

Thomas Aquinas on Grace as a Participation in the Divine Nature: The Philosophical and Theological Exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4

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Thomas Aquinas often refers to grace as a participation in the divine nature, linking this enigmatic description of grace with a verse from 2 Peter 1:4 that “we will be made partakers of the divine nature.”¹ This notion of being made “partakers” of the divine nature arguably contains the seed of the whole doctrine of grace in Saint Thomas. Indeed, it is no accident that the first reference to *participatio* in the questions on grace (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, qq. 109–14) comes in question 110, on the essence of grace.² Grappling with what it means to be made a partaker of the divine nature would thus promise to elucidate the Thomasian understanding of grace, in its many varieties. Several studies have examined the role of 2 Peter 1:4 in the Common

¹ For example, see *In II sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1; *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] IV, ch. 4, no. 3; *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 13, a. 9, obj. 1; I-II, q. 50, a. 2; q. 62, a. 1; q. 110, aa. 3–4; II-II, q. 85, a. 2, obj. 1; III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3; q. 22, a. 1; *Super Ioan* 15, lec. 2 (no. 1999); *Super Rom* 1, lec. 4 (no. 72); *Super Eph* 3, lec. 5 (no. 185); *Super Tit* 3, lec. 1 (no. 92); *Super Heb* 8 lec. 2 (no. 392); *Quaestio disputata de anima*, q. 7; *In symbolum apostolorum*, a. 3. The Latin texts cited are from corpusthomicum.org, often from the available Leonine texts. Unless noted, translations are my own. Italizations of the Latin are my own, as a convenience for the reader. Unless otherwise stated, scriptural passages in this article are from the Revised Standard Version, 2nd Catholic ed.

² The significance of the first reference to 2 Pet 1:4 in the “treatise” on grace is perhaps twofold: first, it would seem to signal a special connection with habitual grace, which seems to be the focus of the question; second, it may also indicate that Thomas sees the verse as essential to our understanding of what grace is.

Doctor's teaching on grace, but few of these focus exclusively on 2 Peter 1:4, and even fewer attempt to place Thomas in conversation with modern scriptural criticism.³ This study thus aims to show what Thomas means by calling grace a participation in the divine nature, through a systematic

³ In her study on deification according to Thomas Aquinas, Daria Spezzano offers the most recent and comprehensive discussion of 2 Pet 1:4 as it appears in the Common Doctor's writings; see *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015). The present study differs from Spezzano's work in at least two ways. First, this paper places Thomas in conversation with several historical-critical perspectives on 2 Pet 1:4. The emphasis is thus not so much to discuss deification, as it is to show that Thomas reads the verse in a manner that reconciles both "covenantal" and "Hellenistic" interpretations of the text, as suggested by recent scriptural critics. Second, the present study focuses exclusively on the Common Doctor's use of 2 Pet 1:4. By limiting the discussion to this verse, the present work aims to concentrate the discussion, presenting a succinct dossier on how Thomas uses the text. In a similar vein, see Daniel A. Keating, "Justification, Sanctification, and Divinization," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John Yocum (London: T&T Clark, 2004). On the metaphysical aspects of grace and participation, see Melissa Eitenmiller, "Grace as Participation According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *New Blackfriars* 98, no. 1078 (2017): 689–708. For a treatment that discusses charity in terms of divinization, see Reinhard Hütter, "Grace and Charity: Participation in the Divine Nature and Union with God: The Surpassing Contemporary Significance of Thomas Aquinas's Doctrine of Divinization," *Espiritu* 65, no. 151 (2016): 173–99. For a recent introduction to Catholic views on grace and justification, see Joseph P. Wawrykow, "Grace and Justification," in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Medi Ann Volpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 403–22. For a more detailed study on grace and merit in a classic form, see Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: "Merit" in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016). On Thomas as a "scriptural theologian," see Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John Yocum, *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005). On the Cyrilian engagement with the text, see Weinandy and Keating, *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003). On the general absence of 2 Pet 1:4 in the exegesis of Augustine, see David Vincent Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), esp. 129–30: "If Augustine hesitates in using *deificare* because of how the connotations of such a term were being used by his rivals, we can also argue here that this is precisely why he never relies on 2 Pet. 1:4 and humanity's participation in the divine nature. . . . The only instances of his citing 2 Pet. 1:4 [occurs] when he reports how it has been co-opted by the Pelagians." According to Meconi, "if we participate in a sinless God, we too remain sinless (so went Augustine's understanding of how Caelestius used 2 Pet. 1:4)" (53).

investigation of the Thomasian corpus, in conversation with select perspectives from recent scriptural criticism.

Although the purpose of the present study is not historical-critical in its conception or method, one can profitably compare the treatment of 2 Peter 1:4 in the works of Aquinas to recent historical-critical considerations of the verse. Representing what I call the “covenantal” reading, Albert Wolters challenges the criticism that “2 Peter 1:4 represents something alien, or at least unusual, in the New Testament.”⁴ The “main point” of Wolters is that “the translation ‘partakers of the divine nature’ is not at all as self-evident as the widespread consensus of the versions makes it appear to be and that a plausible alternative is the rendering ‘partners of the Deity,’ which has no overtones of ontological participation in the being of God.”⁵ Representing what I call the “Hellenistic” reading, Werner Kümmel argues that “it would be hard to find in the whole New Testament a sentence which, in its expression, its individual motifs and its whole trend, more clearly marks the relapse of Christianity into Hellenistic dualism.”⁶ These positions represent two extremes, construing 2 Peter 1:4 either as a “relapse of Christianity into Hellenistic dualism” (the “Hellenistic” reading of Kümmel) or parsing the verse as exhibiting “no overtones of ontological participation in the being of God” (the “covenantal” reading of Wolters).

In a more recent work, James Starr presents a middle ground between these two extremes, offering a balanced reading of the Hellenistic background of 2 Peter 1:4 in light of Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch of Chaeroneia, as well as the Old Testament and Paul.⁷ In his discussion of the “cultural intertexture” of the verse, Starr argues that “the complex of ideas in 1:1–11 anchors 2 Peter most firmly in the epistolary and theological tradition of Pauline Christianity, but he brings to that tradition compatible elements from the Hellenistic philosophical tradition particularly as it was voiced by Middle Platonism.”⁸ Aquinas, I will argue, falls somewhere

⁴ Albert Wolters, “‘Partners of the Deity’: A Covenantal Reading of 2 Peter 1:4,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 25, no. 1 (1990): 29.

⁵ Wolters, “Partners of the Deity,” 29–30.

⁶ Werner Kümmel, *Man in the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. J. J. Vincent (London: Epworth, 1963), 93 (quoted in Wolters, “Partners of the Deity,” 29). For the Hellenistic reading, see also works by Ernst Käsemann.

⁷ See James M. Starr, *Sharers in Divine Nature: 2 Peter 1:4 in Its Hellenistic Context*, Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series 33 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000).

⁸ Starr, *Sharers*, 239. Starr also argues for the philosophic background of the text: “2 Peter 1:4 may unhesitatingly be said to belong to this ancient teleological moral tradition reflected in the Old Testament, Josephus, Philo, Plutarch, the

in this third category with Starr, between Wolters and Kümmel. Besides showing how one can reconcile the covenantal and Hellenistic readings of 2 Peter 1:4, the exegesis of Aquinas also has the advantage of bringing a distinctly philosophical and theological perspective to scriptural exegesis, as opposed to an exclusively historical approach to the text.

How does such an approach bear fruit in the writings of Aquinas? First, especially over the course of the *Summa theologiae*, Saint Thomas cites 2 Peter 1:4 in relation to some of the most important aspects of his teaching on grace, as if placing a seal on the discussion.⁹ He would thus seem to indicate that the verse contains his whole teaching on grace in a nutshell.¹⁰ Second, in his scriptural commentaries, Saint Thomas explains 2 Peter 1:4 especially in terms of Christ and the Trinity, suggesting that to become a partaker of the divine nature is effected through the salvific action of Christ and finds its end in a personal relationship with the Trinity.¹¹ Third, in a way that clarifies how one enters into such a relationship with the Trinity, Saint Thomas unfolds 2 Peter 1:4, especially the notion of “partaking,” in terms of (a) *participatio*, which connects the exegesis conceptually and terminologically to notions of (b) *assimilatio* and *confor-*

Stoics, and Paul” (238). For another interpretation using philosophical categories in the interpretation of 2 Pet 1:4, see Wyndy Corbin-Reuschling, “The Means and End in 2 Peter 1:3–11: The Theological and Moral Significance of Theōsis,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 8, no. 2 (2014): 275–86.

- ⁹ For instance, Thomas cites 2 Pet 1:4 in his discussion of the intrinsic principles of human action (regarding the habits, theological virtues, and grace), as well as in his consideration of Christ (considering his assumption and priesthood, as the mediating source of grace). For examples of this pattern of citation, see *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 2 (on the subject of habits); q. 62, a. 1 (on the theological virtues); a. 3 (on the essence of grace); a. 4 (as referencing our participation in the divine nature, knowledge, and love); III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3 (on Christ’s assumption of a human nature); q. 22, a. 1 (on the priesthood of Christ); and q. 62, a. 1 (on the sacraments as instrumental causes of grace).
- ¹⁰ The reason for this use of the verse, as a scriptural seal or pendant on his teaching on grace, is perhaps because he associates the verse with *gratia gratum faciens*, the root of the whole life of grace (virtues, acts, gifts, and so on). Interestingly, he often cites 2 Pet 1:4 in a broader context—for example, in reference to habitual grace or the theological virtues—as if taking the verse to refer to the whole life of grace as well as specific parts of it.
- ¹¹ See: *Super Ioan* 15, lec. 2 (no. 1999); *Super Rom* 1, lec. 4 (no. 72); *Super Eph* 3, lec. 5 (no. 185); *Super Tit* 3, lec. 1 (no. 92); *Super Hebr* 8 lec. 2 (no. 392). The discussion of the scriptural commentaries add historical and interpersonal dimensions to the exegesis of 2 Pet 1:4, which, while not entirely lacking in the *Summa theologiae*, are perhaps less prominent than in the commentaries.

matio in relation to the divine missions, and (c) *repraesentatio* and *imitatio* in relation to the image of God.

Overall, Saint Thomas offers a philosophically and theologically informed exegesis of the verse, spliced into his theological syntheses and scriptural commentaries, which shows how philosophic categories such as *participatio*, *assimilatio*, and *repraesentatio* do not obscure or diminish the rational creature's personal relationship with God but clarify this relationship and explain the basis for its very possibility. Thomas highlights these personal dimensions of the life of grace and glory in his theological syntheses and especially in his scriptural commentaries. He thus harmonizes the Hellenistic and covenantal readings of 2 Peter 1:4, mutually exclusive positions which nevertheless agree in holding that the verse cannot be understood in both ways.

This study will argue for the three conclusions above in the following order. The first section prefaces the discussion with a consideration of the verse itself, especially the notion of *consors/koinōnos* in the Latin writings of Aquinas and in its Greek scriptural milieu. The second section examines where and how Saint Thomas explicitly cites 2 Peter 1:4 across his theological corpus, focusing especially on the *Summa* (conclusion 1) and the scriptural commentaries (conclusion 2). The third section (conclusion 3) continues the explanation of the verse in terms of *participatio*, *assimilatio/conformatio*, and *repraesentatio/imitatio*.

The Scriptural Background of 2 Peter 1:4

To place 2 Peter 1:4 in context, we will consider the text as it appears in Scripture and in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The Angelic Doctor, of course, was working from some version of the Latin Vulgate. Although we do not have an exact reconstruction of the text he used, given that he probably worked from many, and from his memory, we can make a few conjectures.¹² One relevant citation of 2 Peter 1:4, which Thomas makes in *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 3, reads as follows: “maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, ut per haec efficiamini divinae consortes naturae.” Thus: “He has given us the greatest and most precious promises, that through these we

¹² On the role of memory in medieval thought, see the classic study from Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

might be made partakers [*consortes*] of the divine nature.”¹³ Thomas almost certainly would have been familiar with the relational tone of the verse in question. After all, the Latin term *consors* in the singular (*koinōnos* in the Greek of the New Testament) denotes a sharing, partaking, or participating, and can thus come to signify a colleague, partner, and even heir.¹⁴ The Latin term *socius*, which the covenantal reading of the verse implies, is thus well within the semantic range of *consors*, as the Vulgate translates *koinōnos* in 2 Peter 1:4. The exegesis which Saint Thomas offers suggests that he understood, and indeed emphasized, the interpersonal aspect of the text and its importance for understanding the relationship between God and man.

Significantly, the Clementine Vulgate renders the Greek term *koinōnos* as *socius* in all but three cases in the New Testament.¹⁵ The exceptions to the *consors*–*koinōnos* translation pattern are 2 Corinthians 8:18 (*particeps* renders *koinōnos*), 1 Peter 5:1 (*communicator* renders *koinōnos*), and 2

¹³ The Clementine Vulgate has the same reading (*divinae consortes naturae*) as well as the Weber-Gryson critical edition (*divinae consortes naturae*). The text of the verse therefore seem well-established. For the most scholarly recension of the Vulgate, see Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, eds., *Biblia sacra Vulgata*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007). One can access a free edition of the Clementine Vulgate, based on the Editio Typica (1598), at the “Clementine Vulgate Project,” vulsearch.sourceforge.net.

¹⁴ See *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. Charles T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), s.v. *consors*. See also Albert Wolters, “Postscript to ‘Partners of the Deity,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 26, no. 2 (1991): 418–20: “As we would expect of a word used to describe the relationship of believers to God in the covenant, κοινωνός does not imply equality of status on the part of the covenant partners. It should be borne in mind that κοινωνός in the Hellenistic Greek of the Roman period often reflects the Latin legal term *socius*, which was frequently used of partners of quite different social standing, so that even a slave could be the *socius* of a high-ranking free man.”

¹⁵ Here is the full text of 2 Pet 1:3–4, from the 28th ed. (2012) of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, with the key phrase in italics: “[3] Ὡς πάντα ἡμῖν τῆς θείας δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ τὰ πρὸς ζωὴν καὶ εὐσέβειαν δεδωρημένης διὰ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ καλέσαντος ἡμᾶς ἰδίᾳ δόξῃ καὶ ἀρετῇ [4] δι’ ὧν τὰ τίμια καὶ μέγιστα ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλματα δεδωρήται, ἵνα διὰ τούτων γένησθε θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως ἀποφυγόντες τῆς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ φθορᾶς.” On the ambiguous syntax of 2 Pet 1, see Terrance Callan, “The Syntax of 2 Peter 1:1–7,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2005): 632–40. The full text of 2 Pet 1:3–4, from the Clementine Vulgate, with the key phrase in italics, reads: “[3] Quomodo omnia nobis divinae virtutis suae, quae ad vitam et pietatem donata sunt, per cognitionem eius, qui vocavit nos propria gloria, et virtute, [4] per quem maxima, et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit: ut per hanc *efficiamini divinae consortes naturae*: fugientes eius, quae in mundo est, concupiscentiae corruptionem.”

Peter 1:4 (*consors* renders *koinōnos*).¹⁶ The use of the term *socius* in the New Testament thus italicizes the relational implications of 2 Peter 1:4, as does the connotation of *consors* itself. In addition, *koinōnos* is related to *koinōnia* (communion), which indicates the relational basis of the word.¹⁷ The term *koinōnos* thus carries strong relational overtones, although it is juxtaposed with the language of the “divine nature” (*theias physeōs*), a phrase with more philosophical valences.

Using this linguistic contextualization of 2 Peter 1:4 as a frame of reference, we can turn to Aquinas with a sense of the interpretative stakes. Some Hellenistic interpretations of the verse emphasize the philosophic tone of the text, whereas the covenantal interpretation highlights the interpersonal quality of the text. In his own exegesis, carried out over his career, Saint Thomas deftly synthesizes both the Hellenistic and covenantal resonances of the term. This insight into the meaning of the passage allows him to deploy the verse in a nuanced way. It is thus no surprise that the Common Doctor esteems this text, which seems to capture the spiritual transformation of the human person that accompanies a personal relationship with God.

¹⁶ The term *koinōnos* appears often in the New Testament. The Vulgate often translates *koinōnos* in terms of *socius*: see Mt 23:30 (“If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them [*koinōnoi/socīi eorum*] in shedding the blood of the prophets.”); Lk 5:10 (“... and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners [*koinōnoi/socīi*] with Simon”); 1 Cor 10:20 (“I do not want you to be partners [*koinōnous/socios*] with demons”); 2 Cor 1:7 (“For we know that as you share [*koinōnoi/socīi* ... *estis*] in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort”); 2 Cor 8:18 (“Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners [*koinōnoi/participes*] in the altar?”); 2 Cor 8:23 (“As for Titus, he is my partner [*koinōnos/socius meus*] and fellow worker in your service”); Phlm 17 (“So if you consider me your partner [*koinōnon/socium*], receive him as you would receive me”); Heb 10:32–33 (“you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners [*koinōnoi/socīi*] with those so treated”); 1 Pet 5:1 (“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker [*koinōnos/communicator*] in the glory that is to be revealed”).

¹⁷ See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, 3rd ed. [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. κοινωνία: a “close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship (hence a favorite expr. for the marital relationship as the most intimate betw. human beings . . .)” (p. 552).

Explicit Citations of 2 Peter 1:4 in the Thomistic Corpus

In this section, we will review explicit citations of 2 Peter 1:4 in the writings of Saint Thomas. The majority of these quotations come in the *Summa theologiae*, but he also refers to the text in the *Scriptum* on the *Sentences*, in the *Summa contra gentiles*, in five of his scriptural commentaries, once in his *Quaestio disputata de anima*, and in his commentary on the Apostle's Creed. He thus engages the text throughout his career, and it seems to take on greater importance for him, not less, as he progresses to his mature works and scriptural commentaries.

The goal here is not merely to string together texts from disparate locations. Rather, looking at the texts together, the aim is to see how Thomas, especially in the *Summa theologiae*, unfolds the meaning of the verse not in any one location but across the development of the entire *Summa*, such that the passage takes on new associations depending on the context, much like a leitmotif reoccurring in the movements of a symphony. The scriptural commentaries are also important in tying the verse to the mystery of the Trinity and the action of Christ. Taking these texts together, one can glean how Thomas offers a profound and careful interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4 from the beginning of his career to the end, drawing it into his synthesis of faith and reason.

The Mature Teaching in the Summa theologiae

Saint Thomas develops his exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4 throughout the *Summa theologiae*. One can appreciate his systematic interpretation of the verse only by comparing the disparate citations of the passage, identifying their contexts, and highlighting the wider significance of each. In this light, references to participation in the divine nature show how man is ordered to and arrives at God. We will proceed to examine references to the verse, from the beginning of the *Summa* to the end, to better understand how Thomas interprets the verse within a wider theological framework.

In the *prima pars*, Thomas first deploys the verse in an objection on the divine names, specifically on whether the name "God" is communicable (*communicabile*). The first objection of *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9, argues that the name is communicable because men can become partakers of the divine nature. This objection explicitly cites 2 Peter 1:4 in support of the position.¹⁸ However, Thomas clarifies that "the divine nature is not commu-

¹⁸ "Cuiusque enim communicatur res significata per nomen, communicatur et nomen ipsum. Sed hoc nomen Deus, ut dictum est, significat divinam naturam, quae est communicabilis aliis, secundum illud *II Pet. I, magna et pretiosa promissa nobis donavit, ut per hoc efficiamur divinae consortes naturae*. Ergo hoc nomen

nicae except according to the participation of a likeness [*secundum similitudinis participationem*].¹⁹ In the corpus, he unpacks the notion of likeness: “Properly speaking, [a name] is communicable which according to the whole signification of the name is communicable to many. But [a name] is communicable through a likeness [*per similitudinem*] which is communicable according to some of those things which are included in the meaning of the name.”²⁰ He also notes that “this name God is in no way communicable according to its whole signification, but according to something of it, through a certain likeness [*similitudinem*].”²¹ Thomas thus affirms that something of God is communicated to man by way of a likeness, but we are left wondering exactly which aspect of the “name” of God is communicated and in what way. Saint Thomas will answer these questions more precisely in the discussion on grace in the *prima secundae*, especially in question 110.²²

In the *prima secundae*, while discussing the intrinsic principles of human action, Thomas asks whether habit is in the essence of the soul or in its powers, in the course of which he responds that, “if we speak about some higher nature, of which man can be a partaker [*particeps*], according to that saying of 2 Peter 1, ‘that we may be made sharers [*consortes*] of the divine nature,’ then nothing prevents there being some habit [*habitus*] in the soul according to its essence, namely grace, as will be shown later,”²³

Deus est communicabile”—“For to whatever is communicated the thing signified by the name, the name itself is also communicated. But this name God, as was said, signifies the divine nature, which is communicable to others, according to 2 Pet 1:4: great and precious are the promises he gave to us, that through this we should be made consorts of the divine nature.” It is interesting that 2 Pet 1:4 first appears in the *Summa* as an objection.

¹⁹ *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9, ad 1: “Natura divina non est communicabilis nisi secundum similitudinis participationem.”

²⁰ *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9: “Proprie quidem communicabile est, quod secundum totam significationem nominis, est communicabile multis. Per similitudinem autem communicabile est, quod est communicabile secundum aliquid eorum quae includuntur in nominis significatione.”

²¹ *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9: “Est nihilominus communicabile hoc nomen Deus, non secundum suam totam significationem, sed secundum aliquid eius, per quamdam similitudinem, ut dii dicantur, qui participant aliquid divinum per similitudinem, secundum illud, ego dixi, dii estis”—“. . . as they are called God who partake of something divine through a likeness, according to that passage, ‘I have said, you are gods (Ps 82:6).’”

²² Thomas, of course, will also give the beginning of an answer in his question on the divine missions and the rational creature’s assimilation to the divine persons through acts of knowing and loving in *ST* I, q. 43.

²³ *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 2: “Sed si loquamur de aliqua superiori natura, cuius homo potest

perhaps indicating *ST* I-II, q. 110. The verse also appears in a discussion on the theological virtues, this time referring not to a *habitus* perfecting the essence of the soul, but to one perfecting the powers: “There is another beatitude exceeding the nature of man, toward which man is able to come by the divine power alone, according to a certain participation of divinity, as it is said in 2 Peter 1, ‘that through Christ we are made partakers of the divine nature.’”²⁴ In these cases, Thomas draws out 2 Peter 1:4 to show more precisely how man becomes a partaker of the divine nature: by habitual grace, as qualifying the essence of his soul, and by the theological virtues, as qualifying the powers of his soul.

Another reference to 2 Peter 1:4 in the *prima secundae* comes in the discussion of the essence of grace and makes more explicit the insights of I-II, q. 50, a. 2, and I-II, q. 62, a. 1, just noted above. Thus, in *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 3, Thomas references 2 Peter 1:4, connecting *consors* with *participatio*, arguing that habitual grace is not the same as the infused virtues:

The infused virtues dispose man in a higher way and for a higher end; so it is also necessary that [they dispose him] in relation to a higher nature. And this is for partaking of the divine nature [*ad naturam divinam participatam*], as is said in 2 Peter 1: “Great and precious are the promises he gave, that through these we may be made partakers of the divine nature [*divinae consortes naturae*].”

esse particeps, secundum illud *II Petr. I, ut simus consortes naturae divinae*, sic nihil prohibet in anima secundum suam essentiam esse aliquem habitum, scilicet gratiam, ut infra dicitur.”

²⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 1: “Alia autem est beatitudo naturam hominis excedens, ad quam homo sola divina virtute pervenire potest, secundum quandam divinitatis participationem; secundum quod dicitur *II Petr. I, quod per Christum facti sumus consortes divinae naturae*.” Note how Thomas modifies the scriptural text to saying that we are made partakers through Christ, rather than through the “most precious promises” of Christ. In this article, Thomas also draws a distinction between two ways in which a thing can have a nature, essentially and by participation: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod aliqua natura potest attribui alicui rei dupliciter. Uno modo, *essentialiter*, et sic huiusmodi virtutes theologicae excedunt hominis naturam. Alio modo, *participative*, sicut lignum ignitum participat naturam ignis, et sic quodammodo fit homo particeps divinae naturae, ut dictum est. Et sic istae virtutes conveniunt homini secundum naturam participatam”—“With regard to the first objection, it must be said that some nature can be attributed to something in two ways. In one way, *essentially*, and the theological virtues in this way exceed the nature of man. In another way, *by participation*, just as burning wood participates in the nature of fire; and, thus, in some way, man is made a partaker of the divine nature, as was said. And so these virtues belong to man according to participated nature” (I-II, q. 62, a. 1, ad 1).

And by the reception of this nature, we are said to be regenerated [*regenerari*] into sons of God.²⁵

Thomas thus directly links the notion of *participatio* with the *consortes* of 2 Peter 1:4. The participation accomplished through the grace of God, making the graced human into a *consors*, that is, a sharer, or even partner, of the divine nature, suggests the relational aspect of graced participation in the divine nature. The reference to regeneration into sons of God (*filii Dei*) confirms the relational dynamism of participation: its goal is a filial relationship with God.

In article 4 of question 110, the interpenetration of the philosophical and theological, arguably already present in the text of 2 Peter 1:4, appears even more clearly. Having argued that grace is a participation in the divine nature in the prior articles, in reference to habitual grace, Thomas expands his position, extending the graced participation in God to knowledge and love:

For just as by the intellective power man participates the divine knowledge [*participat cognitionem divinam*] through the virtue of faith, and [just as] by the power of the will [he participates] the divine love [*amorem divinum*] through the virtue of charity, so also through the nature of the soul he participates, according to a certain similitude, the divine nature [*participat . . . naturam divinam*], through a certain regeneration or recreation.²⁶

The participation of man in the divine nature thus has its roots in the participation of the soul in the divine nature through habitual grace. In addition, the human person participates in the divine knowledge and love through the virtues of faith and charity, growing out of habitual grace as

²⁵ ST I-II, q. 110, a. 3: "Virtutes autem infusae disponunt hominem altiori modo, et ad altiorem finem, unde etiam oportet quod in ordine ad aliquam altiorem naturam. Hoc autem est in ordine *ad naturam divinam participatam*; secundum quod dicitur II Petr. I, 'maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, ut per haec efficiamini divinae consortes naturae.' Et secundum acceptionem huius naturae, dicimur regenerari in filios Dei." In the corpus of the same article, Thomas also notes that "the light of grace . . . is a participation in the divine nature" ("*lumen gratiae, quod est participatio divinae naturae*").

²⁶ ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4: "Sicut enim per potentiam intellectivam *homo participat cognitionem divinam per virtutem fidei*; et secundum potentiam voluntatis *amorem divinum, per virtutem caritatis*; ita etiam *per naturam animae participat, secundum quandam similitudinem, naturam divinam*, per quandam regenerationem sive recreationem." Thomas does not here cite 2 Peter 1:4, but he does so in the previous article. The use of similar language (*participatio, regeneratio*) in a similar context suggests a link between articles 3 and 4 of question 110.

from a root, as these virtues qualify the intellect and will.²⁷ In his earlier discussion of the divine missions, Saint Thomas draws this line of thought to its logical conclusion: we become like God not only through the gift of habitual grace and the theological virtues but also in our graced actions, that is, in our very acts of knowing and loving the divine persons in their distinction.²⁸

The *tertia pars* contains the next reference to the verse, excepting its quotation in an objection from the *secunda secundae*.²⁹ Discussing the difference between assumption through hypostatic union and assumption through grace, Thomas states that “the assumption which is made through the grace of adoption is terminated toward a certain participation [*participatio*] of the divine nature according to an assimilation [*assimilatio*] of its divine goodness, according to 2 Peter 1, ‘as consorts of the divine nature,’ etc. And therefore the mode of assumption of this kind [namely, one through grace] is common to the three persons both on the part of the principles and on the part of the terminus.”³⁰ To be a *consors* thus involves the grace of adoption, being made a son or daughter of God, which Thomas connects with *participatio* and *assimilatio*.

Finally, in an article on the priesthood of Christ, after quoting a string of passages (Mal 2:7, Heb 5:1, and Col 1:19), Thomas observes that “the proper office of a priest is to be a mediator between God and the people,

²⁷ In God, nature, intellect, and will, as well as the exercise of these acts, are all one. In contrast, man’s nature, intellect, and will, as well as the habits, acts, and objects of these powers, are distinct. What is therefore simple in God is reflected in a manifold way in the human person. The human person thus mirrors God in a multifaceted way.

²⁸ On this point, see the final section of the present study. Thomas prefers to use the word *assimilatio* rather than *participatio* or *consortio* in his consideration of human acts of knowing and loving vis-à-vis the divine persons. Thomas directly links the notions of *participatio* and *assimilatio* in *ST* III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3, discussed below.

²⁹ For the noted exception, see *ST* II-II, q. 85, a. 2, obj. 1: “Cum enim sacrificium Deo offerri debeat, videtur quod omnibus illis sit sacrificium offerendum qui divinitatis consortes fiunt. Sed etiam sancti homines efficiuntur divinae naturae consortes, ut dicitur II Petri I” — “For since sacrifice ought to be offered to God, it seems that a sacrifice must be offered for all those who would be made consorts of the divinity. But holy men are also made consorts of the divine nature, as is said in 2 Pet 1:4.”

³⁰ *ST* III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3: “Assumptio quae fit per gratiam adoptionis, terminatur ad quandam participationem divinae naturae secundum assimilationem ad bonitatem illius, secundum illud II Pet. I, ut divinae consortes naturae, etc. Et ideo huiusmodi assumptio communis est tribus personis et ex parte principii et ex parte termini.”

namely, inasmuch as he brings divine things to the people. . . . And this belongs above all to Christ. For through him gifts were brought to men, according to 2 Peter 1, ‘through whom,’ namely Christ, ‘he gave to us the greatest and most precious promises, that through these we might be made partakers of the divine nature.’”³¹ Participation in the divine nature thus has a Christological basis and character, with Saint Thomas tracing the source of the gifts to Christ as high priest, through whom they are given to men, as noted in 2 Peter 1:4.³²

Finally, Thomas connects 2 Peter 1:4 with the sacraments of Christ, noting how God alone can cause grace, since “grace is nothing other than a certain participated similitude of the divine nature, according that verse of 2 Peter 1.”³³ Thomas therefore fittingly connects 2 Peter 1:4 not only with the humanity of Christ the priest, a conjoined instrument of the Word, but also links the verse to the sacraments, the gifts of Christ the high priest

³¹ ST III, q. 22, a. 1: “*proprium officium sacerdotis est esse mediatorem inter Deum et populum, in quantum scilicet divina populo tradit. . . . Hoc autem maxime convenit Christo. Nam per ipsum dona hominibus sunt collata, secundum illud II Pet. I, per quem, scilicet Christum, maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, ut per haec efficiamini divinae consortes naturae.*” The scriptural texts Thomas cites are Mal 2:7 (“For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts”), Heb 5:1 (“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins”), and Col 1:19–20 (“For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”). See also the discussion of ST III, q. 62, a. 1, in the section on participation below (see note 61 below).

³² The link between Christ, participation, and grace, especially in relation to 2 Pet 1:4, comes out in the fact that Thomas often quotes the phrase differently. Sometimes he writes *per haec*, referring to the great and precious promises, but other times he prefers *per ipsum*, *per hoc*, and even *per Christum*, suggesting that he reads the text, and the whole notion of our graced participation in God, against a Christological background. In the same article (ST III, q. 22, a. 1, ad 3), Saint Thomas also refers to the grace of headship (“Christ, as the head of all, has the perfection of all graces”), reminding us of the fuller discussion of the topic in ST III, q. 8. He also states that “Christ was greater than the angels, not only according to his divinity, but also according to his humanity inasmuch as he had the fullness [*plenitudinem*] of grace and glory” (III, q. 22, a. 1, ad 1). He thus first states that Christ has the fullness of grace (ad 1) and then mentions his grace of headship (ad 3), suggesting, in the context of his discussion of 2 Pet 1:4, how Christ, in his humanity, is the mediator of all graces to men.

³³ ST III, q. 62, a. 1 (see note 61 below).

and separated instrumental causes of God that allow humans to partake of the divine life through their journey on earth.³⁴

These citations of 2 Peter 1:4, taken from across the *Summa theologiae*, have a certain coherence and logic to them. In the *prima pars*, Thomas alludes to how participation in the divine nature makes us like God, insofar as “something” of the meaning of the name of God is communicable to us according to a “likeness” (see *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9, on the names of God). In the *prima secundae*, while discussing the intrinsic principles of human action, he more precisely describes this participated likeness, identifying grace as the cause of the likeness, observing how grace can modify the essence of the soul (see *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 2, on the subject of habits) as well as the powers of the soul (see *ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 1, on the theological virtues), making us partakers of the divine nature in both ways. Even more specifically, one shares in the divine nature through habitual grace, in the divine knowledge through faith, and in the divine love through charity, and in so doing is “regenerated” into a son of God (see *ST* I-II, q. 110, aa. 3–4 on the essence of grace). Finally, Thomas identifies Christ as the source of grace, the “priest” and “mediator” between God and men, showing how Christ is the principle of our “assimilation” to the divine goodness (see *ST* III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3, on the mode of union and q. 22, a. 1, on the priesthood of Christ). God communicates this grace to man, here and now, through the separated instruments of the sacraments (see *ST* III, q. 62, a. 1, on the sacraments as instrumental causes of grace). Thus, the guiding light of the Thomasian exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4 seems to be the patristic refrain, cited from at least Irenaeus onward, but not explicitly mentioned by Saint Thomas in the passages discussed above, that God became man so that man might become like God.³⁵

³⁴ On the sacraments as mirroring the journey of life, and providing for its spiritual needs, from birth to death, see *ST* III, q. 65, a. 1: “Vita enim spiritualis conformitatem aliquam habet ad vitam corporalem”—“For spiritual life has some conformity to bodily life.”

³⁵ Thomas cites this patristic insight prominently in *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2, as the fifth, culminating reason why the Son of God became incarnate, linking it to participation: “Fifth, [God became man] as much as to the full participation of the divinity, which truly is the happiness of man. And this is arranged for us through the humanity of Christ, for Augustine says . . . *God was made man that man might be made God*” (“Quinto, quantum ad plenam participationem divinitatis, quae vere est hominis beatitudo, et finis humanae vitae. Et hoc collatum est nobis per Christi humanitatem, dicit enim Augustinus . . . factus est Deus homo, ut homo fieret Deus”). See also *Super Eph* 3, lec. 5 (no. 185): “Nam nec affectus, nec intellectus humanus potuissent considerare, vel intelligere, vel petere a Deo quod fieret homo et homo efficeretur Deus et consors naturae divinae”—“For neither

Scriptural Commentaries: John, Romans, Ephesians, Titus, and Hebrews

References to 2 Peter 1:4 in the scriptural commentaries of Aquinas root the passage deeper in Scripture and fill out what might appear to be the more abstract explanations of the *Summa*.³⁶ Thomas refers to 2 Peter 1:4 in his commentaries on the Gospel of John and Paul's letters to the Romans, Ephesians, Titus, and Hebrews. These references demonstrate that Thomas understands 2 Peter 1:4 in light of the Trinity as well as the priestly meditation of Christ. The scriptural commentaries thus add an interpersonal dimension to his exegesis of the verse.

In the commentary on John, Thomas glosses a passage in the Farewell Discourse, before the Passion of the Lord, reminding his disciples that, "as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (John 15:9). Thomas then notes that Christ did not love his disciples "that they would be God by nature," nor that "they would be united to God in person," but rather "he loved them toward [*ad*] a certain likeness of these, such that, namely, they would be gods by participation through grace," after which he quotes 2 Peter 1:4.³⁷ The passage thus underscores the divine love as the principle of our union with God through participation in grace.³⁸

Thomas also comments on this passage from Romans: "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7). After

affection nor human understanding was able to consider or to understand or to seek from God that he should become man and that man should be made God and a consort of the divine nature." For one of the earliest references to this notion, see Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.19.1: "Propter hoc enim Verbum Dei homo, et qui Filius Dei est Filius hominis factus est, [ut homo], commixtus Verbo Dei et adoptionem percipiens, fiat filius Dei" (ed. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, Sources Chrétiennes 211 [Paris: Cerf, 1974])—"For on account of this the Word of God became man and he who was the Son of God was made a son of man, that man, mingled with the Word of God and recognizing the adoption, should be made a son of God."

³⁶ On the scriptural commentaries of Aquinas, see Weinandy, Keating, and Yocum, *Aquinas on Scripture*. A fuller discussion of the passages cited below, in their proper context, would require an additional study.

³⁷ *Super Ioan* 15, lec. 2 (no. 1999): "Et ad nihil horum filius dilexit discipulos, nam neque ad hoc dilexit eos ut essent Deus per naturam, neque essent uniti Deo in persona; sed ad quamdam horum similitudinem eos dilexit, ut scilicet essent dii per participationem gratiae; Ps. LXXXI, 6: ego dixi: dii estis; II Petr. I, 4: *per quem magna nobis et pretiosa promissa donavit, ut divinae per hoc efficiamur consortes naturae*" (emphasis added).

³⁸ On this point, see also *ST* I, q. 20, on the love of God, which contextualizes the teaching on grace.

noting that the phrase “from God our Father” can be taken “essentially for the whole Trinity,” Thomas observes that Paul adds “and our Lord Jesus Christ” not because he is another person but “on account of his human nature through the mystery of which [*per cuius mysterium*] the gifts of graces come to us,” connecting these gifts of grace with our being made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).³⁹ The mystery of grace⁴⁰ is thus placed in a Trinitarian and Christological context: grace comes from the entire Trinity as mediated by the mystery of the humanity of Christ, thereby leading man back to the Trinity through Christ.⁴¹

In Ephesians, Thomas comments on the following text: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20–21). As an example of this “abundance” (*abundantia*), Saint Thomas observes that “neither human affect nor human understanding would have been able to consider or to understand or to seek from God that he should become man and that man should be made God and a consort of the divine nature, which nevertheless he works in us according to power, and this in the Incarna-

³⁹ *Super Rom* 1, lec. 4 (no. 72): “Quod autem dicit Deo patre nostro, potest teneri essentialiter pro tota Trinitate, quae dicitur pater, quia nomina importantia relationem ad creaturam, communia sunt toti Trinitati, sicut creator et dominus. Addit autem et domino Iesu Christo, non quod sit alia persona a tribus, sed propter humanam naturam, per cuius mysterium ad nos dona gratiarum perveniunt. II Petr. c. I, 4: *per quem maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit*. Vel potest dici quod hoc quod dicit Deo patre nostro, tenetur pro persona patris, quae secundum proprietatem dicitur pater Christi, sed secundum appropriationem pater noster” — “And when he says ‘to God our Father,’ it can be taken essentially for the whole Trinity, which is called Father; for names implying a relation to creatures are common to the whole Trinity, just as Creator and Lord. And he adds ‘to the Lord Jesus Christ’ not that he is another person from the three but on account of the human nature, through whose mystery gifts of grace should come to us, ‘through which he gave the most great and precious promises to us.’ Or it can be said that what he says, ‘to God our Father,’ is taken for the person of the Father, which according to his property is called the Father of Christ, but according to appropriation, our Father.”

⁴⁰ One might be tempted, perhaps not incorrectly, to read *mysterium* here (“propter humanam naturam, per cuius mysterium ad nos dona gratiarum perveniunt”) in terms of *sacramentum*.

⁴¹ In the context of the rest of his exegesis in the scriptural commentaries, the reference to the “Father” as being taken “essentially” for the whole Trinity would seem to imply that all of the divine persons are present in the work of our sanctification. Where God is at work, so are each of the divine persons, for each is God.

tion of his Son [quoting 2 Peter 1:4: *per hoc efficiamini*].⁴² So, again, to be a partaker of the divine nature comes about through the mystery of the Incarnation and the power of God at work within us.

In the commentary on Titus, Thomas comments on this text: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Tit 3:4–6). Thomas here notes that man in the state of perdition needed both to be restored to a participation in the divine nature and to put off the old man, which occurs in such a way that “this [new] nature is so given that our nature also remains, and thus it is added above [it]. For in this way a participation in the Son of God is generated, by which man is not destroyed.”⁴³ Participation in the divine is thus portrayed as a participation in the Son of God (*participatio* in the *Filium Dei*).

In regard to Hebrews, Thomas comments on the following: “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises” (Heb 8:6). The reference here to “promises” and mediation links Hebrews with 2 Peter 1:4. Thomas observes that “every priest is a mediator. And this one is the mediator of a better covenant, namely, of man to God. For it belongs to a mediator to reconcile extremes. And this one bears divine [things] to us, for through him [*per ipsum*] we are made partakers of the divine nature, as is said in 2 Peter 1. He also offers us to God.”⁴⁴ The

⁴² *Super Eph* 3, lec. 5 (no. 185): “Nam nec affectus, nec intellectus humanus potuissent considerare, vel intelligere, vel petere a Deo quod fieret homo et homo efficeretur Deus et consors naturae divinae, quae tamen secundum virtutem operatur in nobis, et hoc in incarnatione filii sui. II Petr. I, 4: *ut per hoc efficiamini divinae consortes naturae*.”

⁴³ *Super Tit* 3, lect. 1 (no. 92): “Homo indigebat duobus in statu perditionis, quae consecutus est per Christum, scilicet *participatione divinae naturae*, et depositione vetustatis. . . . Sed primum consequimur per Christum, scilicet per participationem naturae divinae. *I Pet. II* [sic]: *ut per hoc efficiamur consortes divinae naturae*. Sed nova natura non acquiritur nisi per generationem. Sed tamen haec natura ita datur, quod etiam remanet nostra, et ita superadditur. Sic enim generatur participatio in filium Dei, quo non destruitur homo”—“In the state of perdition, man stood in need of two things, which Christ accomplished, namely, participation in the divine nature and the putting off of his old age. . . . But we accomplish the first through Christ, namely, by participation of the divine nature: ‘that through this we should be made consorts of the divine nature.’ This [new] nature is so given that our nature also remains. . . .”

⁴⁴ *Super Heb* 8, lec. 2 (no. 392): “Deinde cum dicit quanto et melioris, etc. assignat

link between Christ, mediation, and priesthood is thus present here, as it is in *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1.

All these texts demonstrate how Thomas connects participation in God with the person of Christ, who, as priest, is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb 8), and, as savior, pours out the gift of regeneration through the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). This “love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Eph 3:19) reveals the “power at work within us” (Eph 3:20) leading the believer to give glory to the Father in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:14–21). The biblical commentaries thus contextualize the notion of participation in the divine nature by setting it in Scripture: linking it to the love of God (John 15:9) and Christ (Eph 3:19), its origin in Christ (Rom 1:7), the priesthood of Christ (Heb 8:6), and the salvific power of God (Tit 3:4). References to the Father (Eph 3:14) and the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5) also gesture at the Trinitarian dimension of graced participation, as does “God our Father,” which Thomas takes essentially for the Trinity, in Romans 1:7. The personal dimensions of 2 Peter 1:4 thus shine forth clearly in the exegesis of the scriptural commentaries.

Additional Citations of 2 Peter 1:4

To conclude this exhibition of texts, Thomas also refers to 2 Peter 1:4 in his *Scriptum*, the *Summa contra gentiles*, the *Quaestio disputata de anima*, and in his commentary on the Apostle’s Creed. The earlier theological writings, such as the *Scriptum*, show that Thomas already invested some importance in 2 Peter 1:4. These citations also show how Thomas cited 2 Peter 1:4 across his career, in several genres, and in different registers (academic and popular).

In the *Scriptum*, for example, Thomas connects the saying from 2 Peter 1:4, without a specific citation, to a discussion of confirmation in the good and divine sonship. Contrasting God’s confirmation in goodness to that of man, Thomas notes that “to whomever this is given, [namely,] that they should be confirmed in the good through grace, they have [this] through the gift of grace, through which they are made sons of God, and in a certain way consorts of the divine nature.”⁴⁵ The reference to confirmation

causam quare ministerium hoc maius est. Omnis enim sacerdos mediator est. Iste autem mediator est melioris foederis, scilicet hominis ad Deum. Mediatoris enim est extrema conciliare. Iste vero ad nos divina attulit, quia per ipsum facti sumus divinae consortes naturae, ut dicitur II Pet. I, 4 [sic]. Ipse etiam nostra offert Deo”—“Next, when he says ‘how much and better,’ and so on, he assigns a cause on account of which this ministry is better. For every priest is a mediator . . .”

⁴⁵ *In II sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1: “. . . et quibuscumque hoc confertur ut per gratiam

in goodness, a characteristic of the beatified saints, connects the notion of participation in God to the states of grace and glory. The first citation thus already indicates the notion of a journey from the present life to life everlasting.⁴⁶

Thomas also refers to the verse in the *Summa contra gentiles*, but in this case to refute a position that Christ was merely adopted in grace, and not truly divine. The objectionable position holds that “through a certain assimilation to God he [Christ] is called God in the Scriptures not by nature, but through a certain sharing [*consortium*] of the divine goodness, just as it is said also of the saints in 2 Peter 1.”⁴⁷ While denying this position, Thomas at a later point affirms that Christ, though God, is a partaker of the divine nature in his humanity through grace.⁴⁸ These citations of 2 Peter 1:4, which Thomas does not develop systematically, nevertheless

confirmuntur in bono, habent per donum gratiae, per quod filii Dei efficiuntur, *et quodammodo divinae naturae consortes*.”

⁴⁶ On language of participation in the *Scriptum* reminiscent of 2 Pet 1:4, see *In II sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3 (see note 62 below) and *In III sent.*, d. 4, q. 3, a. 1: “Verum est quod nulla merita etiam aliorum, filii Dei incarnationem meruerunt, proprie loquendo, propter tres rationes. . . . Tertia ratio est, quia meritum humanum non se extendit ultra conditionem humanam, quae in hoc consistit ut quis mereatur *aliquam divinitatis et beatitudinis participationem*. Sed quod tota plenitudo divinitatis habet in homine, hoc excedit et conditionem et meritum humanum”—“It is true that no merits of others merited the Incarnation of the Son of God, properly speaking, for three reasons. . . . The third reason is because human merit does not extend beyond the human condition, which consists in this, that someone should merit some participation of divinity and beatitude. But that the whole plenitude of the divinity should dwell in man exceeds both the human condition and human merit.”

⁴⁷ *SCG* IV, ch. 4, no. 3: “Opinantes Iesum Christum purum hominem esse . . . aestimaverunt eum, similiter aliis hominibus, per adoptionis spiritum Dei filium; et per gratiam ab eo genitum; et per quandam assimilationem ad Deum in Scripturis dici Deum, non per naturam, sed per consortium quoddam divinae bonitatis, sicut et de sanctis dicitur II Petr. 1: *ut efficiamini divinae consortes naturae*”—“Those supposing that Jesus Christ was merely a man . . . judged him, like other men, a son of God through the spirit of adoption; and begotten by him through grace, and through a certain assimilation to God . . .”

⁴⁸ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 1, ad 1: “Sed quia cum unitate personae remanet distinctio naturarum, ut ex supra dictis patet, anima Christi non est per suam essentiam divina. Unde oportet quod fiat *divina per participationem, quae est secundum gratiam*”—“But because with the unity of the person there remains a distinction of natures, as is clear from the words mentioned above, the soul of Christ is not by its essence divine. So it is necessary that it may be made divine by participation, which is according to grace.”

foreshadow how the theme of participation in the divine nature will influence his account of both man and Christ.

In the *Quaestio disputata de anima*, Thomas asks whether an angel and soul differ with respect to species.⁴⁹ In response to the objection, which notes that angels and men are each perfected by grace, glory, and charity, Thomas observes that “gratuitous perfections belong to the soul and to an angel through a participation of the divine nature, whence it is said in 2 Peter 1.”⁵⁰ Here, Thomas sees 2 Peter 1:4 as summing up the “gratuitous perfections” given to men and angels. The verse thus functions in the disputed question, as it does in the *Summa*, as a sort of catchphrase summing up the graced life of men in relation to God both *in via* and *in patria*.

Finally, commenting on article 3 of the Apostle’s Creed—“qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine”—Thomas observes that the Incarnation strengthens our faith, hope, and charity. The Incarnation also provides a reason to keep a pure soul (*puram animam*), Saint Thomas writes, “inasmuch as our nature was ennobled and exalted from union [*coniunctio*] with God, which was assumed [*fuit . . . suscepta*] for a sharing [*ad consortium*] of a divine person,” later quoting 2 Peter 1:4.⁵¹ The text here, significantly, refers to the Incarnation itself as a kind of union (*coni-*

⁴⁹ *Quaes. disp. de an.*, q. 7: “Septimo quaeritur utrum Angelus et anima differant specie”—“Seventh, it is asked whether angel and soul differ in species.”

⁵⁰ *Quaes. disp. de an.*, q. 7, ad 9: “Ad nonum dicendum quod perfectiones gratuitaе conveniunt animae et Angelo per participationem divinae naturae; unde dicitur II Petri, I: per quem maxima et pretiosa nobis dona donavit, ut divinae naturae consortes, et cetera. Unde per convenientiam in istis perfectionibus non potest concludi unitas speciei”—“. . . whence it is said in 2 Peter 1: through whom he gave to us the most great and precious gifts, that we may be made consorts of the divine nature,’ and so on. So, the unity of the species cannot be concluded from agreement in these perfections.”

⁵¹ *In symbolum apostolorum*, a. 3: “Quarto inducimur ad servandam puram animam nostram. *Intantum enim natura nostra fuit nobilitata et exaltata ex coniunctione ad Deum, quod fuit ad consortium divinae personae suscepta. . . .* Ideo homo huius exaltationem recolens et attendens, debet dedignari vilificare se et naturam suam per peccatum: ideo dicit beatus Petrus: per quem maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, ut per haec efficiamur divinae consortes naturae, fugientes eius quae in mundo est concupiscentiae corruptionem”—“Fourth, we are led to preserving our soul pure, inasmuch as our nature was ennobled and exalted from union with God, which was assumed for a sharing of a divine person. . . . Therefore, man, remembering and attending to the exultation of this, ought to disdain to debase himself and his nature though sin: therefore the blessed Peter says: ‘through whom he gave the most great and precious promises, that through these we should be made consorts of the divine nature.’”

unctio) and sharing (*consortio*) of a divine person, although perhaps the language here is more metaphorical, geared as it is toward a more popular audience. In any case, the idea is that Christ himself, as man, participates as a “partaker” in the divine nature.⁵²

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All these passages, from the *Scriptum* to the *Summa* to the scriptural commentaries, show how the meaning of 2 Peter 1:4 unfolds in the writings of Saint Thomas like an ever-deepening stream. The initial references in the *Scriptum* and *Summa contra gentiles* display how the verse is present at earlier stages of his thought. The systematic exposition of the verse from across the *Summa theologiae* shows how 2 Peter 1:4 contains the whole teaching on grace in embryo: some likeness of God is communicated to us through grace, qualifying the essence and powers of the soul, coming to fruition in the graced acts of knowledge and love of God, all of which is made possible through the mediation of the priesthood of Christ. A citation of 2 Peter 1:4 accompanies each stage of this development, as the teaching on grace deepens and broadens. Our “partaking” of the divine nature is thus totally enfolding: through our participation in the divine nature, by habitual grace, we are made apt to receive the theological virtues of faith and charity that bear fruit in the graced acts of knowing and loving God. The scriptural commentaries lend an even deeper personal dimension to the meaning of the verse, connecting 2 Peter 1:4 with the persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and Christ in his humanity, the mediating source of grace for us. His exposition of 2 Peter 1:4 is thus conceptually sophisticated—as explained in terms of *communicatio*, habitual grace, the theological virtues, and priestly mediation—as well as historically grounded in the revelation of the Trinity and the salvific deeds of Jesus Christ.

Textual Resonances: Grace as *Participatio*, *Assimilatio*, and *Repraesentatio*

Thus far we have catalogued and reflected on many of the explicit references Thomas makes to 2 Peter 1:4. This analysis shows how Thomas connects 2 Peter 1:4 with his significant teachings on grace: from habitual grace, to the theological virtues, to graced human action.⁵³ These refer-

⁵² Interestingly, although he connects 2 Pet 1:4 with a discussion of the Incarnation and adoption in grace, Thomas in the *Summa* does not seem to explicitly explain the humanity of Christ in terms of the verse.

⁵³ To my knowledge, Saint Thomas does not explicitly link 2 Peter 1:4 with his discussion of the grace of *auxilium*, the grace of God moving, reducing the

ences, while drawing out the implications of what it means to be made a partaker of the divine nature, do not yet exhaust the intellectual resources of the Angelic Doctor.

We have already noted how Thomas explicitly links 2 Peter 1:4 with the notion of *participatio*.⁵⁴ In so doing, Thomas also draws the verse into a constellation of ideas that include *assimilatio* and *conformatio* in reference to the Trinity as well as *repraesentatio* and *imitatio* in reference to man as *imago Dei*.⁵⁵ The goal of this final section will be to trace the conceptual and terminological links from 2 Peter 1:4 to participation, divine mission, and the image of God. It will not be an exhaustive study of any one of these additional topics but will merely to gesture at the connections to suggest the implications and fecundity of the Thomasian exegesis. We will then see more clearly how the allegedly Hellenistic background of 2 Peter 1:4 does not compromise the personal and covenantal character of Christianity but actually upholds it.

Grace as Participatio: A Philosophic Interpretation of "Partaking"

As we have seen, in *ST* I-II, q. 110, on the essence of grace, Thomas connects 2 Peter 1:4 with the notion of *participatio*.⁵⁶ He argues that we

human actor from potency to act. However, the discussion of *auxilium*, for example in *ST* I-II, q. 111, a. 2, is near other quotations of 2 Peter 1:4, such as those in q. 110.

⁵⁴ References in *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 2 (see note 23 above), and q. 110, a. 3 (see note 25 above) explain 2 Pet 1:4 in terms of *participatio*. See also III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3: "The assumption which is made through the grace of adoption is terminated in a certain participation [*participatio*] of the divine nature according to an assimilation [*assimilatio*] of its divine goodness, according to 2 Peter 1, as consorts of the divine nature." See also *Super Tit* 3, lec. 1 (no. 92).

⁵⁵ See, for example, *ST* I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2, on the divine missions (see note 71 below), and *ST* I, q. 93, a. 5, on the image of God (see notes 79, 82–83, and 86–89 below).

⁵⁶ See *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 3 (note 25 above). For a recent discussion of participation in Aquinas that attempts to coordinate Platonic and Aristotelian elements in Thomas's theology of creation, see Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 46 (Leiden: Brill, 1995). Two historically significant studies of participation in Thomas Aquinas are, of course, Cornelio Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Rome: EDIVI, 2010), and Louis-Bertrand Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, Bibliothèque thomiste 23 (Paris: Vrin, 1942). For a closer study of grace as a participation in the divine nature, especially in light of the three modes of participation, see Eitenmiller, "Grace as Participation." On the Dionysian background of Thomistic metaphysics, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

become partakers of the divine nature insofar as we participate in it. What exactly does Thomas mean by speaking of such a participation? More precisely, in what sense, and how, does grace make one a participant in the divine nature?

Without studying the relation of *gratia* and *participatio* in the entire Thomistic corpus, we can contextualize *ST* I-II, q. 110, by considering other references to grace and participation in the *Summa theologiae*.⁵⁷ For example, Thomas introduces the pair of grace and participation in his discussions of the final end of man (I, q. 24, a. 2, ad 3: on the book of life); the life of the angels (I, q. 106, a. 4: on how one creature moves another); and the old law's insufficiency in relation to the new law (I-II, q. 98, a. 1: on the old law); and in relation to the gift of fear, the beginning of wisdom, and man's order to his final end (II-II, q. 19, a. 7: on the gift of fear).⁵⁸ These

⁵⁷ Outside of the *Summa*, references to grace as a participation of the divine nature occur in the *De veritate* (e.g.: q. 27, a. 1, ad 7; q. 29, a. 1, ad 5; a. 3, ad 5; a. 5), in some scriptural commentaries, and elsewhere.

⁵⁸ The first citation connects participation with the final end of man, italicizing the goal-directed character of grace. See *ST* I, q. 24, a. 2, ad 3: "Et propter hoc, illi qui habent gratiam et excludunt a gloria, non dicuntur esse electi simpliciter, sed secundum quid. Et similiter non dicuntur esse scripti simpliciter in libro vitae sed secundum quid; prout scilicet de eis in ordinatione et notitia divina existit, quod sint habituri aliquem ordinem ad vitam aeternam, secundum *participationem gratiae*"—"And on account of this, those who have grace and fall short of glory are not said to be elected simply, but in a qualified way. And likewise they are not said to be written into the book of life simply, but in a qualified way—namely, as there exists in the divine knowledge and ordination that they are to have some relation to eternal life, according to a participation of grace." *ST* I, q. 106, a. 4: "Quanto igitur aliqua agentia magis in *participatione divinae bonitatis constituuntur*, tanto magis perfectiones suas nituntur in alios transfundere, quantum possibile est. Unde beatus Petrus monet *eos qui divinam bonitatem per gratiam participant*, dicens, I Petr. IV, 'unusquisque, sicut accepit gratiam, in alterutrum illam ministrans, sicut boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei'—"Therefore as much as some agents are established more in the participation of divine goodness, so much more do they strive to transfuse their perfections into others, as much as is possible. The blessed Peter thus admonishes those who participate in the divine goodness through grace, saying, 'each one, just as he receives grace, ministering to one another, just as good dispensers of the multiform grace of God' [1 Pet 4:10]." *ST* I-II, q. 98, a. 1: "Et ideo illud quod sufficit ad perfectionem legis humanae, ut scilicet peccata prohibeat et poenam apponat, non sufficit ad perfectionem legis divinae, sed *oportet quod hominem totaliter faciat idoneum ad participationem felicitatis aeternae*. Quod quidem fieri non potest nisi per gratiam spiritus sancti, per quam diffunditur caritas in cordibus nostris, quae legem adimplet, gratia enim Dei vita aeterna, ut dicitur Rom. VI—"And therefore that which suffices for the perfection of human law, namely, that it should prohibit sins and

passages highlight how grace as participation is ordered toward the final life of glory.

References to grace as a participation in the divine nature also abound in the *tertia pars*, especially in reference to the grace of Christ in his humanity. In asking whether the union of the Incarnation occurred through grace, Thomas observes that “grace, which is an accident, is a certain participated similitude [*similitudo . . . participata*] in man,” whereas the human nature of Christ is directly “conjoined to the divine nature itself in the person of the Son.”⁵⁹ However, due to the distinction of natures, the soul of Christ is not essentially divine, so “it is necessary that it be made divine through participation, which is according to grace.”⁶⁰ The texts on grace and participation which refer to Christ thus stress that Christ in his humanity must participate in the divine nature, even while acknowledging that the union of natures is through the divine person.

Finally, while discussing in *ST* III, q. 62, a. 1, whether the sacraments are a cause of grace, distinguishing between principal and instrumental causes, and observing that the principal cause makes the effect like itself,

apply punishment, does not suffice for the perfection of the divine law, but it is necessary that man should be made totally fit for the participation of eternal happiness, which, indeed, is not capable of happening except through the grace of the Holy Spirit, through whom charity, which fulfills the law, is poured into our hearts for the grace of God is eternal life, as is said (Rom 6:23).” *ST* II-II, q. 19, a. 7: “*Quia enim vita nostra ad divinam fruitionem ordinatur et dirigitur secundum quandam participationem divinae naturae, quae est per gratiam*; sapientia secundum nos non solum consideratur ut est cognoscitiva Dei, sicut apud philosophos; sed etiam ut est directiva humanae vitae, quae non solum dirigitur secundum rationes humanas, sed etiam secundum rationes divinas”—“For since our life is ordered toward divine enjoyment and is directed according to a certain participation of the divine nature, which is through grace, wisdom in regard to us is not only considered as it is knowledgeable about God, just as with regard to the philosophers, but also as it is directive of human life, which is directed not only according to human reasons, but also according to divine reasons.”

⁵⁹ *ST* III, q. 2, a. 10, ad 1: “*gratia quae est accidens, est quaedam similitudo divinitatis participata in homine*. Per incarnationem autem humana natura non dicitur participasse similitudinem aliquam divinae naturae, sed dicitur esse coniuncta ipsi naturae divinae in persona filii”—“Through the Incarnation human nature is not said to have participated a certain likeness of the divine nature, but it is said to be conjoined to the divine nature itself in the person of the Son.”

⁶⁰ *ST* III, q. 7, a. 1, ad 1: “*Sed quia cum unitate personae remanet distinctio naturarum, ut ex supra dictis patet, anima Christi non est per suam essentiam divina*. Unde oportet quod fiat *divina per participationem, quae est secundum gratiam*”—“But since the distinction of the natures remains with the unity of the person, as is clear from what was said above, the soul of Christ is not by its essence divine. So it is necessary that . . .”

Thomas observes that no one can cause grace except God because “grace is nothing other than a certain participated similitude of the divine nature, according that verse of 2 Peter 1.”⁶¹ In the following article, on whether sacramental grace adds something above the grace of the virtues and the gifts, Thomas refers to the *secunda pars*, presumably to q. 110, a. 4, stating that grace in itself perfects the essence of the soul. He then offers what amounts to a précis of his teaching on grace as participation: thus, “grace, considered in itself, perfects the essence of the soul, inasmuch as it participates a certain similitude of the divine *esse*.”⁶² “And just as from the essence of the soul flow its powers, so from grace flow certain perfections for the powers of the soul, which are called virtues and gifts, by which the powers are perfected in relation [*in ordine*] to their acts.”⁶³ He also, strikingly, refers to grace not as a participation in the divine nature, as he often does elsewhere, but as participating a likeness of the divine *esse*. Taken with other texts, Thomas thus cumulatively refers to grace as a participation in the divine existence (*divinum esse* in *ST* III, q. 62, a. 2 [see note 63]), the divine nature (*divina natura* in I-II, q. 110, a. 3 [note 25]), the divine good-

⁶¹ *ST* III, q. 62, a. 1: “Principalis quidem operatur per virtutem suae formae, cui assimilatur effectus, sicut ignis suo calore calefacit. Et hoc modo non potest causare gratiam nisi Deus, quia *gratia nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo divinae naturae*, secundum illud II Pet. I, ‘magna nobis et pretiosa promissa donavit, ut divinae simus consortes naturae’ — “The principal cause indeed works through the power of its form, to which the effect is likened, just as fire heats with its heat. And in this way no one is able to cause grace except God, because grace is nothing other than . . .”

⁶² *ST* III, q. 62, a. 2: “Gratia, secundum se considerata, perficit essentiam animae, inquantum participat quandam similitudinem divini esse.” See also *In II sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3: “Ad tertium dicendum, quod tam augmentum gratiae quam etiam ipsius infusio est a Deo: sed tamen aliter se habent actus nostri ad infusionem gratiae et augmentum ipsius: *quia ante infusionem gratiae homo nondum est particeps divini esse*; unde actus sui sunt omnino improportionati ad merendum aliquod divinum, quod facultatem naturae excedat: sed *per gratiam infusam constituitur in esse divino*; unde iam actus sui proportionati efficiuntur ad promerendum augmentum vel perfectionem gratiae” — “To the third objection it must be said that as the infusion of grace itself is from God so is the increase of grace: but, nevertheless, our acts are related to the infusion of grace and the increase of it in different ways: for before the infusion of grace man is not yet a partaker of the divine being; so his acts are entirely disproportionate to merit something divine, which exceeds the faculty of nature: but through infused grace, he is established in divine being; so now his acts are made proportionate to merit the increase or perfection of grace.”

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 62, a. 2: “Et sicut ab essentia animae fluunt eius potentiae, ita a gratia fluunt quaedam perfectiones ad potentias animae, quae dicuntur virtutes et dona, quibus potentiae perficiuntur in ordine ad suos actus.”

ness (*divina bonitas* in I-II, q. 110, a. 2 [note 85]), the divine knowledge (*cognitio divina* in ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4 [note 26]), and the divine love (*amor divinum* in ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4 [note 26]).

Three conclusions follow from these investigations. First, to speak of grace as a participation of the divine nature is to indicate that man does not possess God essentially but accidentally. Grace is something that qualifies man's nature and actions, but does not replace them. Grace perfects and builds on nature; it does not destroy it.⁶⁴ Supposing the impossible, if man possessed the divine nature not in a participated way, but in its fullness, man would cease to be man and would be identical with the essence of God—an impossible conclusion. In this sense, the participated possession of grace is contrasted with possessing something essentially.⁶⁵

Second, if grace is an accidental participation in the divine nature, it must somehow be communicated to the creature. It is not something “inborn” (*natus*) or naturally possessed. Thus, grace must be communicated to man. Although God could bestow grace directly, according to Saint Thomas, grace comes to us through the humanity of Christ.⁶⁶ In addition, the ordinary means of the reception of grace is through the sacraments, as a separated instrumental cause.

Third, the notion of causation, instrumental or otherwise, implies an effect. Saint Thomas notes three modes of participation in his commentary on Boethius's *De hebdomadibus*.⁶⁷ In the first mode of participation, which has a more logical tone to it, a species participates in the genus (the species man partakes of the genus animal) or an individual participates in the species (the individual Socrates partakes of the species man). In the second mode of participation, a substance participates its accidents

⁶⁴ See ST I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2, for the earliest reference to this principle in the *Summa*.

⁶⁵ Thomas makes the *essentialiter-participative* distinction in ST I-II, q. 62, a. 1, ad 1.

⁶⁶ See, for example, ST III, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1 (as well as the rest of the question).

⁶⁷ For this threefold division, see the commentary of Saint Thomas on the *De hebdomadibus*, no. 24 (commentary on rule 2): “Now participating is almost a taking part. Hence: (a) Whenever something particularly receives what pertains universally to something else, it is said to participate in it. For instance, man is said to participate in animal, since it does not have the account of animal in its full generality. Socrates participates in man for the same reason. (b) The subject likewise participates in its accident, and so does matter in form, since the substantial or accidental form, which is common in virtue of its account, is determined to this or that subject. (c) The effect is similarly said to participate in its cause, especially when it isn't equal to the power of its cause—e. g. when we say that air ‘participates’ in sunlight because it doesn't receive it with the brightness there is in the sun” (*Aquinas: Exposition of Boethius's Hebdomads*, trans. Peter King, 2004, scribd.com/document/444959507/AQUINAS-Exposition-of-Hebdomads).

(an apple partakes of redness) and matter participates its form (some clay partakes the form of a sphere). In the third mode of participation, the effect participates in the cause, as air partakes of the light of the sun. In all these cases, to participate something is to possess it in a limited way, to have some “part” in it. It would seem that Saint Thomas speaks of grace as a “participation” of God in the third sense: one does not participate God as a species does a genus, or a substance an accident, or matter its form, but such that the effect brought about in the creature makes it somehow like God, although in a limited and non-identical way, that is, as being able to know and love the cause in some way. In this sense, insofar as God grants grace to men, he gives them something, a likeness, of himself. In the following sections, we will explore more precisely how grace makes man “like” God, and how this adds color to the picture of how Thomas interprets 2 Peter 1:4 in relational terms.

Grace as Assimilatio and Conformatio: The Divine Missions

In the questions on grace (*ST* I-II, qq. 109–14), Saint Thomas also glosses 2 Peter 1:4 in terms of *assimilatio*.⁶⁸ This term links the discussion to the divine missions in *ST* I, q. 43, where the same word appears in a similar context.⁶⁹ The divine missions can thus illuminate how Saint Thomas understands 2 Peter 1:4. His discussion, especially in the final article on the essence of grace, also has a conceptual resonance with his discussion of grace in the divine missions. Recall how Thomas states the following in *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 4:

For just as by the intellective power man participates the divine knowledge [*participat cognitionem divinam*] through the virtue of faith, and by the power of the will [he participates] the divine love [*amorem divinum*] through the virtue of charity, so also through the nature of the soul he participates, according to a certain similitude,

⁶⁸ See *ST* III, q. 3, a. 4, ad 3: “The assumption which is made through the grace of adoption is terminated in a certain participation [*participatio*] of the divine nature according to an assimilation [*assimilatio*] of its divine goodness, according to 2 Peter 1, as consorts of the divine nature.”

⁶⁹ The divine missions has become a popular topic in recent literature. For an important study, see Gilles Emery, “Theologia and Dispensatio: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas’s Trinitarian Theology,” *The Thomist* 74, no. 4 (2010): 515–61. See also the first two chapters in Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Another helpful overview is available in chapter 15, “Missions,” from Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

the divine nature [*participat...naturam divinam*], through a certain regeneration or recreation.⁷⁰

Thus, man participates in the divine nature through habitual grace, the divine knowledge through faith, and the divine goodness through charity. The references to a participation in faith and charity, conceptually and terminologically, echo the discussion of the assimilation (*assimilatio*) of the human person to the Son and the Holy Spirit in the question on the divine missions:

The soul is conformed [*confirmatur*] to God through grace. So for this, that some divine person is sent to someone through grace, it is necessary that there be made some assimilation [*assimilatio*] of him to the divine person who is sent through some gift of grace. And because the Holy Spirit is the gift of love, the soul is assimilated [*assimilatur*] to the Holy Spirit through the gift of charity [*per donum caritatis*], so the mission of the Holy Spirit is directed according to the gift of charity. And the Son is the Word, not any word, but the one breathing forth love [*spirans amorem*]. . . . Therefore, the Son is not sent according to any perfection of the intellect, but according to a certain instruction of the intellect [*instructionem intellectus*] by which it breaks forth into an affection of love.⁷¹

The parallels between the two texts are fairly obvious. The text on the essence of grace speaks of a participation in the divine nature, in the divine knowledge, and in the divine love. The text on the divine missions argues that the soul is conformed to God through grace. More specifically, there is an assimilation (*assimilatio*) of the soul to the Holy Spirit through the gift of charity and to the Son through an “instruction of the intellect” breaking forth into an affection of love.⁷²

⁷⁰ See note 26 above for full Latin.

⁷¹ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2: “Anima per gratiam conformatur Deo. Unde ad hoc quod aliqua persona divina mittatur ad aliquem per gratiam, oportet quod fiat assimilatio illius ad divinam personam quae mittitur per aliquod gratiae donum. Et quia spiritus sanctus est amor, per donum caritatis anima spiritui sancto assimilatur, unde secundum donum caritatis attenditur missio spiritus sancti. Filius autem est verbum, non quaecumque, sed spirans amorem. . . . Non igitur secundum quamlibet perfectionem intellectus mittitur filius, sed secundum talem instructionem intellectus, qua prorumpat in affectum amoris.”

⁷² A fuller discussion of the human person’s assimilation to the divine persons requires its own study, especially in light of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological controversies on grace and beatitude. For the moment, however,

The same question also details how the Son and Holy Spirit are sent to the soul in sanctifying grace and insofar as the soul actually knows and loves the divine persons. Thus, Thomas writes that “it belongs to a divine person to be sent according as he exists in a new way in something; and to be given according as he is had by someone. But neither of these exists except according to the grace that makes pleasing [*gratia gratum faciens*].”⁷³ Thus, habitual grace, as the root of the life of grace, is the only way by which a divine person can be possessed by a creature in a new way, apart from God’s common mode of being (through the divine essence, power, and presence).⁷⁴ In the same article, Thomas also remarks on human action:

Above this common mode, there is a special one, which belongs to the rational creature in which God is said to exist, just as the one known is in the one knowing [*cognitum in cognoscente*] and the one loved is in the one loving [*amatum in amante*]. And because, by knowing and by loving, the rational creature by its operation attains to God himself, according to this special mode, God is not only said

one can note that *assimilatio* involves the notion of likeness (*similitudo*). For an analysis of the degrees of likenesses (*similia*), see *ST I*, q. 4, a. 3. Briefly, things are alike (1) according to the same form (*forma*), aspect (*ratio*), and mode (*modus*); (2) according to the same form and aspect but not according to the same mode; or (3) according to the same form but not according to the same aspect and mode. Further, regarding similarity according to likeness of form, this can be either according to the species, genus, or analogy (*analogia*). To speak of a likeness (*similitudo*) between man and God or to speak of becoming like God (*assimilatio*) would seem to fall into this final category: there is an analogical likeness between Creator and creature, not agreeing in genus or species, but still somehow observing some likeness, since, as Thomas states in the body of the article, every agent makes something like itself (“Cum enim omne agens agat sibi simile in quantum est agens, agit autem unumquodque secundum suam formam, necesse est quod in effectu sit similitudo formae agentis”—“For since every agent makes something like itself inasmuch as it is acting, and each thing acts according to its form, it is necessary that the likeness of the form of the agent should be in the effect”). The way in which the human person becomes like God is through his actually knowing and loving the divine persons in their distinction.

⁷³ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 3: “Divinae personae convenit mitti, secundum quod novo modo existit in aliquo; dari autem, secundum quod habetur ab aliquo. Neutrum autem horum est nisi secundum gratiam gratum facientem.”

⁷⁴ See *ST I*, q. 43, a. 3: “Est enim unus communis modus quo Deus est in omnibus rebus per essentiam, potentiam et praesentiam, sicut causa in effectibus participantibus bonitatem ipsius”—“For there is one common way by which God is in all things by his essence, power, and presence, just as the cause is in the effects participating its goodness.”

to be in [*esse in*] the rational creature, but also to dwell in it [*habitare in ea*] just as in his temple.⁷⁵

The implication of this passage is that the divine persons are present to the rational creature insofar as it knows and loves the divine persons in their distinction, through grace.⁷⁶ Again, this passage mirrors the participation of the creature through habitual grace as stated in *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 4: man becomes like God through his ability to know him and to love him.⁷⁷

Thus, Saint. Thomas explains 2 Peter 1:4 in terms of participation in the divine nature, the divine knowledge, and the divine love. These references parallel, terminologically and conceptually, the question on the divine missions.⁷⁸ Participation in the divine nature, through habitual grace, thus makes possible a personal relationship not only with God, as denoting what is common to the divine persons, but with the divine persons

⁷⁵ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 3: “Super istum modum autem communem, est unus specialis, qui convenit creaturae rationali, in qua Deus dicitur esse sicut cognitum in cognoscente et amatum in amante. Et quia, cognoscendo et amando, creatura rationalis sua operatione attingit ad ipsum Deum, secundum istum specialem modum Deus non solum dicitur esse in creatura rationali, sed etiam habitare in ea sicut in templo suo.”

⁷⁶ See *ST* I, q. 43, a. 3: “Similiter illud solum habere dicimur, quo libere possumus uti vel frui. Habere autem potestatem fruendi divina persona, est solum secundum gratiam gratum facientem” (“We are said to have something which we are freely able to use or enjoy. But to have the power of enjoying a divine person is only according to the grace that makes one pleasing”). On the union of the human person with the divine persons, see “How Can a Creature Be Related to a Single Divine Person?” and the surrounding discussion in Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 19–21: “Aquinas has in mind a created effect that has a real relation to a single divine person because it ‘terminates’ to what is proper to that person. This ‘termination’ is something real in the creature; it is not only a manner of speaking” (21).

⁷⁷ In the question on the divine missions, graced knowledge and love are presented as an assimilation to the person of the Son, who proceeds by way of intellect, and to the Holy Spirit, who proceeds by way of love. In the question on the essence of grace, the virtue of charity is presented as participation in the divine love and faith in the divine knowledge. One might well wonder how these two explanations are compatible with one another, since charity would seem to be both an assimilation to the Holy Spirit in himself and a participation in the divine knowledge (which is not proper to the Holy Spirit but common to the three divine persons), while faith would seem to be both an assimilation to the Son in himself and participation in the divine love (which, again, is not proper to the Son but common to the three divine persons).

⁷⁸ Both passages include references to God, grace, knowledge, love, and participation or assimilation.

themselves.⁷⁹ And so, participation through grace, making possible an assimilation and conformation to the divine persons, culminates in the expression of the Trinity in the world, made present through the graced human actions of knowing and loving the divine persons by which man imitates the divine life.

Grace as Repraesentatio and Imitatio: The Image of God

One can profitably extend these reflections—the connection between (1) grace as participation and (2) *assimilatio/conformatio*, and that connection in relation to (3) the divine missions—to the discussion of *repraesentatio/imitatio* on the image of God in man in *ST* I, q. 93, a. 5.⁸⁰ Rather than using the language of *consors* and *participatio* (as in *ST* I-II, q. 110, aa. 3–4) or *assimilatio* and *conformatio* (*ST* I, q. 43, a. 5), Thomas prefers to speak about grace here in terms of *repraesentatio* and *imitatio*.

Saint Thomas does not explicitly reference 2 Peter 1:4 in his discussion of the image of God in question 93. However, several conceptual and terminological similarities connect the verse with the question on the image of God. First, and perhaps most obviously, Saint Thomas explains 2 Peter 1:4 in terms of *similitudo*.⁸¹ The notion of likeness, especially in the

⁷⁹ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 5: “Unde manifestum est quod distinctio divinarum personarum est secundum quod divinae naturae convenit. Unde esse ad imaginem Dei *secundum imitationem divinae naturae*, non excludit hoc quod est esse ad imaginem Dei *secundum repraesentationem trium personarum*; sed magis unum ad alterum sequitur. Sic igitur dicendum est in homine esse imaginem Dei et quantum ad naturam divinam, et quantum ad Trinitatem personarum, nam et in ipso Deo in tribus personis una existit natura”—“Thus, it is clear that the distinction of the divine persons is according as it belongs to the divine nature. So, to be toward the image of God according to the imitation of the divine nature does not exclude that it is also to be toward the image of God according to a representation of the three persons; but, rather, one follows from the other. In this way, therefore, it must be said that the image of God is in man both with respect to the divine nature and with respect to the trinity of persons, for even in God himself one nature exists in three persons.”

⁸⁰ For recent studies on this topic in Aquinas, see: D. Juvenal Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study in the Development Aquinas' Teaching* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990); Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 215–48; Servais Pinckaers, “Ethics and the Image of God,” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Titus (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 130–43; Gilles Emery, *Trinitarian Theology*, 395–402.

⁸¹ See, for example, *ST* I, q. 13, a. 9: “The divine nature is not communicable except

context of becoming like God, brings to mind the question on the image of God in the *Summa*. Second, there is an obvious conceptual path in the *prima pars* from the discussion of assimilation to the divine persons in question 43 to the treatment of the image of God in question 93. In the discussion of the divine missions, Thomas notes how the rational creature is assimilated to the divine persons through the “gift of charity” and the “instruction of the intellect” (q. 43, a. 5, ad 2). In the question on the image of God, Thomas also discusses how man is not only an image of the divine nature but also of the three divine persons: “To be ‘toward’ the image of God according to the imitation of the divine nature does not exclude this, that it is also be ‘toward’ the image of God according to a representation of the three persons.”⁸² So, one can follow a path from *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 4 (on participation in the divine nature, knowledge, and love), to I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2 (on the assimilation to the Holy Spirit and the Son through love and instruction), to I, q. 93, a. 5 (on “whether the image of God is in man by comparison to the divine essence, or to the divine persons, or to one of them”).⁸³ In short, by explaining 2 Peter 1:4 in terms of participation, and by describing participation in terms of the divine knowledge and love, Saint Thomas prompts the reader to recall the divine missions and, consequently, the image of God in man, as it pertains to 2 Peter 1:4.

Third, in the context of discussing the participation of the soul in the divine nature in *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 2, the Common Doctor uses *expressio* as a synonym for *participatio*.⁸⁴ Thus, he writes, “[grace] is nobler than the nature of the soul, inasmuch as it is the expression or participation [*expressio vel participatio*] of the divine goodness.”⁸⁵ The same term *expres-*

according to the participation of a likeness [*secundum similitudinis participationem*]. . . . This name God is in no way communicable according to its whole signification, but according to . . . a certain likeness.” See also *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 4 (note 26 above).

⁸² *ST* I, q. 93, a. 5: “Unde esse ad imaginem Dei secundum imitationem divinae naturae, non excludit hoc quod est esse ad imaginem Dei secundum repraesentationem trium personarum”

⁸³ *ST* I, q. 93, proem.: “Quinto, utrum in homine sit imago Dei per comparisonem ad essentiam, vel ad personas divinas omnes, aut unam earum.”

⁸⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 3, cites 2 Pet 1:4, which, of course, immediately follows q. 110, a. 2.

⁸⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2: “Id enim quod substantialiter est in Deo, accidentaliter fit in anima participante divinam bonitatem, ut de scientia patet. Secundum hoc ergo, quia anima imperfecte participat divinam bonitatem, ipsa participatio divinae bonitatis quae est gratia, imperfectiori modo habet esse in anima quam anima in seipsa subsistat. Est tamen nobilior quam natura animae, inquantum est expressio vel participatio divinae bonitatis, non autem quantum ad modum

sio, not surprisingly, reappears in the discussion on the image of God: "It is clear that likeness regards the meaning of image [*ratione imaginis*], and that image adds something above the notion of likeness, namely, that it is expressed from some other [*ex alio expressum*], for image is said from this, that it is made for the imitation of another."⁸⁶ Finally, Thomas draws a connection between image and representation: "Some representation of species [*repraesentatio speciei*] belongs to the meaning of image."⁸⁷ Thus, Saint Thomas joins *participatio* with *expressio* (I-II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2), and *expressio* with *imitatio* and *imago* (I, q. 93, a. 1), and *imago* with *repraesentatio* (I, q. 93, a. 7). Thomas thus explains the *consors* of 2 Peter 1:4 in terms of *participatio*, *expressio*, and *similitudo*, and he elsewhere discusses these three latter words with reference to *imago*, *repraesentatio*, and *imitatio*. In sum, to understand the fullness of the meaning of *participatio*, *expressio*, and *similitudo*—at least insofar as Saint Thomas applies it to the exegesis of 2 Peter 1:4—one must also grasp the interrelated meanings of *imago*, *repraesentatio*, and *imitatio*.

The terminological similarities between 2 Peter 1:4 and Thomas's question on the essence of grace also manifest a deep conceptual kinship between the notion of what it means to be a "partaker" of the divine nature and what it means to image, represent, express, and imitate the divine nature. A discussion of the image of God runs beyond the scope of this study, but it is sufficient for our purposes to see that Saint Thomas explains 2 Peter 1:4 in terms that link it terminologically and conceptually to the discussion of the image of God in *ST* I, q. 93.

Still, we can at least note how the discussion of the image of God

essendi"—"For that which is in God in a substantial way comes to be in an accidental way in the soul participating in the divine goodness, as is clear regarding knowledge. According to this, therefore, because the soul imperfectly participates the divine goodness, the participation itself of the divine goodness, which is grace, has a more imperfect existence in the soul than the soul subsists in itself. [*Grace*] is nobler than the nature of the soul, inasmuch as it is the expression or participation of the divine goodness, but not with respect to the mode of being."

⁸⁶ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 1: "Sicut Augustinus dicit in libro octoginta trium quaest. ubi est imago, continuo est et similitudo; sed ubi est similitudo, non continuo est imago. Ex quo patet quod similitudo est de ratione imaginis, et quod imago aliquid addit supra rationem similitudinis, scilicet quod sit ex alio expressum, imago enim dicitur ex eo quod agitur ad imitationem alterius"—"As Augustine says in the *Book of 83 Questions*, where there is an image, there is immediately likeness; but where there is likeness, image does not exist immediately. From which it is clear that likeness regards . . ."

⁸⁷ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 7 (and parallel passages): "ad rationem imaginis pertinet aliquis repraesentatio speciei."

highlights the active role of the human person in becoming like God and therefore imitating him. One sees this most obviously in a concluding sentence in article 7: “And therefore the image of the Trinity is observed primarily and principally in the mind in act—as namely, from the knowledge which we have, we form an inner word by thinking, and from this we break forth into love.”⁸⁸ If there is a connection between 2 Peter 1:4 and the *imago Dei*, to be a *consors* or “partaker” of the divine nature is to express, imitate, and represent God, precisely insofar as the graced creature actively knows and loves God, both in what is common to the persons and in their very distinction.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Saint Thomas therefore weaves 2 Peter 1:4 into almost every aspect of his theology of grace. We are made “partakers” of the divine nature through the grace of the Trinity and the salvific and priestly action of Jesus Christ. Through this “partaking” the human person becomes able to actually know and love God, indeed, even the divine persons, and to become like them.

From a systematic perspective, Thomas explains this verse by placing it within a dense constellation of terms that include the richly analogical notions of *participatio*, *assimilatio*, and *similitudo*. These terms open wider vistas onto the divine missions, extending the analysis to *conformatio* vis-à-vis the Trinity, as well as to *imitatio* and *repraesentatio* in relation to the image of God. Besides forging these lexical linkages, which provide opportunity for further study, Saint Thomas also explains the verse from differ-

⁸⁸ *ST* I, q. 93, a. 7: “Et ideo primo et principaliter attenditur imago Trinitatis in mente secundum actus, prout scilicet ex notitia quam habemus, cogitando interiorius verbum formamus, et ex hoc *in amorem prorumpimus*.” The term “*prorumpo*” (a perhaps uncommon term) appears again in *ST* I, q. 43, a. 5 (see note 71 above). In both cases, the discussion is about how the acts of the human person in knowing and loving God mirror the processions of the Word and the Holy Spirit. Even if the word “*imago*” does not appear in the question on the divine missions, the lexical and conceptual similarities between the two questions is striking.

⁸⁹ See, again, *ST* I, q. 93, a. 5 (note 79 above). On *imitatio* in relation to the image of God, see the whole of *ST* I, q. 93, especially a. 4: “Respondeo dicendum quod, cum homo secundum intellectualem naturam ad imaginem Dei esse dicatur, secundum hoc est maxime ad imaginem Dei, secundum quod intellectualis natura Deum maxime imitari potest. *Imitatur autem intellectualis natura maxime Deum quantum ad hoc, quod Deus seipsum intelligit et amat*”—“Since man is said to be toward the image of God according to his intellectual nature, he is above all toward the image of God according as the intellectual nature is most of all able to imitate God. And the intellectual nature most of all imitates God inasmuch as God knows and loves himself.”

ent methodological perspectives: philosophically, he explains it in terms of participation; theologically, he contextualizes the verse in terms of the inner Trinitarian life and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. He also draws on philosophical notions of nature, power, virtue, and action to clarify these theological mysteries. Across his writings, Saint Thomas thus places 2 Peter 1:4 in a network of ideas and methods that explicate its meaning.

From a historical perspective, the Angelic Doctor quotes the verse across his career, in his earliest writings, including the *Scriptum*, and in middle works such as the *Summa contra gentiles*. His use of the text comes to full flower in the *Summa theologiae*, where he interprets the “partaking” of 2 Peter 1:4 in terms of habitual grace and the theological virtues of faith and charity, and even points to its source in the mediating priesthood of Jesus Christ and his sacraments. The scriptural commentaries, in a way, pick up where the *Summa* leaves off, highlighting the interpersonal dimension of the verse, suggesting how our “partaking” of God is accomplished through the mediation of Christ and comes to fruition in our relation with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Finally, Saint Thomas explains our “partaking” of God in terms of participation, which opens a path to understanding the passage in light of the divine missions and image of God. Thus, in the question on the divine missions (*ST I*, q. 43), Thomas uses the language of *conformatio* and *assimilatio* to explain this participation. Then, in the question on the image of God in man (*ST I*, q. 93), even as an image of the Trinity, Thomas adopts the language of *imitatio* and *repraesentatio* to explain our graced participation in God. This knowing and loving of God constitutes the personal relationship between man and God made possible in the life of grace.

Many modern exegeses of 2 Peter 1:4, reading the text *either* as a detrimental Hellenization of Christianity *or* exclusively in covenantal terms, thus present a false dichotomy. In contrast, Saint Thomas unpacks the text to show how the word *consors*, explained in terms of *participatio*, *assimilatio*/*conformatio*, and *repraesentatio*/*imitatio* does not belittle or obscure our personal relationship with God but guarantees and grounds its possibility, bringing it to full expression in terms of our assimilation to and imitative representation of the Trinity itself.⁹⁰ NEM

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