come down to us, this remains a valuable

⁴ Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 77.

⁵ Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74.

⁶ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:339, Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74.

⁷ Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74.

⁸ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:57.

⁹ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:56–57 and Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74–75.

¹⁰ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:57 and Holmes, “Aquinas’ *Lectura*,” 74–75.

¹¹ Selections of it were reproduced in J.-P. Renard, “*La Lectura super Matthaeum* V. 20–48 de Thomas d’Aquin (Edition d’après le ms. Bale, Univ. Bibl. B.V. 12),” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 50 (1983): 145–190, and H.-V. Schooner, “*La Lectura in Matthaeum* de S. Thomas (Deux fragments inédits et la *Reportatio* de Pierre d’Andria),” *Angelicum* 33 (1956): 121–42.

commentary and source of insight into Aquinas's biblical theology, and thus to his doctrine on the Kingdom, which is harder to derive from his more famous systematic works.

We should briefly address this commentary's relationship to Thomas's other major work on the Evangelists, the *Catena aurea*. Thomas began this collection of patristic commentary on the Gospels "at the request of Urban IV toward the end of 1262 or the beginning of 1263"¹² and had the volume on Matthew ready to offer to that Pope before his death in October 1264.¹³ The rest of the text took somewhat longer to complete, but it was finished "between 1265 and 1268, before Thomas returned to Paris."¹⁴ Thus, it predates the commentary on Matthew, and Holmes, having selected the passage on the Transfiguration as "typical" of the commentary, concludes that "those parts of Thomas' text which are directly dependent on the *Catena* make 70 per cent of the total commentary on Mt. 17.1–9."¹⁵ While the *Catena aurea* contains little of Thomas's own thought, its structure and influence on the commentary on Matthew make it an invaluable companion as a way to track his sources and demonstrate the depth of his engagement with the Fathers, as well as his gifts in bringing them all into a unified, coherent whole.¹⁶

Some previous attempts at studying the topic of the Kingdom have dismissed the Matthew commentary, if not Aquinas's work as a whole. Writing in 1980, Benedict Viviano stated: "Thomas Aquinas does not devote any significant portion of his principal theological enterprise to the kingdom of God, the central theme of the preaching of Jesus. This may be considered a serious weakness in the greatest doctor of the medieval Church."¹⁷ Viviano was aware of the Matthew commentary, but when considering the definition of the Kingdom in the commentary on Matthew 3, he characterized it as containing "the familiar false start based on Luke 17:21, which becomes the basis for an individualist, private interior definition, . . . the usual Augustinian line, . . . [and] a rather remote, arbitrary equivocation."¹⁸ The reason for those multiple descriptions is

¹² Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:136.

¹³ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:136–37.

¹⁴ Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:137.

¹⁵ Holmes, "Aquinas' *Lectura*," 86.

¹⁶ The *Catena aurea* has also been studied and annotated with more depth than those commentaries, especially the neglected Matthew text, making it an easier source for determining precise references to earlier authors.

¹⁷ Benedict T. Viviano, "The Kingdom of God in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 44, no. 4 (1980): 507–24, at 509.

¹⁸ Viviano, "Kingdom of God," 510.

that, in this passage, Aquinas puts forth a definition of the Kingdom that includes no less than *four* distinct dimensions.

Later writers have had a more positive view of Thomas's work here. Contemporary theologian Matthew Levering has used this passage as the starting point when discussing "the Kingdom, the Church, and the Holy Spirit" in his *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*.¹⁹ Levering provides a brief overview of the four dimensions laid out at the start of Aquinas's commentary on Matthew 3, and highlights how each of the first three dimensions helps provide "the addition of an imminent dimension to the sense of eschatological imminence."²⁰ Levering does not follow up on the work on the Kingdom in the rest of the commentary, though, opting to develop his thesis through a study of other texts of Aquinas. Thus, while Aquinas's views of the Kingdom are treated more respectfully than in Viviano, the *commentary on Matthew* is used only as a starting point rather than a topic for deep research.

This paper takes some steps in the other direction, arguing that a careful examination of the commentary on Matthew demonstrates Thomas's broad knowledge of the Fathers on the topic of the Kingdom and that Thomas understands these dimensions of the Kingdom as interconnected and dependent on each other. Rather than being four independent interpretations, or even three dimensions feeding into an eschatological whole, these are four dimensions of a unified concept of the Kingdom, and this unity can be seen throughout Aquinas's discussion of the topic in his study of this Gospel. In addition, going beyond the fourfold definition laid out in the commentary on Matthew 3:2 leads the careful reader to a text that is easy to overlook, but which provides a Christological dimension that anchors the other dimensions of the Kingdom in an even more profound unity than the eschatological dimension.

I begin with a breakdown of Aquinas's exegesis of the proclamation of the Kingdom in Matthew 3, which provides the fourfold definition mentioned above, as well as the less obvious but more fundamental fifth dimension. I then examine Aquinas's commentary on some other "Kingdom texts" in Matthew, examining how Thomas explains and connects the dimensions of the Kingdom, and conclude by exploring the question of the unifying dimension of the Kingdom and some further explorations of this doctrine.

¹⁹ Matthew Levering, *Exploring the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 234–35.

²⁰ Levering, *Exploring*, 235.

Matthew 3: Defining the Kingdom of Heaven

The first lecture on Matthew 3, which opens with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven by John the Baptist, provides Thomas with the opportunity to state his understanding of that Kingdom.

"The Kingdom of Heaven," Aquinas says, "is received in four ways in Scripture," following Remigius, down to the scriptural citations used.²¹ This is the only source cited on this passage in the *Catena aurea* as well, so we can be confident Thomas is using Remigius as the baseline for his interpretation. The first dimension of the Kingdom is based on the common medieval reading of Luke 17:21 ("The Kingdom of God is within you") and is Christ's indwelling by grace in the individual soul. "And this is called the kingdom of heaven because, by grace, the road to the kingdom of heaven is begun in us."²² Viviano calls this a "familiar false start based on Luke 17:21, which becomes the basis for an individualist, private interior definition."²³ Thomas is working in the medieval tradition that draws in turn from the Fathers; the *Catena aurea* cites Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Venerable Bede in support of this interpretation.²⁴ Defining it as a "false start" thus requires dramatically different premises from those of the medieval Scholastics, since it requires both dismissal of the Church Fathers and a modern skepticism about the text of the Gospels themselves. Since the Kingdom has not yet manifested in its visible fullness, and neither Jesus nor the report of his words in Scripture could be fundamentally in error, "the kingdom of God is within you" in the present tense must refer to the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers.²⁵

The second dimension of the Kingdom given is Scripture. This interpretation has been a stumbling block for some; Viviano calls it one that "can only be characterized as a rather remote, arbitrary equivocation."²⁶ Thom-

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Matt 3*, lec. 1, (Marietti) no. 250; translations of *Super Matt* are my own guided by *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura*, trans. Jeremy Holmes, 2 vols. (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2013). Quotations of *Catena aurea* trans. John Henry Parker, in *Catena Aurea*, vol. 1, *Matthew* (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1842).

²² Aquinas, *Super Matt 3*, lec. 1 no. 250. Since Remigius, and through him Aquinas, cites Matthew 21:43, which refers to the transfer of the Kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles, in the context of Sacred Scripture, it can be taken as being read that Scripture here encompasses the Old Testament as well as the New.

²³ Viviano, "Kingdom of God," 510

²⁴ Aquinas, *Catena aurea: Luke 17*, lec. 6

²⁵ For further discussion of the relationship of Christ's preaching, the kingdom, and the degree of fulfillment, see Levering, *Exploring*, 210–40.

²⁶ Viviano, "Kingdom of God," 510

as's reasoning becomes clearer with a further reading of the commentary, which shows that this interpretation centers on the understanding of Scripture as the "Book of the New Law." For Saint Thomas, the concept of law is central to the idea of a kingdom or people; his commentary on Psalm 2 goes so far as to state that "a populace is a mass of men joined by harmony of the law."²⁷ Scripture thus "is called the kingdom, because this law leads to the kingdom."²⁸ This is in keeping with what he saw about law in the *Summa theologiae*: "The intent of every lawgiver is to make good citizens."²⁹ In this case, the New Law of the Gospel makes the good citizens who constitute the Kingdom of Heaven. Based on other passages in the commentary on Matthew (especially the exposition of the parables of chapter 13) and elsewhere in his corpus, "Scripture" here should be understood as referring to the fullness of revelation or *sacra doctrina*.

The third dimension of the Kingdom is a more obvious one, "the present Church Militant."³⁰ However, this is not the central meaning, but only one of the several dimensions, since the earthly Church is modeled on the heavenly Church. Walter Mitchell, who wrote his dissertation on the relation between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church, puts it well:

[The Kingdome here] denotes the earthly church's exemplary cause. Thomas does not mean equivalence of kingdom and church; rather he is explaining the operative force within the church now of its eschatological goal. This operative force makes the present church to be *like*, to *participate* in, the kingdom's reality, but does *not* make it now the kingdom to come nor declare it such.³¹

Levering makes the same point in reviewing the Kingdom text in Matthew 3, referring back to the commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* to establish that Thomas "identifies the kingdom with beatitude, either the

²⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Super Psalmos* 2, no. 1, Parma text of 1863, adapted to electronic format by Roberto Busa, S.J., reviewed by Enrique Alarcón, corpusthomisticum.org.

²⁸ *Super Matt* 3, lec. 1, no. 250.

²⁹ *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 92, a. 1. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: Benziger, 1947). Reference has also been made to the Leonine edition (see corpusthomisticum.org for index of volumes).

³⁰ *Super Matt* 3, lec. 1, no. 250.

³¹ Walter A. Mitchell, "The Relationship Between Kingdom and Church in the Writings of St. Thomas" (PhD diss., Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomase de Urbe, 1973), 51.

imperfect beatitude we possess by faith informed by charity or the perfect beatitude of heaven.”³²

That leads us to the fourth dimension of the Kingdom, the “heavenly court” (*caelestis curia*), a meaning Aquinas supports by reference to Matthew 8:11, with Christ’s proclamation about the eschatological Kingdom in which peoples of all nations will join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.³³ This is not only the last dimension explicated by Aquinas in commenting on Matthew 3:2, but as Mitchell and Levering point out, it is also arguably the final dimension in the sense of being the end toward which the others are ordered.

However, after laying out these four dimensions, Aquinas adds one more near the end of this lecture. Commenting on John’s proclamation of the coming Messiah in Matthew 3:11, Saint Thomas states simply “that kingdom is Christ,” again referring to Luke 17:21 and following a tradition that goes back to Origen.³⁴ Referring again to the *Catena aurea*, the connection of this passage specifically to the Kingdom comes from the *Glossa ordinaria* and its statement that Matthew 3:11 speaks of “the approach of the kingdom of Heaven.”³⁵ This idea of the identity of the King and his Kingdom will further be developed by Robert Bellarmine, Joseph Ratzinger, and others.³⁶ Aquinas moves back and forth in his commentary on Matthew 3 between seeing John the Baptist’s mission as a preparation for the Kingdom and a preparation for Christ; this is the point where he clearly identifies the two in this context.

This raises the question of what provides the unifying dimension of the Kingdom in Aquinas’s thought. Levering and Mitchell make a strong case for the three other dimensions pointing toward the eschatological one, which suggests that the identification of the Kingdom with Christ may have no deeper relevance. On the other hand, Christ is so fundamental to Aquinas’s work that the identification cannot be lightly dismissed, especially with the pride of place that Aquinas typically gives to the *Glossa ordinaria* in his exegesis. In the “worst case scenario,” Viviano may have discerned the truth, and Aquinas is holding views in tension that do not fundamentally cohere—which also seems contrary to his overall approach

³² Levering, *Exploring*, 236.

³³ Again following Remigius.

³⁴ *Super Matt* 3, lec. 1, no. 275; Viviano, “Kingdom of God,” 503.

³⁵ *Catena aurea: Matthew* 3, lec. 5

³⁶ See Ezra Sullivan, O.P., “Seek First the Kingdom: A Reply to Germain Grisez’s Account of Man’s Ultimate End,” *Nova et Vetera* (English), 8, no. 4 (2010): 959–95, especially 990–93.

and method. To explain this, the first step is to see what else Thomas has to say about the Kingdom in his commentary on Saint Matthew's Gospel. While passages related to the Kingdom can be found throughout the Gospel and the commentary, in the interests of space and focus, this paper hones in on four key sections—the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of Matthew 13, the Parable of the Vineyard in Matthew 21, and the Judgment Discourse in Matthew 25.³⁷

The Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount

The lectures on Matthew 5 and 6, which contain most of the Sermon on the Mount, also contain some of the richest Kingdom of Heaven material in Matthew's Gospel, and have been the hardest parts of Aquinas's commentary to access. Many lectures on these two chapters were lost or corrupted parts of an already scanty manuscript tradition. These lacunae were only filled in by the discovery of the Basel manuscript in the 1950s, and it took several decades after that for the text to become easily accessible to most students of Saint Thomas.³⁸

The first reference to the Kingdom of Heaven in this part of the commentary is when Thomas analyzes the structure of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–10): “In these beatitudes, some things are set forth as merits, and some as rewards, and this is clear in each. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*—here is the merit; *because theirs is the kingdom of Heaven*—here is the reward.”³⁹ These rewards, he goes on to say, “may be had in two ways, namely perfected and complete, and so it is fully in the homeland, or secondly inchoate and imperfectly, and so it is in this life. Hence, the holy have a certain inchoate form of this blessedness.”⁴⁰ This demonstrates the unity of the dimensions of the Kingdom by providing a baseline for how the “present” or “earthly” forms of the Kingdom—sanctifying grace, Scripture, and the Church Militant—are subordinated and directed to the

³⁷ While Thomas also refers to Matt 8:11 in identifying the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom, his commentary on that passage only refers to the Kingdom briefly, highlighting its universality and its contemplative nature (*Super Matt* 8, lec. 2, no. 704).

³⁸ For a brief discussion of this issue, see Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:56–57, Holmes, “Aquinas' *Lectura*,” 74–75, and Beryl Smalley, *The Gospel in the Schools, c.1100–c.1280* (London: Hambledon, 1985), 257–58. The full Basel text of chapters 5 and 6 has been reproduced in the Aquinas Institute's Latin–English edition of the commentary on Matthew and has been used here.

³⁹ *Super Matt* 5 lec. 2, no. 409.

⁴⁰ *Super Matt* 5 lec. 2, no. 413. Cf. Augustine, *Sermo in Monte* 1.5, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 5, lec. 9.

eschatological form of the eternal Kingdom, which supports the eschatological understanding of the Kingdom's unity. Yet the Beatitudes are also a means of becoming Christ-like and sons of God, as Thomas states when discussing "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9), commenting, "because by peace with charity one comes to the eternal kingdom, in which all will be called sons of God," hinting again at the union of the eschatological and the Christological dimension, especially when one considers the importance of participation in Aquinas's theological and philosophical thought.⁴¹

Thomas's third lecture on Matthew covers 6:9–15, the Lord's Prayer, with the petition "Thy kingdom come." Aquinas identifies this petition as the second petition of the prayer, and the first pertaining to us: "The last end is eternal life, and we request this by saying *thy kingdom come*."⁴² Citing Augustine and Chrysostom, Aquinas says: "I believe that this is the literal meaning; hence we ask *come*, that is, make us to arrive at and share in eternal blessedness."⁴³ However, Thomas provides two other readings.

The first comes from Augustine, who says that "Christ began reigning from when he redeemed the world, . . . thus *your kingdom come*, that is, the completion of your reign."⁴⁴ This argues for an interwoven eschatological and Christological understanding of the petition; "Lord, may you come to judge, and may the glory of your kingdom appear."⁴⁵ In addition, tying the beginning of the Kingdom to the redemption highlights both the internal and eschatological dimensions of the Kingdom.

The second alternative fits in with the moral sense of Scripture, as

⁴¹ *Super Matt* 5, lec. 2, no. 439. For more on participation in Aquinas, see: Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), esp. 96–97, 105 (citing definitions of participation from Aquinas's commentary on *De hebdomadibus*); and Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015), 24 (which also summarizes the Boethian definition).

⁴² *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 585.

⁴³ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586. Cf. Augustine, *Sermo in Monte* 2.6, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 6, lec.4. Curiously, no citation from Chrysostom is given; conversely, an explanation given by Cyprian in the *Catena* but not mentioned here is that the Kingdom is Christ Himself; cf. Aquinas's comments on Matthew 3, above.

⁴⁴ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586. Thomas makes a similar point in his *Expositio in orationem dominicam*, a. 2.

⁴⁵ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586.

well as the anagogical sense: “Let the reign of sin be destroyed, and reign over us, O Lord: when we serve justice, then God rules, but when sin, the devil.”⁴⁶ Thomas continues by noting that “they could most rightly ask *your kingdom come* who have justified themselves as sons . . . since the inheritance is due to sons, but that kingdom is in heaven; hence you cannot go hence without being made heavenly.”⁴⁷ Here again, the internal sense of the Kingdom leads to the eschatological dimension, and the reference to “being made heavenly” reflects the participatory dimension in Christ noted above, as well as the moral dimension that involves our becoming deiform in virtues and actions.

This connection is reinforced when we return to the Kingdom in Thomas’s fifth lecture and the Lord’s command in Matthew 6:33—“Seek you therefore first the kingdom of God.” This statement, according to Saint Thomas, “sets forth three things.”⁴⁸ The Kingdom is the end, “because by the kingdom of God is understood eternal beatitude.”⁴⁹ This is “because in life anything is ruled properly when it is under a governing rule. But in life things are not fully submitted to God, because we are not without sin; and it will be so in glory, where we will accomplish the divine will perfectly.”⁵⁰ Implicit in this are both the internal dimension, where the individual conforms to Christ, and to a lesser extent the scriptural dimension, which provides us with the “governing rule.”

The second part of this verse is “the right way” to reach the Kingdom, which is by justice. Here, Thomas is apparently drawing from Pseudo-Chrysostom. “Hence if you would go to the kingdom of God, it is needful that you keep the justice of the kingdom.”⁵¹ This justice is specifically God’s justice, “because man, by the help of grace, believes that he can be saved.”⁵² The third part of the verse, where Jesus says, “and all these things will be added unto you,” returns to the motif of wages, where the day’s wages are identified as eternal life.

In a final note, the words “*to seek first*” are understood in two ways: as an end or as a reward. And thus he says *Seek first the kingdom of God*, and not temporal things. We ought not evangelize so that we might eat, but

⁴⁶ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586; cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 6, lec. 4.

⁴⁷ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 586.

⁴⁸ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁴⁹ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵⁰ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵¹ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630. Cf. Pseudo-Chrysostom, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 6, lec. 20.

⁵² *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

the other way around.”⁵³ Returning to the Lord’s Prayer, Aquinas gives a hierarchy of goods to be sought: “Therefore first we should seek the very good of God, namely his glory; in other matters first the kingdom of God, second justice, third *your will be done*, fourth those things which are added, *our daily bread*, etc.”⁵⁴ One could easily argue that Thomas is saying the same thing in two ways, since the glory of God and the Kingdom of God are, in many ways and contexts, the same thing—the full manifestation of God in his creation and the bringing of that creation into the fulfillment of his purpose for it.

The Kingdom Parables of Matthew 13

Chapter 13 of Matthew contains a set of parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, which provides us with further examples of how Thomas approaches the topic—and the approach is unique enough that one can again understand why some might be put off by it. Although the Gospel uses the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven” repeatedly, Thomas introduces chapter 13 in his first lecture by describing the parables as dealing with “the power of the evangelical doctrine.”⁵⁵ While it may sound odd, a close reading shows that this is consistent with Matthew’s Gospel, which continuously refers to the “Gospel [*Evangelium*] of the Kingdom of Heaven.” It also highlights the emphasis on Christ as preacher and teacher that we find in Thomas and other medieval Dominicans.⁵⁶ This section of the commentary is also where Thomas develops and supports his understanding of the doctrinal dimension of the Kingdom.

Despite this, Aquinas’s study of the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3–9) has only a few direct references to the Kingdom. This is not surprising

⁵³ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵⁴ *Super Matt* 6, lec. 3, no. 630.

⁵⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec.1, no. 1077. Cf. Remigius as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 2.

⁵⁶ See: Richard Newshauser, “Jesus as the First Dominican? Reflection on a Sub-theme in the Exemplary Literature of Some Thirteenth-Century Preachers,” in *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans*, ed. Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 238–57; Michael Sherwin, O.P., “Christ the Teacher in St. Thomas’ *Commentary on the Gospel of John*,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 173–93. For an examination of this same theme in Romans, see Hans Boerma, “*Ressourcement* of Mystery: The Ecclesiology of Thomas Aquinas and the Letter to the Romans,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 61–63.

when one sees that, for Thomas, this parable is concerned primarily with the “impediment of the evangelical doctrine.”⁵⁷ We get the glimmers of both the interior and ecclesiological dimensions in his comments on Matthew 13:8 (“And they produced fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold”), where the various levels of fruitfulness are applied to various states in earthly life—martyrs, virgins, and married folk, respectively.

The mention of the Kingdom of Heaven in his treatment of 13:11 provides some more material. “In these words, three things are set forth.”⁵⁸ The first is that “there are some understanding, and some not.”⁵⁹ This is relevant to the Kingdom when set in conjunction with the discussion in Matthew 21. Aquinas attributes this to “the divine ordination,” but also considers it a sign of divine love and “of great use, since it is a certain sign of blessedness.”⁶⁰ This is the second factor. The third is that such understanding is “from gift, not from merit.”⁶¹ Although Aquinas goes on in his commentary on 13:12 to explicate factors that make one apt to receive such a gift—desire, zeal, charity, and faith—he concludes with the note that even these are gifts from God.⁶²

The exegesis of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13: 31–32) opens with another examination of the Kingdom’s contents: “In a kingdom there is the king, the prince, the subjects, and likewise the imprisoned. Similarly, there are riches and other things. Therefore, we can liken the kingdom to all of these things.”⁶³ In contrast to the two parables before this, which Aquinas explained as dealing with what impedes entry into the Kingdom or what prepares one for entry into it, this parable deals with the Kingdom in itself.

Following Jerome, Saint Thomas identifies the grain of mustard as the evangelical teaching, which produces the “heat” of faith and drives away the poison of error.⁶⁴ The smallness, likewise, is in the way that it “preached a God who suffered, was crucified and so forth. And who could believe

⁵⁷ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1084.

⁵⁸ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁵⁹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁶⁰ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁶¹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1101.

⁶² *Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, nos. 1102–6.

⁶³ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1159.

⁶⁴ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1159. Cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 5, as well as Augustine, who is there cited in reference to the warmth of faith and the antidote to poison.

such a thing?"⁶⁵ The largeness, of course, is in the way that the preaching spread to and bore fruit among every nation, and "greater in solidity, in generality and in utility."⁶⁶ The solidity comes from the teaching's grounding in the Divine Word, the generality, from its applicability to all states and issues of life, and usefulness "because the birds dwell in its branches, that is, all who have their spirit in heaven."⁶⁷

Although Thomas follows Jerome's interpretation, which fits into the scriptural dimension of the Kingdom, he also gives space to two other Fathers. Chrysostom identifies the apostles as the mustard seed—thus providing a prototype of the ecclesiological dimension—and Hilary applies it to Christ, thus supporting the Christological dimension, although the unity of Christ and the Church may be so obvious as to need no further comment.⁶⁸ This same diversity of explanations is repeated in the Parable of the Leaven, with the three Fathers mentioned cited again as giving the same explanations as the mustard seed. Aquinas adds Augustine to the Parable of the Leaven as well; according to him, "the fervor of charity is signified by the leaven," which harmonizes well with the interior dimension.⁶⁹ Unlike in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Aquinas does not seem to give preference to any one of these interpretations, but states from the beginning that "four things are signified."⁷⁰ The diversity of patristic explanations on this and other parables helps us understand why Aquinas's understanding of the Kingdom is so multidimensional. Like all Catholics, Thomas is working within a tradition that provided various interpretations, and his approach to Scripture, following Augustine, is such that he does not want to reject any interpretation out of hand unless it is obviously deficient or contrary to the Faith.⁷¹ However, the connections that Thomas draws between the various interpretations of the Kingdom also show that he does not simply want to set them all out as equally valid, but actively

⁶⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1160.

⁶⁶ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1162.

⁶⁷ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1162.

⁶⁸ *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 5, includes these citations, as well as citations from Gregory I the Great that identify the mustard seed with Christ (e.g., *Moralia* 19.1).

⁶⁹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1167. Cf. *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 6. All four interpretations mentioned in this lecture of the commentary can be found in the *Catena*.

⁷⁰ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 3, no. 1166.

⁷¹ See John Boyle's discussion of Aquinas's approach to exegesis in "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio textus*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 3–8.

works to reconcile and harmonize them whenever possible, so that, rather than contradicting each other, the interpretations work symphonically to strengthen one another.

While most of the parables of Matthew 13 have a predominantly evangelical bent in Thomas's reading, the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matt 13:24–30, with Jesus's own explanation given in Matt 13:36–43) is more ecclesiological. The parable opens with a description of the most basic structure of the Kingdom: "In a kingdom are contained the king, and those who are ruled: and those are heavenly men, who have been made equals of the angels."⁷² The Kingdom here, based on Thomas's exegesis of the parable, is the Church, with the apostles as the servants, faithful Catholics as the wheat, and heretics as the tares.⁷³ The end of the parable, speaking of the "gathering of the crops," is not applied directly to the Kingdom, but Aquinas does state that "there is a twofold collection: one in the present Church, and another in the heavenly."⁷⁴ The first harvest is referred to the preaching of the apostles, and the second to the Last Judgment. However, Aquinas applies the separation and final disposition of the wheat and tares solely to the latter here. When he discusses Jesus's explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares at the end of this section of Matthew 13, Aquinas confirms that here, Kingdom is "understood as the present Church, because in the Church Triumphant there are no scandals."⁷⁵ However, he also cites Chrysostom, who, looking forward to the end of the parable, "exposits that the kingdom is the heavenly homeland. And he says that *all scandals* should not be understood as that they are there, but that they are not,"⁷⁶ having been gathered and cast out already.

The last set of parables (Matt 13:44–52, although the lecture goes through to the end of the chapter at Matt 13:58) deals with the dignity of the evangelical teaching, which "is shown in three ways: with regard to its abundance, with regard to its beauty, and with regard to its commonality."⁷⁷ The abundance is described by the parable of the treasure hidden in a field, and Thomas once more refers to the evangelical teaching, which "is like a treasure, because just as a treasure is a plentitude of riches, so is the

⁷² *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1134.

⁷³ See *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, nos. 1134, 1136, 1138.

⁷⁴ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1153. Cf. Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, et al. cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 4.

⁷⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1182. Cf. Chrysostom *In Mattheum* (*Catena Aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 8).

⁷⁶ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 2, no. 1182.

⁷⁷ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1187. Aquinas is again following Chrysostom here (cf. *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9).

evangelical teaching: *riches of salvation, wisdom and knowledge: the fear of the Lord is his treasure* (Isa 33:6).⁷⁸

However, Thomas provides numerous differences of detail in exactly how to understand the treasure and the field in which it is hidden, again referring to the Fathers. Chrysostom describes it as the evangelical doctrine, "which is hidden in the field of this world, namely from the eyes of the unclean."⁷⁹ Gregory the Great, by contrast refers to the same verse from Isaiah as Thomas did, but identifies the treasure as "heavenly desire" and the field as "spiritual discipline, because it seems contemptible outside, but truly has sweetness within."⁸⁰ Jerome, interestingly enough, provides the interpretation that the treasure is the Word himself, hidden in flesh, but "in another way, it is understood as sacred teaching, which is hidden in the field of the Church."⁸¹

Thomas continues with the idea of the treasure of the Kingdom as evangelical teaching when he turns to the passage about how "a man, having found it, hides [the treasure]." He takes this, however, in a more personal and interior direction than any of the Fathers he cites. The treasure "is found in all through faith . . . but it is necessary that it be hidden, following what is said in Psalm 118:11: *In my heart I have hidden your words*."⁸² This hiddenness within the heart increases fervor, prevents vainglory, and guards a newborn faith from being discovered by "he who steals it away."⁸³

The last part of this parable, about how the subject "out of joy goes, and sells all that he has, and buys that field," is interpreted as about the progress of the spiritual life.

When he by faith finds it, *out of joy goes*, and begins to progress *and sells everything*, that is has contempt for [everything else], that he might have spiritual [goods], *and buys that field*, that is, either he seeks out good company for himself, or gains for himself the rest which he does not have, namely, spiritual peace.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1188.

⁷⁹ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1189. Cf. Chrysostom as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9.

⁸⁰ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1189. Cf. Pope Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.1, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9.

⁸¹ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1189. Cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 9. Aquinas does not here cite Augustine, whom he quotes in the *Catena aurea* as referring to this as "despising temporal things."

⁸² *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1190.

⁸³ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1190.

⁸⁴ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1192.

The parable of the “pearl of great price” demonstrates “beauty, or charity.”⁸⁵ Aquinas again turns to the Fathers here, and this time Jerome and Chrysostom are in agreement that the pearl refers to the evangelical doctrine, in contrast to false teachings which “are not pearls.”⁸⁶ Further emphasis is placed on the oneness and uniqueness of this teaching, drawing on [Pseudo-]Dionysius, who “says that power divides, but truth gives unity.”⁸⁷ Gregory, by contrast, argues that the pearl represents heavenly glory, “because the good is naturally desirable, and man always wishes to exchange a lesser good for a greater one. The supreme good of man is heavenly glory; when he has found it, he ought to abandon everything for it.”⁸⁸

Thomas also provides three different interpretations from Augustine, which all hinge on the merchant as representing a seeker and which emphasize the excellence and supremacy of the “pearl” among many other things of similar species. The pearl of great price could thus be taken as Christ among virtuous men, charity among the virtues, and the Word of God among the sciences.⁸⁹

Unlike with most of the other parables, Thomas does not set out his own explanation before surveying the Fathers, although the use of “beauty or charity” to describe what this parable symbolizes is suggestive.

The next parable under consideration is the “fishing or net parable” (Matt 13:47–50), which Thomas describes as depicting the *communitas* of the evangelical doctrine. The net, he says “can signify either doctrine or the Church, since the first teachers [*doctores*] were fishermen.”⁹⁰ The sea represents the world, and so this parable demonstrates the commonality of the Gospel. “The law was only given to one nation [*non erat data nisi uni genti*]. . . . The evangelical law gathers all together,”⁹¹ connecting law—or Scripture—and community. The community is both the present Church and the eschatological Kingdom; the latter is signified by the end of the

⁸⁵ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1193.

⁸⁶ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1193.

⁸⁷ *Super Matt* 13. lec. 4, no. 1193. Cf. also Chrysostom in *Catena Aurea*, Matthew 13, lec. 10. Jerome also refers to the Law and the Prophets as “goodly pearls” in a section cited in the *Catena*; the Gospel is so precious that the others appear as “dung” by contrast.

⁸⁸ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1194.

⁸⁹ See Augustine, *Quaestiones XVI in Mattheum*, q. 13 (cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 10).

⁹⁰ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1197. Cf. *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 11, where Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.4, is cited in support of the Church, while Jerome says that “they made for themselves a net of evangelical dogma from the Old and the New Testament.

⁹¹ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1197.

parable, where Thomas comments, "by the shore is signified the end of the world, because there will be no turbulence among the saints, but they will be in good peace."⁹²

A comparison of ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions shows up in the discussion of the separation of the wicked from the just: "For a time the evil are among the good, . . . but they will be separated from the communion of the good, and according to this the evil are excommunicated; for this is a sign of that, but also different, for the Church is often deceived, but then there will be no deception."⁹³ The difference between this parable and that of the wheat and tares, according to Thomas,⁹⁴ is that "here by the net is understood both the good and the evil; hence it signifies those who are not cut off [*praecisi*] from the Church. But the weed signifies those who are cut off by diversity of dogma, and these are not of the Church."⁹⁵

The Parable of the Vineyard

The Parable of the Vineyard in Matthew 21: 33–45 is another point where Thomas draws on multiple interpretations and dimensions of the Kingdom. Even the target of the parable can be interpreted in two ways: "some say that he speaks against the vineyard [following a similar parable in Isaiah] . . . but here [he speaks] against the farmers."⁹⁶ Thomas again turns to two of his favorite patristic sources, Jerome and Chrysostom. Jerome says that "the Jewish people are called the vine," following the Isaian parable, "insofar as this present evil proceeds not from the people, but from the leaders. . . . Therefore this parable is not against the vine."⁹⁷ A second explanation (given without transition, suggesting a failure in our manuscript tradition of the commentary on Matthew) says that "this vine is not the house of Israel, but the justice of God, which is handed down hiddenly in Sacred Scripture."⁹⁸ This note on the "justice" or righteousness of God could also

⁹² *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1197. Cf. Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.4, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 11.

⁹³ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1199. Again, cf. Gregory I, *Homilae xl in Evangelia* 6.4, as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 13, lec. 11.

⁹⁴ Thomas appears to be taking a hint from Chrysostom here (cf. citation in *Catena aurea*, Matthew 13, lec. 11).

⁹⁵ *Super Matt* 13, lec. 4, no. 1200.

⁹⁶ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734.

⁹⁷ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734. Cf. Jerome as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 ("Plantavit autem . . .").

⁹⁸ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734. Origen also gives this as an interpretation; see *Catena aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 ("Sed forte in Evangelio . . .").

be taken as referring to the soul's justification, which connects this meaning to the internal dimension of the Kingdom, or to God's universal judgment, which would bring in a link to the eschatological dimension.

Similarly, the hedge around the vineyard is either "what is set up for protection, whether they be the prayers of the saints or the protection of the angels," or the words of Scripture, "because, following a mystical understanding, the hidden meaning of Scripture should not be opened to everyone."⁹⁹ Thomas does not pursue the mystical explanation beyond the establishment of the vineyard and its accoutrements; rather, he takes the parable as expounding salvation history from Moses, through the prophets, up to the coming of Christ.

The conclusion, "Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you" (Matt 21:43), is taken in two ways. The first, as mentioned back in Matthew 3, is that the Kingdom is Sacred Scripture, following the interpretation of the vineyard as Scripture and the vine as divine justice given at the start of the parable. Scripture is said to be taken from them "because [they] have forsaken the understanding of Sacred Scripture."¹⁰⁰ The second interpretation is similar, but is applied to "prelateship over the Church of the faithful, because their glory has been transferred," referring to Isaiah 55:4–5.¹⁰¹ This interpretation is used again in the commentary on John, where Aquinas cites this verse when discussing the cleansing of the temple in the second chapter of that Gospel. "By this evicting of these things from the temple, He gave understanding that the time approached when the sacrifices of the law ought to cease, and the true worship of God be transferred to the Gentiles."¹⁰²

In any event, while these two interpretations apply to two dimensions of the Kingdom as identified in chapter 3—the scriptural and the ecclesiastical—the conclusion is the same: a change in the Kingdom from in the "possession" of the Jewish nation to the community of the faithful. The fundamental issue, based on Thomas's exegesis of the surrounding passage, hinges on the relationship to Christ, who is "the stone the build-

⁹⁹ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1734. Aquinas's patristic sources in the *Catena aurea*—Jerome, Pseudo-Chrysostom, and Origen—favor some form of the first explanation. Origen also gives the second option as an interpretation cited in *Catena Aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 ("Sed forte in Evangelio. . .").

¹⁰⁰ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1750. Cf. Origen as cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 21, lec. 6 ("Regnum Dei dicit mysteria regni Dei . . .").

¹⁰¹ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1750.

¹⁰² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 2, lec. 5 (Marietti) no. 386, in *Super evangelii S. Joannis*, trans. Fabian Larcher (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2013).

ers rejected, [which] has become the cornerstone."¹⁰³ This is reinforced by Matthew 21:44, and Thomas's account that "when a man stumbles over the rock Christ, then he is broken according to the greatness of sin; when he is truly faithless, he is totally crushed."¹⁰⁴ This provides an indication that the Christological dimension is of deep importance to Thomas, and may provide the unifying factor of his Kingdom theology.

The Last Judgment

Finally, we come to the great discourse on the Last Judgment that ends Christ's teaching ministry in the Gospel according to Matthew, recorded in Matthew 25:31–46. Christ is called King here because "it is a king's to judge."¹⁰⁵ The Kingdom is here mentioned as the reward, although Thomas makes it clear that "it will not be given to us according to our merit, but according to how we are grounded in [*confirmamur*] the merits of Christ."¹⁰⁶ This seems to imply a more complete union with Christ, since he brings up an objection: "Are not the good even now in some way joined to God? I say yes, through charity, but not the fullness of charity, and through a mysterious [*aenigmaticam*] faith; but then they will be gathered in the fullness of charity and in faith which is not enigmatic."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, he states that, in the judgment, "the cause of damnation is from man, the cause of salvation is from God."¹⁰⁸ That cause is twofold: "The temporal is the application of glory; . . . the other cause is the predestination of God."¹⁰⁹

The reward itself is "the kingdom of heaven: . . . Who possesses God, possesses the Kingdom."¹¹⁰ And you cannot have one without the other, as Thomas rebukes those who just want to "scrape by" and avoid hell. "But some may say: *I do not wish to rule, it suffices for me that I be not damned*. This cannot be. Either you will be a king and have a kingdom, or you will be damned."¹¹¹

The "possession" mentioned here ("enter into possession") "is fitting and proper to him who has the right. Thus, we have this right by divine order,

¹⁰³ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1749.

¹⁰⁴ *Super Matt* 21, lec. 2, no. 1751.

¹⁰⁵ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2092.

¹⁰⁶ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2092.

¹⁰⁷ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2093. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.9, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 25, lec. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2094.

¹⁰⁹ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2094.

¹¹⁰ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2095.

¹¹¹ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2095. Cf. Augustine, Sermon 351, no. 8, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew* 25, lec. 3.

namely from its acquisition by Christ, who earned it for us, and by His grace.”¹¹² It also contains the sense of fullness and security, “‘what is had peacefully’; . . . We have God in a way now, but not quietly, because man is disturbed in multiple ways, but then one will possess it in peace.”¹¹³ And again, we see the Kingdom is the possession of and participation in God himself. This provides the unity of the Christological and eschatological dimensions we have been looking for, and this can be brought into further clarity by moving to another one of Aquinas’s commentary on First Corinthians and his treatment of the famous eschatological passage in 1 Corinthians 15. “The final end [of the resurrected faithful] will not be to live a life of bodily pleasures [*vita corporis et voluptatibus*], as the Jews and Saracens imagine, but that they will join themselves [*inhaeraent*] to God by an immediate vision and happy enjoyment: and this is *to hand over the kingdom to God the Father*.”¹¹⁴

The Kingdom is here identified first with the faithful, whom Christ will bring “before the sight of God, that is of His Creator insofar as He is man, and the Father, insofar as He is God. . . . But He will hand this over so that He will not take this from Himself, for indeed, He will reign, one God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁵ This hearkens back to both the interior and ecclesiological dimensions of the division in Matthew 3. A second explanation is that the delivery of the Kingdom is associated with the public manifestation of the Father’s reign, “for in Scripture something is said to be done when it first becomes known, and in this way it is made known by Christ.”¹¹⁶

In either case, the manifestation of the Kingdom “shall have brought to naught all principality and power and virtue” (1 Cor 15:24b), which Aquinas says means that “all dominion, whether human or angelic, will have ceased, then we will be immediately under God.”¹¹⁷

How does this work with the following verse, that Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”? “It must that said that in some way the enemies of Christ are under his power, but in a twofold way”¹¹⁸—either by conversion, as in the case of Paul, or “insofar as Christ does his will, even concerning those who do their will against the will of

¹¹² *Super Matt 25*, lec. 3, no. 2095.

¹¹³ *Super Matt 25*, lec. 3, no. 2095. Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 20.9, cited in *Catena aurea: Matthew 25*, lec. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 937.

¹¹⁵ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 937.

¹¹⁶ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 937.

¹¹⁷ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 938.

¹¹⁸ *Super I Cor 15*, lec. 3, no. 941.

Christ."¹¹⁹ The future tense, by contrast, refers to when "he will put them under his feet, that is, under the humanity of Christ."¹²⁰ The contrast appears to be that the faithful—human and angelic alike—will be directly under God, while the enemies of Christ—probably the fallen angels as well as sinful men—will be subordinate to the humanity of Christ. Given the strong identification of Head and members in Aquinas's Christology and ecclesiology, it may imply the subordination of all enemies to the whole Body of Christ, which makes it, in another sense, a Kingdom.

The "until" is understood in two ways. First, "as if he says: It is true, that Christ has a kingdom, and although there are some enemies, while they do not do his will, nonetheless he reigns *until he places*, etc."¹²¹ The other reading takes the "until" as a cessation—"truly afterwards he will not reign"¹²²—but reads it as saying that:

"To reign" [*regnare*] does not mean to have a kingdom, but to advance in reigning and to spread the kingdom, and this, to that degree, is the perfect manifestation of the kingdom of Chris. It is as though he said: the reign of Christ is accomplished by degrees, namely, insofar as it is manifested and made known, *until he has put all his enemies under his feet*, that is, until all enemies acknowledge him to reign.¹²³

Thus, once Christ has fully manifested the Kingdom, all his enemies will be submitted to him and acknowledge him as Lord. "So, therefore, the subjection of all adversaries is clear, which will be a most perfect subjugation, because even that which is most opposed will be subjected to him."¹²⁴

The general resurrection demonstrates this victory by the ultimate defeat of death, "which is most contrary to life."¹²⁵ However, "the end of this resurrection is not in the humanity of Christ, but rather that rational creatures are guided further to the contemplation of divinity, and in this is our beatitude, and our end is God Himself."¹²⁶ He concludes that "the reason for this subjection is *that God may be all in all*, that is that the soul of man rest fully in God, and God alone will be his beatitude. For in a

¹¹⁹ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 941.

¹²⁰ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 941.

¹²¹ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 941, no. 942.

¹²² *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 943.

¹²³ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 943.

¹²⁴ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 944.

¹²⁵ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 944.

¹²⁶ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 950.

sense, in one there is life, in another virtue and in another glory, but then God will be life and salvation and power, and glory and all things.”¹²⁷ Thus, the eschatological Kingdom is the perfection of contemplation; the ways to contemplation—both earthly contemplation and the handing on of its fruits—are the ways to that perfect Kingdom when God will be all in all. Thus, 1 Corinthians’ treatment of the Kingdom, according to Thomas, reflects the famous statement in 1 Corinthians 13:13 about “three things which abide”: the faith that grounds the Kingdom, the charity that makes one a true participant, and the hope that is fulfilled in it.

Conclusions

As we can see from these texts, Aquinas has a strong sense of how the four dimensions of the Kingdom relate to one another. The “interior” Kingdom, of grace within the believer, is informed by Scripture and both is nourished by and participates in the life of the Church, while also being subject to her authority. That same Church is constituted primarily by those living in that state of grace, fosters them in it, and teaches and governs them, relying on Scripture to do so while having the authority to interpret that same Scripture. Scripture, as mentioned, enlightens the believer regarding the New Law and is intimately tied up with the Church’s teaching role. All three of these also point to and are illuminated by the eschatological Kingdom—the life of holiness leads to it and is promised it as a reward, Scripture speaks of it, and the Church foreshadows and participates in it.

Additionally, throughout his work, in both theology and political philosophy, Saint Thomas holds a strong identification of king and kingdom. Furthermore, the three derivative senses mentioned earlier in the lecture could be applied to Christ as well as the eschatological Kingdom. Grace is the indwelling of Christ, after all, according to the theology of grace and of the Divine Missions expressed in the *Summa theologiae*.¹²⁸ In addition, both Christ and Scripture are, in analogical senses, the Word of God, a tradition that we see even today in texts such as *Dei Verbum* §13. The identification of Christ with the Church is so well-known as barely to need comment. Finally, when Thomas dives deeply in eschatological

¹²⁷ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 3, no. 950.

¹²⁸ See *ST* I, q. 43, where Aquinas makes explicit that the indwelling associated with sanctifying grace is common to the Trinity, and that both the Son and Spirit can be spoken of as sent invisibly. Ad 1 makes it clear that certain elements of grace can be appropriated to the indwelling of the Son, namely intellectual graces, which provides a link to the emphasis on contemplation seen in the commentaries on Matt 8 and John 3.

Scripture passages, such as Matthew 25 and 1 Corinthians 15, we see that eschatological fulfillment also meets its end in God who is Christ.

Thus, as Levering pointed out, the Kingdom is fundamentally eschatological and *also* fundamentally Christocentric. The individual dimension involves the indwelling of Christ and the union of the soul with Christ in preparation for eternity.¹²⁹ The scriptural dimension points to, flows from, and reveals him. The ecclesiological dimension derives all its authority, knowledge, and power from Christ, and the eschatological dimension begins with Christ as Judge and will end with him turning over the Kingdom to the Father. This may be why Thomas has no patience with the Joachite concept of an “Age of the Holy Spirit,” to the point that he refers to such a position as *stultissimus* in the *Summa*, grounding his condemnation in the proclamation of the Kingdom by Christ in the Gospels.¹³⁰ For Aquinas, everything is grounded in Christ, and the only transition will be from imperfect union with Christ who rules in his humanity and through the Church, to the perfect union when Christ as God rules us “in himself” and all the elect share in the divine vision and rulership.¹³¹

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¹²⁹ See Levering, *Exploring*, 234, on how the indwelling of grace leads to divinization and is thus “an eschatologically oriented reality.”

¹³⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 106, a. 4

¹³¹ This paper started life as part of my doctoral dissertation in historical theology at the Catholic University of America; an earlier version was presented at a conference on “Aquinas the Biblical Theologian” at Ave Maria University in February 2019. Special thanks to Dr. Joshua C. Benson and Dr. John F. Boyle for their unflagging support and guidance.