

“When Israel Came Forth from Egypt”: Aquinas on the Gifts of Judgment and Purgatory*

DARIA SPEZZANO

Providence College

Providence, RI

One of my favorite scenes in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is in the beginning of the *Purgatorio*, when Dante and Virgil are standing on the shores of Mount Purgatory after climbing out of the darkness and chaos of hell. They find themselves at daybreak looking across the sea that separates the living from the dead. As the sun rises, Dante sees a ship, swift as a bird, flying toward them across the waters, powered by the wings of a bright angel at the helm. In contrast to the wails and shrieks of the damned, the souls it carries are singing: “In exitu Israel de Aegypto.”¹ They have been judged worthy of

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¹ Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, cantos 1–2. The music of purgatory is primarily liturgical; it takes place on this earth and is therefore time-bound (psalms, hymns, ordinary). See Ronald L. Martinez, “‘L’amoroso canto’: Liturgy and Vernacular Lyric in Dante’s *Purgatorio*,” *Dante Studies* 127 (2009): 93; Kevin Brownlee, “Music and the Act of Song in Dante’s ‘*Purgatorio*’ and ‘*Paradiso*,’” *Bibliotheca Dantesca* 1 (2018): 233–44, repository.upenn.edu/bibdant/vol1/iss1/13. The image of souls carried to purgatory on a ship, besides its interest as a counterpart to Charon’s ferry in the *Inferno*, has theological meaning in Alexander of Hales’s explanation of how souls in purgatory must hope in the meritorious action of others rather than their own. They are like passengers on a ship, who pay the fare (i.e., the debt they owe) but gain no merit (unlike the Captain) (Alexander of Hales, *Quaestiones disputatae “antequam esset frater,”* Biblioteca francescana scholastici medii aevi 20 [Florence: Quaracchi, 1960], 1548).

being purified for eternal life. It is the first of many songs we hear in the joyfully penitential soundtrack of purgatory, as Dante and Virgil climb with those being cleansed up the mountain, getting lighter as they go, until Dante crosses over into the brighter radiance and even sweeter music of paradise.²

Dante's image captures well the essence of the doctrine of purgatory even if he poetically embroiders many of the details. As Pope Benedict XVI puts it more succinctly, with reference to Paul's teaching on salvation through fire in 1 Cor 3:12–15, the suffering of purgatory is a transforming "fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy."³ In his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi*, the Pope writes that purgatory is a state of "blessed pain, in which the holy power of Christ's love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God." The Pope supports the view that purgatory takes place in the experience of divine judgment; for those who are saved, "the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour." It is an existential encounter with the Lord, outside of earthly time, in which "we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of [Christ's] love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy" (§47). The Pope underlines in *Spe Salvi* that, contrary to an atheism that would substitute human for divine justice, there can be no true hope for eternal life without faith that God will ultimately bring about "an 'undoing' of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright," not only for ourselves but for all of human history (§42–43). In Pope Benedict's view, the image of our final judgment by Christ, enfolding within it complete purification from evil, is "the decisive image of hope." (§44).

For many Catholics today, though, teaching on the coming reality of Christ's divine judgment, and the transformative purgatorial suffering that it will require in the best case for most of us, tends to fall on resistant ears.⁴

² Dante, *Paradiso* 10.146–48.

³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, vol. 9 of *Dogmatic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 230–31. See 1 Cor 3:10–15: "10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, 11 for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, 13 the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire [itself] will test the quality of each one's work. 14 If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. 15 But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire" (New American Bible, Revised Edition).

⁴ For a recent theological treatment taking a neutral to somewhat sympathetic view

It seems outmoded at best, and hard to reconcile with who Jesus is, in the popular imagination. One firm tenet of popular Christology, after all, is that Jesus does not judge, and he certainly does not want us to suffer. It is not uncommon to hear those who identify as Catholic claim that Christ's Gospel teachings of inclusivity and tolerance support and promote the freedom to embrace whatever moral decision each individual feels to be good for themselves, no matter how contrary it may be to the Church's teaching. And where the infallibility of individual choice is celebrated, there can of course be no requirement for conformation to a higher standard of justice, and so no need for ultimate purification in accord with that standard. Although the Church is judgmental, the narrative goes, Jesus is not. In fact, the kind of judgmental and punitive attitude displayed by the institutional Church is exactly what Jesus condemns. In other words: I am happy for Jesus to be my friend, but not so delighted for him to be my judge.

But according to Thomas Aquinas, I should be. I will argue that Thomas offers us helpful insight as Christians increasingly allergic to the notion of Christ's eschatological judgment and the consequent necessity for most of us of final purification from evil. Like Pope Benedict, Thomas understands Christ's judgment and the pains of purgatory as bringing about "a reparation that sets things aright." This healing reparation—as always in Thomas's soteriology—involves the interpersonal cooperation of divine and human freedom in a way that reveals the immensity of the divine goodness. In the wider context of Thomas's teaching on Christ as judge, mediator, and savior, we can understand more deeply how the doctrines of judgment and purgatory, perhaps difficult for modern Christians to engage, might be presented as compelling revelations of God's generosity. While these teachings certainly encourage holy fear, they also show positively why we need Christ's wise judgment and therefore his gracious gift of purgatory; they reveal the

of the modern "disappearance" of purgatory and its associated practices, see John Thiel, "Time, Judgment, and Competitive Spirituality: A Reading of the Development of Purgatory," *Theological Studies* 68 (2008): 741–85. Thiel contrasts an older more "competitive spirituality" focused on individual salvation with a post-Vatican II more inclusive theology emphasizing the wide availability of grace. An advantage of this newer "noncompetitive" Catholic faith is, for instance, that, "in this theological perspective, salvation is as much a corporate as it is an individual event, and the time of history is as important for negotiating the salvation of the human community as the supernatural time of purgatory has been for negotiating God's judgment on individual believers in light of the ascetical standard" (785). See also Timothy Dillon, "From Painful Prison to Hopeful Purification: Changing Images of Purgatory in U.S. Catholic Periodicals, 1909–1960" (PhD diss., University of Dayton, 2013).

Father's love, and so give the most profound reasons—to those who really will be the friends of Jesus—for gratitude and joyful hope.

The Roots of Resistance

I will start by attempting to diagnose the reason for modern resistance to the Church's teaching on judgment and purgatory after death more clearly. These two "last things" have been linked to each other, at least in some form, since the early Church, especially in the West.⁵ A full-blown doctrine of purgatory was elaborated in the medieval Latin Church, becoming a point of contention most famously in the Protestant Reformation.⁶ For Reformers like John Calvin, purgatory must be rejected because of the sole sufficiency of Christ's mediation; purgatory implies human cooperation in paying the debt of sin, but, he argues, "Christ's blood is the sole purification, offering and satisfaction for the sins of the faithful."⁷ The reason for modern resistance to the ideas of both judgment and purgatory is, I think, something like the opposite of Calvin's. That is, concomitant with a diminished sense of the gravity of sin, it stems from an underestimation of Christ's role in salvation and an overestimation of our own. And this mistake, I think, derives even more fundamentally from a flawed Christology, that is, from a deeper level of discomfort with the fundamental Christian claim: we need a mediator; we cannot save ourselves. Christians today can be tempted to reject this need for mediation in favor of a more personalized and self-determined plan of apotheosis, in which Jesus plays a significant but supporting role. New Age

⁵ A brief but helpful review of patristic treatments of purgatory in East and West is found in Robert Ombres, O.P., *The Theology of Purgatory* (Butler, WI: Clergy Book Service, 1978).

⁶ For a discussion of the thirteenth-century development of Latin ideas about purgatory, including its relation to heretics who rejected the idea of purgatory and to Greek views, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 237–88.

⁷ For the Reformers, the rejection of purgatory stems from the belief that no human cooperation is possible when Christ has satisfied. John Calvin writes: "We must cry aloud that purgatory is a dangerous illusion of Satan, which very greatly insults God's mercy, brings the cross of Christ to nothing, breaks in pieces and destroys our faith. For what is their purgatory except a punishment which the souls of the dead offer in satisfaction for their sins? So that if one takes away the fantasy of satisfaction, their purgatory falls to the ground. Now if, from what we have argued previously, it is more than clear that Christ's blood is the sole purification, offering and satisfaction for the sins of the faithful, what more remains except that purgatory is a pure and horrible blasphemy against Jesus Christ?" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1541 French ed., trans. Elsie Anne McKee [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009], 314).

spirituality, widely influential on contemporary American religious culture, often promotes the necessity for “unlocking our hidden (divine) potential,” proposing a distorted version of *theosis* that is attained by our own effort of “recognizing and accepting that we are divine.”⁸ Sacraments, the Church, the tradition of moral teaching, the notion that one must ultimately be conformed to an external standard of justice, may therefore become somewhat optional, even for Catholics. As a corollary, any need for penitential purification if one departs from these objective demands also becomes inconsequential. The revealed truth about our dependence on the one divine and human mediator who “will come to judge the living and the dead” can be perilously neglected under the influence of a culture seeking affirmation of more comfortable truth claims that allow the pursuit of autonomous paths to salvation.

This trend in popular Christology no doubt reflects a certain Pelagian tendency that is congenial to the self-constructing ideals of postmodern culture. But as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s recent letter *Placuit Deo* points out, this tendency to neo-Pelagianism goes hand in hand with a neo-gnostic impulse that seeks a merely interior salvation “closed off in . . . subjectivism,” disregarding the role of the body and the Incarnation itself.⁹ Quoting Pope Francis in *Lumen Fidei*, the document notes that, for this new form of Gnosticism, “salvation consists in elevating oneself with the intellect beyond ‘the flesh of Jesus towards the mysteries of the unknown divinity.’”¹⁰ Contemporary reductionist tendencies to think of salvation as self-realization and a disembodied fusion with the divine underlie a rejection of the sacramental economy, the mediation of the Church, and most fundamentally the gift of the Incarnation itself.¹¹

The neo-gnostic trend identified by *Placuit Deo* in particular finds an unfortunate ally, and possibly a source of influence, in some developments in contemporary academic theology. I am reminded of a quote from Joseph Ratzinger’s essay, “Revelation and Tradition,” written in 1966. Ratzinger describes the “urgent task” of the magisterium to defend the “*sarx* of history”—that is, the truth of the revelation of the Incarnation

⁸ See Pontifical Council for Culture and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, declaration *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the “New Age”* (2003), §3.5.

⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Placuit Deo*, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation (2018), §3.

¹⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Placuit Deo*, §3; see Pope Francis, encyclical letter *Lumen Fidei* (2013), §47.

¹¹ CDF, *Placuit Deo*, §§12–14.

in Scripture—against “the caprice of a *gnosis* which perpetually seeks to establish its own autonomy.”¹² A similar concern emerges in *Dominus Iesus*, published in 2000 under Ratzinger as head of the CDF. The document was written to counter “relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or in principle),” based on “pre-suppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature, which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth.” The central concern here is with Christological approaches that imply or explicitly posit mediations of salvation alternative to the mystery of the Word made flesh and his Church, undermining their “absolute truth and salvific universality.”¹³

One well-known example is the later Christology of Fr. Jacques Dupuis, which led to his notification by the CDF at the time of *Dominus Iesus*. Dupuis proposed that the divine Logos might bestow truth and grace through other religious traditions in ways unmediated by his humanity, even after the Incarnation.¹⁴ This, as Fr. Thomas Joseph White notes, leaves “room for knowledge of truths about God the Logos that comes not through the humanity of Christ, but by means of other mediators,” especially in non-Christian religions.¹⁵ Such a separation between the Word and Jesus, or between the salvific activity of the Word’s two natures, reflects a problematic account of the hypostatic union, as well as of the revealed truth that the Word incarnate is the sole and universal mediator of salvation for all humanity.¹⁶

Like Ratzinger, Fr. Thomas Weinandy, in an essay published a few years before *Dominus Iesus*, characterizes some contemporary Christologies as having gnostic tendencies. Discussing the work of John Hick, among others, he notes Hick’s rejection of traditional teaching on the uniqueness of the

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, “Revelation and Tradition,” in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 49. Cf., Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (1965), §10.

¹³ CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (2000), §4.

¹⁴ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), e.g., 298–99, 321. See CDF of the Faith, “Notification on the Book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997), by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J.,” January 24, 2001.

¹⁵ Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 105.

¹⁶ Fr. Dupuis did however genuinely seek to avoid error, and in earlier works criticized pluralistic theologies that undermine the uniqueness of Christ as Savior. For a recent article in defense of Dupuis, see Mark Yenson, “Jacques Dupuis and Chalcedon,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019): 271–92.

Incarnation in favor of the view that Jesus is one religious teacher among others, albeit one with an “immensely powerful God-consciousness.”¹⁷ This, he argues, leads to the idea that “salvation consists in perceiving and living the philosophical truth hidden within . . . religious metaphor and myth.” Jesus reveals and teaches the truth of this transcendent reality as an exemplar, perhaps in an exceptional manner, but differing from other holy figures like Buddha or Moses only in degree, not in kind.¹⁸ Such a focus on the union of Jesus’s human consciousness with God in a manner similar to, though greater than, that of other religious figures comes at the expense of an ontology of union in the hypostasis of the Word;¹⁹ the gnostic notion that Christ’s salvific work as human is primarily to share this God-consciousness with others naturally follows. As a corollary, without a Chalcedonian ontology in which Christ’s humanity is the instrument of his divinity, it is also unclear that, as human, he can exercise divine judgment or purgatory.

A more recent widespread shift towards contextual theologies in the academy often involves a critical reevaluation of traditional Christology and eschatology to support “Christologies from below” that locate redemption in the liberating transformation of social structures by a Christ identified with the oppressed. Some influential feminist theologies, for instance, propose a Spirit/Sophia Christology, in which Jesus is again primarily a messenger of divine wisdom, while others reject traditional eschatological teaching, especially about the last judgment, purgatory, and hell, as violent and exclusive.²⁰ According to a recent *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, Christianity’s traditional emphasis on the “moral imperatives to be included among the saved,” with “clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders,” constitutes a questionably “exclusivistic, often violent,” vision of justice. Instead, feminist

¹⁷ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1993), 26.

¹⁸ Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., “Gnosticism and Contemporary Soteriology,” in *Jesus: Essays in Christology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2014), 260; this essay was originally published as “Gnosticism and Contemporary Soteriology: Some Reflections,” *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995): 546–54.

¹⁹ For this reason, White characterizes the Christology of both Dupuis and Hick as tending toward Nestorianism (*Incarnate Lord*, 103–7).

²⁰ For a helpful overview of feminist reconstructions of Christology, see Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27–55. Seminal sources (influenced by liberation theology) include Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet* (London: SCM, 1995). For an extended critique of traditional eschatology, see Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Approach to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon, 1996).

“visions of judgement are more universalistic and focus on the here and now, on the worth and value of all peoples of the earth. The emphasis is not on a judgment of destruction, but on a new creation.”²¹ The rejection of traditional teaching on Christ’s final judgment and its consequences as violent is intrinsically related to discomfort with orthodox teaching on the Incarnation, owing to a perceived connection between patriarchal and abusive treatments of women, on the one hand, and the teaching that Christ was a male human being, on the other. Natalie Watson notes that, for this reason, “very few feminist theologians stick to traditional orthodox Chalcedonian Christology.”²²

These contemporary theologians share a laudable concern to understand God’s plan of justice and salvation. Most do not reject the idea that some mediator is necessary, at least as revealer and teacher; but, for the sake of an inclusive pluralism, the thought of many tends toward the notion that this mediator need not be the Word made flesh, who saves and purifies us, body and soul. Once such a soteriology filters out into classrooms, parishes, and popular media, it easily allies with the idea that one may pick and choose among ways of accessing the divine, encouraging, perhaps in the name of tolerance and inclusivity, Ratzinger’s “caprice of a *gnosis* which seeks to establish its own autonomy.” Resistance to the idea of Christ’s mediation, his judgment, and any need of his purification after death for sins committed in bodily life, might therefore be called a gnostic move, a search for transcendence that bypasses the Incarnation. Like the docetists of St. Irenaeus’s time or the Cathars of St. Thomas’s (who denied purgatory as well as hell),²³ Catholics influenced by this gnostic tendency today may both disregard such embodied means to salvation as Church, sacraments, and good moral action and discount Christ’s unique role in his humanity as mediator, savior, judge, and final purifier—perhaps not in principle, but too often *de facto*.

The credal affirmation that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead is not going away, however, nor, I think, is the Church’s teaching on purgatory. And so a renewed catechesis on these doctrines seems needed today. I will begin by considering Thomas’s teaching on Christ’s judgment and then look at how that relates to his understanding of purgatory. The

²¹ Tina Pippin, “Judgment,” in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 158.

²² Natalie K. Watson, *Feminist Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 36. Watson likewise observes that “feminist theologians have so far not taken much interest in the study of the possibility of a future world, but rather in the healing and transformation/liberation of the present world” (49).

²³ Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, 280.

kind of judge Christ is, in other words, shapes the meaning of purgatory, the kind of purification that Christ wills and effects in us. I will conclude that Thomas offers at least three “anti-gnostic” insights that could be helpful in catechesis today, all rooted in his thoroughly Chalcedonian Christology and hylomorphic anthropology, insights that might perhaps even make the doctrine of Christ as mediator, judge, and purifier more compelling for contemporary Catholics. The first insight concerns why Christ must be our judge and purifier in his *humanity*, the second has to do with why we *need* judgment and purgatory in the first place, and the third concerns the *nature* of purgatory and of the judgment, when he will “bring to light what is hidden in darkness” and “each one will receive his praise from God” (1 Cor 4:5). To give a framework for these insights, I will first outline Thomas’s teaching on Christ as judge.

Aquinas on Christ as Judge

Thomas discusses Christ’s judicial power in numerous texts. I will draw from both biblical commentaries and systematic works, but will begin with *Summa theologiae* (*ST*) III, q. 59, because the structural placement of this question itself gives insight into the meaning for him of Christ’s role as judge.²⁴ This question is the final one in Thomas’s consideration of the mysteries of Christ’s life—those things that “were done and suffered” by the incarnate Word for human salvation.²⁵ Christ’s judgment, then, is the culmination of his salvific activity in his human nature. In the unjust condemnation of his Passion, Christ justly merited exaltation to resurrection and the power of judgment over all.²⁶ Christ’s judicial power in his humanity is due first and foremost, however, to the grace of union with the Word, and consequently his fullness of habitual grace as Head, which gives him “the prerogative to bring souls to beatitude.”²⁷ Thomas’s account of Christ as judge is therefore anchored in the ontological foundation he has constructed earlier

²⁴ For a thorough treatment of Thomas on Christ’s judicial power in the Scripture commentaries, see Piotr Roszak, “The Judge of the Living and of the Dead: Aquinas on Christ’s Power to Judge in his Biblical Commentaries,” in *Towards a Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, S.A., 2018), 99–117.

²⁵ *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] III, q. 1, prol. All translations of *ST* are based on vols. 4–12 in the Leonine edition. All translations from Latin are my own unless otherwise noted.

²⁶ Question 59 concludes a subsection of questions on Christ’s exaltation through his resurrection, ascension, and seating at the Father’s right hand in glory, mysteries which are fitting because they increase faith, hope and love (*ST* III, q. 53, aa. 1 and 3).

²⁷ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2, ad 2; a. 3.

in the *tertia pars* for the inseparability of Christ's two natures after the union, and the instrumentality of Christ's human nature in his theandric activity.²⁸ Christ is our judge both as Son of God and Son of Man.

Christ's Judgment as Son of God

In his divine person as "Wisdom Begotten and Truth proceeding from the Father," the Son of God is himself the "law of truth or wisdom," on which "the very rule of judgment is based."²⁹ Drawing from Augustine (on the Word's role in creation), Thomas explains that the Son is the *ars Patris*, through whom the Father does all things. So judiciary power is properly appropriated to him because, "inasmuch as the Son is his art, so [the Father] judges all things through the Son, as the Son is his wisdom and truth."³⁰ Thomas's implied parallel between the Son as *ars Patris* in creation and judgment underlines the role of the Word as the Alpha and Omega, from the beginning through to the end of the divine economy.³¹ In his commentary on John, Thomas writes that, in the beginning, "all things were made" through the Word (John 1:3), the "eternally conceived wisdom" who is "the art full of the living patterns [rationes] of all things."³² Later in the commentary, he says that the Son of God, as the *ars Patris* and exemplar of creation, is also the fitting exemplar of perfect virtue for our justification.³³ The principle at work is that, just as the Father works through the Word to bring things into being in creation, so through the Word he brings all things to their end through governance (for rational creatures, through the moral life) and final judgment.³⁴ The Word fully expresses and manifests the Father's wisdom and

²⁸ *ST* III, q. 19, a. 1; q. 50, aa. 1–2.

²⁹ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 1.

³⁰ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 1, ad 2; Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.2.11.

³¹ Roszak also alludes to this parallel between creation and judgment, with reference to Thomas's commentary on Colossians, where Thomas explains that Christ is the exemplar of creation, "for in him all things were created" (Col 1:16), and to *ST* III, q. 10, a. 2 ("To Christ and to his dignity all things to some extent belong, inasmuch as all things are subject to him. Moreover, he has been appointed judge of all by God, 'because he is the Son of Man'"). Roszak shows that, for Thomas, all things have been subjected to the Son as the principle of creation, and therefore Christ, knowing all things in the Word, is judge of all: "The judge should know the subject of his judgment and Christ has precisely such a competence because the creation of the world happened 'through' Him" ("Judge of the Living and of the Dead," 106).

³² *Super Ioan* 1, lec. 2, no. 77. All citations of the commentary on John are based on *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 6th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1972).

³³ *Super Ioan* 13, lec. 3, no. 1781.

³⁴ See *In IV sent.*, d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 1: "Just as operation pertains to the principle by

truth in creation, in re-creation by grace, and at the end of time, ushers in the new creation, completing the wise ordering of God's plan of salvation in a final rectification of all things.³⁵

Thomas again quotes Augustine to explain how the Father's Word will manifest all truth in judging without error: "He who alone is Truth itself pass[es] judgment on us, when we cling to him."³⁶ Those who "cling to him"—as well as those who do not—can count on his complete knowledge and just judgment of their deepest intentions, thoughts, and actions. Thomas writes about the perfection of this future divine judgment in his commentary on 1 Cor 4:5:

The Lord coming to judgment "will illumine what is concealed in darkness," i.e., will make clear and manifest those things done secretly in darkness. "And he will make manifest the counsels of hearts," i.e., all the secrets of the heart. . . . This means both good things, and evil things that have not been covered over by penitence. Third, he mentions the fruit, which the good will carry back from the divine judgment, saying, "and then each one," namely, the good, "shall receive his praise from God." This will be true praise, because God can neither deceive nor be deceived.³⁷

For Thomas, like Augustine, judgment by the one who is himself the very *ratio* of wisdom and truth ensures that judgment will be without error and absolutely just, because the Lord alone knows the secrets of hearts and the inner truth of each one's conscience.

which things are produced in being, so also judgment pertains to the terminus by which things are brought to their end." In this quaestiuncula, Thomas argues that God's universal and particular judgments correspond to his creation and governance, respectively. Every human being is both a member of the human race and an individual person, and so receives an individual or particular judgment for his own works, corresponding to governance, and also the universal judgment, corresponding to the first production of things in creation, when "a final completion will be given to the world." (Latin trans. from Parma ed. at corpusthomisticum.org)

³⁵ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., comments on Thomas's early treatment of the last judgment in *In IV sent.*, d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, that "his vision of the last judgment expresses . . . the reaffirmation of the lordship of God as creator and savior over the whole universe" (*Le Christ en ses mystères: La vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 2 [Paris: Desclée, 1999], 703; trans. mine).

³⁶ *ST III*, q. 59, a. 1, corp. and ad 2; Augustine *De vera religione* 31.

³⁷ *Super I Cor 4*, lect. 1, no. 196. All citations from Thomas's commentaries on the Pauline letters are based on: *S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vols. 1–2, ed. R. Cai, 8th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1953).

Christ's Judgment as Son of Man

In the Incarnation, the Word shares his judiciary power with the humanity assumed. Indeed, Thomas emphasizes in *ST* III, q. 59 a. 2 that it is especially through the instrumentality of his humanity that this power of the Word is exercised. Quoting John 5:27 ("He has given him power to do judgment, because he is the Son of Man"), Thomas explains that Christ as human is judge because he is Head of the Church, with jurisdiction over those subject to him.³⁸ His human soul is eminently capable of judgment, which "belongs to truth as its standard," and therefore to "the man imbued with truth and as it were one with truth," because, "beyond all creatures, Christ's soul was more closely united with truth and more full of truth, according to John 1:14: 'We saw him . . . full of grace and truth.'"³⁹ Because of the "overflow of the Godhead in Christ's soul," so that he knows all things possible to a created intellect in the Word in every time and place, "it belongs to him also to know and to judge the secrets of hearts."⁴⁰

In the background here is the work Thomas has done earlier in the *tertia pars* on Christ's threefold grace, where John 1:14–16 was a key scriptural authority. Christ's capital grace is the causative overflow to others of his fullness of habitual grace ("of his fullness we have all received"), which is itself the overflow in his soul of the grace of union with the Word, making him "full of grace and truth."⁴¹ Christ's human power to judge flows from his perfection of habitual grace as Head, which gives his humanity the capacity to act as the instrument of his divinity and makes him the "mediator of God and men" (1 Tim 2:5).⁴² In article 3, Thomas explicitly states that Christ's judicial power belongs to Christ as human because of this threefold grace, and also because of the merits he won by suffering unjustly to justify us.⁴³ Christ's habitual grace fills his soul not only with wisdom but also with perfect charity; Thomas has said earlier in the *Summa* that right judgment according to the divine rules belongs to the gift of wisdom flowing from charity.⁴⁴ Christ's preeminent wisdom as judge is founded in the fullness of both charity and truth, giving him the prerogative to "judge and set in order

³⁸ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2; a. 3, ad 2.

³⁹ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2, ad 1; a. 3, ad 3.

⁴⁰ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2, ad 3; q. 10, a. 2.

⁴¹ *ST* III, q. 8, aa. 1 and 5.

⁴² *ST* III, q. 7, a. 1.

⁴³ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 3, corp. and replies to the objections.

⁴⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 45. See *ST* II-II, q. 60, a. 1, ad 2: "The spiritual man, from the habit of charity, has an inclination to judge rightly all things according to the divine rules, in accord with which he pronounces judgment through the gift of wisdom, just as the just man pronounces judgment according to the rules of law from the virtue of prudence."

all things,” including especially the final disposition of souls, “according to the divine rule” of justice.⁴⁵ The one who judges us is the same one who was sent, filled with grace and charity, to suffer for our salvation.

Thomas’s further explanations in article 1 for why it is so fitting that Christ as human has judiciary power build on this idea that he is a judge who is also savior of body and soul. They also tell us what kind of judge he is. God judges us through Christ in his human nature “because of his likeness [convenientiam] and kinship” with us, “so that his judgment might be sweeter [suaviter]” to us. Here Thomas quotes Heb 4:15: “We do not have a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted like us in all things, without sin. Let us go then with confidence to the throne of his grace.” The throne of judgment, belonging to Christ by reason of his royal dignity as the Son of God, is the throne of grace administered by Christ as the Son of Man. Hebrews 4:15 appears often where Thomas discusses Christ’s judgment.⁴⁶ In his commentary on Hebrews, he says this verse shows Christ’s “mercy and tenderness . . . that care for our misery,” so no one will believe that “he can do only what is demanded by his justice.”⁴⁷ Christ as our judge is also our priest, who intercedes for us and offers himself in sacrifice for us, for the remission of our sins and the grace of our salvation.⁴⁸ Christ has not just the power, but “also the eagerness and readiness to come to our aid, because he knows, by experience, our misery, which as God, he knew from eternity by simple knowledge.”⁴⁹ Christ as human has experientially tasted our suffering, and this makes him a compassionate judge. In the commentary on John, Thomas explains that the Father has given the power to judge to

⁴⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 1. Thomas is not always clear on whether he is talking about Christ as judge in the particular or the last judgment. However, on account of the union, Christ always judges by the power of God working through his human nature, because, although “God alone can bestow beatitude upon souls by a participation with himself,” it is “Christ’s prerogative [in his humanity] to bring them to beatitude,” as Head and author of their salvation (*ST* III, q. 59, a. 2, ad 2). After the Incarnation, all of God’s judgments about human affairs, and manifestly those concerning human ordering to beatitude as the end of salvation, are subject to Christ’s judgment in his human nature, working as a conjoined instrument of the Word (a. 4, corp. and ad 3). This must therefore include both the particular and last judgments.

⁴⁶ E.g., *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3 (reportatio Leodegarii Bissuntini); *Super Heb* 4, lec. 2, no. 232; *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 5, no. 789.

⁴⁷ *Super Heb* 4, lec. 3, no. 235.

⁴⁸ See *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2, a. 3.

⁴⁹ *Super Heb* 4, lec. 3, no. 235. Roszak notes with reference to the Hebrews commentary and to *Super I Cor* 2, lec. 3, that “the emphasis that the Son of Man will be the one to judge carries a message of hope for man and also the conviction that the judge will be the *optimus iudex*” (“Judge of the Living and of the Dead,” 109).

the Son of Man because this helps to take away the terror of falling “into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).⁵⁰

Thomas draws on Augustine for two other reasons that Christ is fittingly judge as human; these have to do with his human body and ours. First, because “at the last judgment . . . ‘there will be a resurrection of dead bodies, which God will raise up through the Son of Man,’” just as souls are raised up through Christ as the Son of God.⁵¹ In question 56, on Christ’s resurrection, Thomas distinguishes between the primary cause of resurrection—the divine justice—and the secondary instrumental cause, Christ’s resurrection in his own human body, which communicates the life-giving power of the Word.⁵² Christ’s resurrection is the efficient cause of the resurrection of both the good and wicked; all will have a resurrected body like him, and even the wicked will receive incorruptibility. However, his resurrection is the exemplar cause of the resurrection only of the good, who will also be conformed to his divine sonship in glory.⁵³

It was just for Christ to be exalted in resurrection because he humbled himself in death.⁵⁴ But why is Christ’s resurrection, as the cause of ours, an instrument of divine justice? The answer seems to be that our resurrection must take place for all of the effects of judgment to be complete. Although all are individually judged and rewarded or punished in their souls immediately after death, it is only in the final resurrection that all will receive the public and complete fulfillment of reward or punishment due to their merits and demerits in the body as well as in the soul.⁵⁵ Just as the saints will enjoy the vision of God more when the delight of beatitude overflows into their

⁵⁰ *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 5, no. 789.

⁵¹ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2. Thomas quotes Augustine’s *Tractate on John* 19. For a very helpful discussion of Augustine’s theology of resurrection, which was influential for the Middle Ages, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 94–103.

⁵² *ST* III, q. 53, a. 1.

⁵³ *ST* III, q. 56, a. 1, ad 3. Even the wicked will receive back bodies that are repaired, renewed, and incorruptible; the principle is that what belongs to nature will be restored, but what belongs to grace is given only to the elect; (*Super I Cor* 15, lec. 8, no. 1010). The bodies of the damned will be incorruptible but not impassible, in the sense that, although they will not have natural passibility, they will suffer by a kind of spiritual reception of corporeal fire; (*Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] IV, ch. 89). The separated souls of the damned (and those in purgatory) before the resurrection suffer corporeal fire by the dispensation of divine justice in that they suffer “by a certain bondage” to something lower than themselves (SCG IV, ch. 90; *Quaestio disputata de anima*, q. 20, a. 2; cf. *In IV sent.*, d. 44, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 1; see below).

⁵⁴ *ST* III, q. 53, a. 1.

⁵⁵ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 5; *Compendium theologiae* [CT] I, chs. 243–44.

resurrected bodies, those in hell will suffer in their bodies what they already suffer in their souls.⁵⁶ Thomas argues in his commentary on 1 Cor 15 that, in addition to the necessity of the reunion of soul and body for the metaphysical completion of human nature, divine justice demands that each will receive back his own identical body, so that he will be rewarded or punished in the same body in which he had carried out good or evil deeds.⁵⁷ Thomas explicitly rejects as a “fable” the gnostic position held by heirs of Platonism from Origen to the Cathars and condemned at Lateran IV (1215), that at the resurrection the soul would be rid of the material body.⁵⁸ The resurrection of bodies is caused by the judge because in the resurrection the full effects of judgment are fulfilled in one’s own body.

Thomas also insists with Augustine that Christ will appear as judge in his human body at the last judgment because both good and wicked must *see* their judge.⁵⁹ He explains in his commentary on John that the wicked cannot

⁵⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 4 and ad 5; *CT* I, ch. 153. The position that the pure separated soul immediately experiences the beatific vision was affirmed in 1336 by Pope Benedict XII in *Benedictus Deus* (on the beatific vision controversy of the 1330s, see Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 279–89).

⁵⁷ *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 9, no. 1013. What Thomas means by the “same” body, given his doctrine of the unicity of form, is famously debated. Thomas’s position on unicity of substantial form was thought by some to imply that, after death, Christ’s body, separated from his soul, was no longer identical. Thomas argues that its identity lies in the continuing union of the body with the divine *suppositum* (e.g., *ST* III, q. 50, a. 5). His critics were unconvinced, and in 1286 the theory that the soul is the body’s only substantial form was condemned as heretical by John Peckham, the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury, as the Franciscans had consistently opposed this position; see Antonia Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 175–82, for an interesting account of debate over the theory of unicity of substantial form in the centuries following Aquinas. Fitzpatrick concludes that, for Aquinas, the body’s formal continuity from life across death to the resurrected body lies in its dimensive quantity (159–65); see *SCG* IV, ch. 81, and *CT* I, ch. 154. In *CT* Thomas argues that divine power alone can bring about the reunion of the soul with the same numerical body. The idea that the accident of dimensive quantity can remain after the substance of the body is corrupted seems parallel to Thomas’s understanding of transubstantiation.

⁵⁸ E.g., *CT* I, ch. 153, and *SCG* IV, ch. 84. See Fitzpatrick, *Aquinas on Bodily Identity*, 88.

⁵⁹ *ST* III, q. 59, a. 2; Thomas draws here from Augustine, Sermon 127, no. 10. This teaching is also found in *De Trinitate* 1.13. The particular judgment of the separated soul is “invisible,” but it is suitable that the last judgment, about the completion of reward or punishment in the body, be carried on visibly (*SCG* IV, ch. 96). Therefore, although, as argued above (note 44), Christ does judge in his human nature (as instrument of his divinity) in the invisible particular judgment, he does not *appear* in that nature as judge until the visible general resurrection at the last judgment. In *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 5, nos. 789–91, Thomas clarifies Augustine’s teaching that the Word, one with the Father in

see Christ in his divinity, because this vision is beatitude. Only “the good will see Christ in his divinity and in his humanity.”⁶⁰ For the same reason, “the Father will not appear at the judgment,” since this would be beatitude for the wicked. “Therefore, only the Son will appear, who alone has an assumed nature,” judging with the authority of the Father.⁶¹ The sight of his glorified human body, displaying the signs of his Passion, will be a reward to his friends, the righteous, but a reproach and torment to those who hate him.⁶² The elect will see that they have been saved through his sufferings and rejoice, but “sinners, who have scorned so great a benefit, will be filled with dismay”⁶³ at the sight. Likewise, Thomas explains, the Gospel of Matthew says that “all the tribes of the earth will mourn” (Matt 24:30) at his coming, “seeing Christ with such power whom they have despised, and such wisdom, whom they did not obey, and the saints with such great brilliance.”⁶⁴ The wicked are dismayed by being unavoidably confronted with the bodily evidence of the salvation they have rejected, a truth that stares them in the face, as it were, and declares their culpability. For Thomas, there is no bypassing embodied human nature in judgment, whether that of the incarnate Word or our own. The sight of Christ in his glorified humanity will elicit a final crisis of recognition by those who have been judged as admitted to beatitude, or excluded from it, with their own cooperation.⁶⁵

Purgatory, Final Conformation to Christ

In between the particular and last judgments, divine justice mercifully works its last and most perfecting gift in saved sinners not yet ready for beatitude. Thomas’s teaching on purgatory, drawing much from Augustine and Gregory the Great,⁶⁶ was also shaped by the polemical context of debate with Eastern

his divinity, raises up souls, while the resurrection of bodies is accomplished through the humanity of the Son. Christ’s divinity is first cause of both resurrections, while his humanity is meritorious cause of both. But what Augustine means, Thomas explains, is that the Word’s divinity is the exemplary cause of the spiritual resurrection, while his humanity is our exemplar for the corporal resurrection, in which our bodies will be conformed to the glory of his own.

⁶⁰ *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 5, no. 789. Parallels are found in *In IV sent.*, d. 48, q. 1, a. 3, and *Super II Cor* 5, lec. 2, no. 172. Thomas again quotes here from Augustine, Sermon 127.

⁶¹ *Super Ioan* 5, lec. 4, no. 763.

⁶² *In IV sent.*, q. 48, a. 2, ad 2 and ad 4.

⁶³ *CT I*, ch. 241.

⁶⁴ *Super Matt* 24, lec. 3, no. 1963.

⁶⁵ See *ST III* q. 59, a. 4.

⁶⁶ Le Goff argues that the noun *purgatorium* signifying purgatory as a distinct place in the afterlife does not appear until the late twelfth century, first in a sermon by Peter

Christians.⁶⁷ By the 1230s, disagreements about the possibility and nature of purification after death had surfaced between Latins and Greeks, with debate about whether such purification is possible, whether it would take place prior to the last judgment, and especially whether it involves suffering by corporeal fire, as 1 Cor 3 seems to reveal.⁶⁸ Thomas's writings on purgatory address these questions, but he also consistently places them into the soteriological context of divine justice and mercy for the weak but chosen soul who is a member of Christ's body, the Church. For Thomas, purgatory is personal but it is also ecclesial; it is painful but liberating; most importantly, it is perfecting, totally conforming the soul to Christ in preparation for glory and final resurrection.

Among his writings on purgatory, Thomas's commentary on 1 Cor 3 especially brings out its Christological basis, and also underlines how purgatory manifests Christ's judgment. As the apostle says in 1 Cor 3:8 and 11, everyone "will receive his own reward, according to his own labor," but each builds on the foundation "which is Christ Jesus" (3:11). Christ is the bedrock, Thomas says, on which the Apostles are built in faith and charity as the foundation of the Church.⁶⁹ Those who have faith formed by charity are founded on Christ because he dwells in them, and so they can build a superstructure of spiritual works or good teaching that lasts for eternal life (works of "gold, silver and precious stones" in 3: 12). Works directed to temporal

Comestor (*PL*, 171:739–44), although the notion of postmortem purgatorial fire was widespread in the West from the patristic period (*Birth of Purgatory*, 155–58). He also notes a shift in art and architecture in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, from a focus on the Apocalypse to the representation of the last judgment (23–34). Augustine, whom Le Goff discusses as "the true father of Purgatory" (61–85), writes about purgatorial punishments and purgatorial fire in a number of places, such as *Enchiridion* 69.110 and *De civitate Dei* 21; by his own prayers for his mother Monica, he also witnesses to faith in the efficacy of prayers for the dead (*Confessiones* 9.13). Gregory the Great writes in some detail about purgatorial fire and suffrages for the dead in book 4 of the *Dialogues*, a work quoted often by Thomas, although Gregory at times situates the place of purgation on this earth (88–95).

⁶⁷ Two of Thomas's works address this debate directly although briefly: *De rationibus fidei contra saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad cantorem Antiochae* 9 and *Contra errores Graecorum* 40. Thomas also notes in several other places that his position differs from "the error of the Greeks," who "deny purgatory and say that before the resurrection souls neither ascend into heaven nor descend into hell" (*SCG* IV, ch. 91; see *Super II Cor* 5, lec. 2, no. 167, and *Super Ioan* 14, lec. 1, no. 1861).

⁶⁸ See Robert Ombres, O.P., "Latins and Greeks in Debate over Purgatory, 1230–1439," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35, no. 1 (1984): 1–14, at 2. Pope Innocent IV attempted to reconcile these differences in 1254, but the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 was ultimately unsuccessful in bringing about a reunion (5–7).

⁶⁹ *Sup I Cor* 3, lec. 2, no. 152.

concerns (those of “wood, hay, and stubble”) will be burned away by fire, leaving the good standing, as long as temporal concerns have not turned one completely away from God, becoming an end in themselves (3:15).⁷⁰ Only workers building on Christ, and so belonging to his Church, those in whom Christ dwells, can be purified in this way. The “wood, hay, and stubble” are their venial sins, arising from attachments to temporal things that impeded the exercise of charity; any remaining temporal debt of punishment owed by those who have died in the state of grace for forgiven mortal sins is also paid in purgatory.⁷¹

Referring to 1 Cor 3:13, Thomas explains that this revelation and testing of everyone’s works by fire will be manifested on the “day of the Lord.” This “day,” he says, is the Lord’s judgment, “when his will is accomplished in regard to men, who are rewarded or punished according to his justice.”⁷² Purgatory follows from judgment and so is revelatory of God’s will and ours. It will reveal Christ’s justice and mercy as judge, accomplishing his will for those whose own will has been proven by his judgment to be fundamentally good. The “day of the Lord” refers to all times of judgment, before and after death, when the good are “proven” by the fire of affliction. The day of the Lord in our particular judgment is the day of our death, and this judgment “will be revealed” in “the fire of purgatory, by which the elect will be cleansed, if any need cleansing,”⁷³ so that, with their imperfections burned away, they will “be saved, but as by fire” (3:15). Purgatory, as the effect of individual judgment, is profoundly personal, showing the particularity of divine providence in disposing reward and punishment and assigning to each the punishment they need to be healed of every secret fault that has been revealed.⁷⁴ Purgatory is

⁷⁰ *Sup I Cor 3*, lec. 2 nos. 155–58. An alternative interpretation that Thomas offers is that the superstructure refers to the work of teaching.

⁷¹ Also see *In IV sent.*, d. 21, a. 1, q. 2; *CT I*, ch. 181. Reference to 1 Cor 3 was standard in discussions of purgatory, following Augustine, who relates it to purgatorial punishment. In his *Sententiae IV*, d. 21, ch. 2–5 (117–20), Peter Lombard quotes Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos 37* and *Enchiridion 68*. However, Thomas’s early treatment of the text in *In IV sent.* does not, as in his later commentary on 1 Corinthians, relate the fire of purgatory to Christ’s judgment, nor to Christ as the foundation of spiritual building, connections made in light of his exegesis of the passage in its larger context.

⁷² Aquinas, *Sup I Cor 3*, lec. 2 nos. 162–63.

⁷³ Aquinas, *Sup I Cor 3*, lec. 2 no. 164.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., *CT I*, ch. 172. Fr. Ombres observes that “it is a unique, achieved human life under grace, and in the originating depth of human freedom, that is involved in purgation, and therefore the penetration of sin into that life cannot simply be a matter of generalization” (“The Doctrine of Purgatory According to St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Downside Review* 99, no. 337 [1981]: 279–87, at 282).

also ecclesial, finally freeing a member of Christ's body in whom he dwells, who is still bound by the effects of sin. Thomas often calls on the Church's practice of prayer for the dead as authority for this doctrine.

His teaching on suffrages follows from this ecclesial understanding that those in purgatory are members of Christ's body, united to the living by the bond of charity. Because the will is immutable in the separated soul, the wills of those in purgatory are unchangeably oriented toward God by the charity they possessed at death, and so, unlike the reprobate, they undergo their punishment willingly.⁷⁵ The will of a soul in purgatory is not paralyzed, but its action is voluntary only in the sense that it patiently endures unavoidable punishment for "a good that cannot be gained otherwise"; that is, it cannot actively undertake it to gain a good (as is possible in this life).⁷⁶ Living friends, though, with whom souls are "united in will by the union of love," can actively offer prayers and satisfaction for them,⁷⁷ and this accords with the order of justice, because a friend is, in a sense, another self.⁷⁸ The suffrages of the living do not change the judgment of the dead as to their final state, but can diminish the punishment the elect must suffer in their purification.⁷⁹ Thomas remarks in his commentary on the Creed that, just as Christ descended into the underworld to rescue his friends in bondage, so we should rescue our friends in purgatory with Masses, prayers, and almsgiving.⁸⁰ Christ's priestly mediation is continued for souls in purgatory

⁷⁵ For the soul separated from the body, the will is fixed, because, although it retains the powers of understanding and will, it can receive no new knowledge through the senses that could result in its mutability (*De veritate*, q. 24, aa. 9–10; *CT* I, chs. 174–75 and 182; *SCG* IV, chs. 92–95). See the helpful study by Lawrence Lew, O.P., *Why Can We Not Repent after We Die?*, STL Tesina (Washington, DC: Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, 2017).

⁷⁶ *In IV sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4; *CT* I, ch. 181–2; *SCG* IV, ch. 94.

⁷⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 7. In *SCG* III, ch. 158, no. 7, Thomas draws from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.3.1112b 28 to explain that "the things that we can accomplish through the efforts of our friends we seem to do ourselves," for friendship makes two persons one in love, and especially in the love of charity. And so, just as a person can make satisfaction to God by himself, so also can he do it through another person, especially in case of necessity."

⁷⁸ *CT* I, ch. 226: "Since . . . what we do or suffer through our friends, we ourselves are considered in some fashion to do or suffer (inasmuch as love is a mutual force that in a way makes two lovers one), the order of justice is not violated if a person is set free by the satisfaction his friend offers for him."

⁷⁹ *In IV sent.*, d. 45, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 2. Thomas agrees with Peter Lombard that a person for whom more prayers and satisfaction are offered by others will escape purgatory more quickly (*In IV sent.*, d. 45, q. 2, a. 4; *Quaest. quodl.* II, q. 7, a. 2).

⁸⁰ *Collationes credo in Deum* 5 (Leonine ed. as found in Nicholas Ayo, *The*

in a special way through the instrumentality of the Church especially in the Eucharist, in which Christ's own sacrifice is offered on their behalf for the forgiveness of sins. As Christ's sacrifice was satisfactory for his members because of the charity with which he offered it, so the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity and ecclesial unity, containing the sacrificed Christ himself, is preeminently satisfactory in being offered for the dead who are joined to him by the union of love, "according to the measure of their devotion."⁸¹ Indeed, Thomas argues in the *Contra errores Graecorum* that to deny the existence of purgatory is to lessen the Eucharist's power, "for on those in purgatory a special remedy is conferred by this sacrament."⁸²

The purpose of suffering in purgatory is to restore the soul to the order of justice, in which "it is due to God that that there should be fulfilled in creatures what his will and wisdom require, and what manifests his goodness."⁸³ To manifest God's goodness fully, the soul must be free of all debt of punishment and all impediments to the exercise of charity, making it fit and able to receive the light of glory and enjoy beatitude. Although the punishment of deprivation of the divine vision is not due *per se* for a venial sin, delay in attaining it can happen *per accidens* because any debt of punishment prevents one from participating in the highest happiness of the vision.⁸⁴ Purgatory is therefore painful but liberating; because souls have charity, the suffering they endure is cleansing.⁸⁵

Thomas argues that this suffering involves both the pain of loss or delay and, more problematically, the pain of sense. He holds that, in both ways, even the least amount of suffering in purgatory is greater than any suffering on earth, because of the great pain of longing for delayed beatitude and the sensitivity of the separated soul as the form of the body.⁸⁶ The pain of loss is

Sermon-Conferences of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostle's Creed [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988], 83).

⁸¹ *ST* III, q. 79, a. 5, a. 7. Cf. *In IV sent.*, d. 45, q. 2, a. 3, qa. 1; *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2, a. 3.

⁸² *Contra errores Graecorum* II, ch. 40.

⁸³ *ST* I, q. 21, a. 1; *CT* I, ch. 181.

⁸⁴ *Quaest. quodl.* II, q. 7, a. 2, ad 1.

⁸⁵ *CT* I, ch. 182.

⁸⁶ *In IV sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 3. The duration of this punishment depends on how firmly fixed in its temporal attachments the affections are, since "that which clings more persistently is more slowly cleansed." The severity of punishment on the other hand depends on the quantity of fault, so that "one may be delayed longer who is afflicted less, and the converse" (a. 3, qa. 3 ad 1). It is hard to know how to think of temporal duration after death, but purification must be a process in some sense, in which there is successive perfection, moving from one state to another, if it is to really take place as transformation of a human soul that involves correction and healing.

easier to understand: these souls love God and know that they suffer through their own fault what separates them from him, what they could in fact have avoided by enough love and penance in this life. Their pain is not exactly the same therefore as the pain of the damned who have lost God forever. The pain of loss for souls in purgatory is the pain of sorrow for sin and longing in hope for the delayed but certain future good of glory—neither of which the damned have. This pain is arguably even greater for those in purgatory than for the damned, because it would be all the more intense in proportion to their charity, desire, and nearness to their goal.

Thomas agrees with the mainstream Latin tradition before him (contrary to the Greeks) that those in purgatory (and hell) also suffer the pain of sense in corporeal, not metaphorical, fire.⁸⁷ This is a position hard to explain for separated souls, but Thomas considers this doctrine to be demanded by Scripture (e.g., Matt 25:41) and Tradition. His solution is to propose a meaning of *passio* analogous to corporeal suffering, that of “being acted upon by being impeded.” The soul suffers from corporeal fire in the sense of being “obstructed in its proper activity or kept from something which belongs to it,”⁸⁸ corporeal fire touching it “by contact of a power not its own, but that it has as an instrument of divine justice.”⁸⁹ This does not exactly capture the idea of burning, but is more like a burden or restriction. One may not find

⁸⁷ That is, he does not use the metaphorical imagery of mystics like Catherine of Genoa who describe purgatorial fire as the fire of God's love, although his teaching implies that it is the effect of that love. Thomas touches on the question of punishment by corporeal fire in quite a few places, e.g.: *De ver.*, q. 26, a. 1; *In IV sent.*, d. 44, q. 3, a. 3, qa. 3 (cf. a. 2, qa. 1–3; d. 47, q. 2, a. 1, qa. 2 and 3); *Quaest. quodl.* II, q. 7; III, q. 10, a. 1; VIII, q. 8; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, ad 20; *SCG* IV, ch. 90; *ST* I, q. 64, a. 4, ad 1; *Quaest. disp. de an.*, q. 6, ad 7; *CT* I, ch. 180. This makes it surprising that Walter de la Mare falsely accused Thomas of denying it (Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 281; on the history of thought about corporeal fire, see esp. ch. 8). A related question is the location of purgatory: some thought the entrance to purgatory was located in Sicily, some in Ireland, and some held it to be wherever one's sins had taken place (117–208). Thomas thinks it likely that the fire of purgatory is the same as that of hell and that the two are connected in some way, though he points out that Scripture says nothing specific about purgatory's location and that no effective arguments can be offered about it (*In IV sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 2).

⁸⁸ *De ver.*, q. 26, a. 1: “That a spiritual substance united to a body should be confined and hampered and, as it were, fettered by it, is above nature. The corporeal fire in question, then, acting as the instrument of divine justice, accomplishes something above the power of nature, that is, to confine or fetter the soul; but the union itself in the manner mentioned is natural. The soul accordingly suffers from corporeal fire . . . in the sense in which we say that anything suffers which is obstructed in its proper activity or kept from something which belongs to it.”

⁸⁹ *Quaest. quodl.* II, q. 7, a. 1.

this explanation completely satisfying, but it does perhaps show Thomas's commitment to the consequences of natural hylomorphism for the separated soul, as the substantial form of a body.⁹⁰ In the *Summa contra gentiles*, Thomas explains that, although it is natural to the human soul to be united to its own body, it is contrary to it to be in bondage to a body to which it is not naturally united. And because sin arose from disordered attachment in the body to inferior bodily things, it is fitting that punishment involve subjection to them.⁹¹

It is worth briefly noting here a contrast with the difficulties raised for a genuine hylomorphic anthropology by some recent theologians who argue against the possibility of an interim state for separated souls between death and final resurrection, a position presented in Karl Rahner's seminal statement of the question.⁹² The International Theological Commission's 1992 letter *Some Current Questions in Eschatology* notes that, before a number of prominent theologians mounted their denial in the twentieth century, there had been only a few historical exceptions to the Christian tradition's conception that there is such an intermediate state, among them the second-century Gnostics.⁹³ Among Catholic theologians, the ITC was especially concerned with those who, like Rahner, proposed a theory of an atemporal "resurrection in death,"⁹⁴ rejecting the idea of a separated soul after death that maintains

⁹⁰ There is a debate in recent scholarship over the possibility of genuine identity of the separated soul and the integrated human person. See the article by Philip-Neri Reese, O.P., in this issue of *Nova et Vetera* (English). Thomas himself says that the soul (alone) is not the person (*ST* I, q. 75, a. 4; *Super I Cor* 15, lec. 2: "Anima autem cum sit pars corporis hominis, non est totus homo, et anima mea non est ego"). Therefore some argue that the punishments a soul endures in purgatory do not belong to the person (e.g., David B. Hershenov and Rose Koch-Hershenov, "Personal Identity and Purgatory," *Religious Studies* 42, no. 4 [2006]: 439–51; Patrick Toner, "St. Thomas Aquinas on Punishing Souls," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 71, no. 2 [2012]: 103–16). Others argue that continuance of the substantial form of the soul is enough for continuing personal identity (e.g., Eleanore Stump, *Aquinas* [London: Routledge, 2003], 51–54). Fitzpatrick proposes a "partial continuity" of the person, receiving reward or punishment that will increase when the body returns. This partial continuity/identity results in the "peculiar kind of intellectual life" without sense experience or phantasms experienced by the separated soul that is "less concrete than a dream" (*Aquinas on Bodily Identity*, 154–55; cf. *ST* I, q. 89, a. 5, a. 6, and q. 77, a. 8).

⁹¹ *SCG* IV, ch. 90.

⁹² Karl Rahner, "The Intermediate State," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, *Jesus, Man, and the Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 114–24.

⁹³ International Theological Commission (ITC), *Some Current Questions in Eschatology* (1992), §4.2–3.

⁹⁴ ITC, *Current Questions in Eschatology*, §4.3 and §8.1. See Rahner, "Intermediate

the identity of the person through to the deferred final resurrection in the same body that died. Instead, the soul's new and immediately resurrected body would be entirely different from the corpse in the grave.⁹⁵ Ratzinger argues that the thesis of resurrection in death "dematerializes the resurrection" and places the fulfillment of history outside the plan of salvation.⁹⁶ It does away with the problem of how purification relates to the body, and the body to personal identity, by getting rid of the body altogether. It is in effect a kind of neo-Gnosticism. As Ratzinger and the ITC demonstrate, rejection of the intermediate state departs from Christian anthropology and the *lex orandi* of prayers for the dead, confuses the doctrine of purgatory, and disconnects the resurrection of believers from Christ's return in glory.

How does the suffering of purgatory purify the soul? For Thomas, punishment of the soul separated from its body heals its history of disordered attachments in that body, preparing it to be a principle of glorified life in the resurrection. By subjection or restriction (in some sense) by something corporeal, medicinal correction is applied by a kind of divine homeopathy to free the soul from the burden of those attachments, cleansing, disciplining, and rightly ordering it, so it can re-animate its body more perfectly and exercise its love entirely toward God. Purgatorial punishment is corrective because it elicits the fervor of charity in the soul. Inordinate attachment to temporal things has diminished this fervor, hampering its affections and impeding the exercise of habitual love of God.⁹⁷ Fervent acts of charity counteract this attachment because they entail a virtual displeasure with anything that would hinder union with God.⁹⁸ Patiently bearing punishment or suffering for God's sake, in purgatory or on earth, is an act of fervent charity and penance that especially works to remove the impediment of inordinate attachment to temporal things, allowing the soul to act with the obedience it truly wants to offer, once it is set free.⁹⁹ We can infer that, in

State," 115, 120. See also Andrew Hofer, "Balthasar's Eschatology on the Intermediate State: The Question of Knowability," *Logos* 12, no. 3 (2009): 148–72. Hofer notes Balthasar's agreement with Rahner on the coincidence of the particular and general judgments and the "super-temporality" of the resurrection (157–59); he also notes the internal contradictions of Balthasar's own complex thought on the intermediate state (165–66).

⁹⁵ ITC, *Current Questions in Eschatology*, §2.1 and §5.4.

⁹⁶ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 267 (also see 104–12; 241–60), and White's discussion of Rahner's theory of resurrection in death and rejection of the intermediate state (*Incar-nate Lord*, 444–45; also 448–49).

⁹⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 88, a. 1; II-II, q. 24, a. 10; III, q. 87, a. 1.

⁹⁸ *ST* III, q. 87, a. 1; a. 2, ad 3; a. 3, ad 3; q. 79, a. 4 (in reception of the Eucharist).

⁹⁹ *ST* III, q. 86, a. 4, ad 2; q. 87, a. 1, a. 2, ad 3.

these souls with charity, the gifts of the Holy Spirit would also be operating, especially perhaps the gifts of filial fear, piety, and fortitude.¹⁰⁰ These gifts assist the exercise of temperance and hope, justice, and fortitude and bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit such as patience and long-suffering.¹⁰¹ The soul in purgatory, helped by the gifts to gladly cooperate with the divine will, although it cannot undertake satisfactory acts to merit any diminishment of its punishment, can, by its patient and loving suffering, be freed from attachment to sin and repay its debt, obtaining the forgiveness it has always desired.¹⁰² Unlike some of his contemporaries, Thomas thinks that both the punishment and the guilt of venial sins can be forgiven in purgatory by “an act of love of God contrary to venial sins committed in this life.”¹⁰³ This could happen, for instance, for a man who has committed only a venial sin, who falls asleep without an act of contrition, because he is thinking instead about how “a triangle has three angles equal to two right angles, and in this thought he falls asleep and dies.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps this gives us a hint as to what Thomas did to get to sleep at night.

As Fr. Robert Ombres notes, Thomas’s teaching on purgatory shows a certain “humanness and generosity,” seen in his insistence that these punishments are not inflicted by demons, but by divine justice alone.¹⁰⁵ The punishments of purgatory manifest God’s merciful goodness by returning the soul to the order of justice and so removing the obstacle to receiving the light of glory and sharing the splendor of the Word. Purgatorial suffering makes the soul in whom the Trinity already dwells capable of receiving this light and directing its powers to God with full force, completing its deifying perfection to the divine image in act, and so conforming it totally to Christ as an adopted child of God, ready to receive his inheritance. This suffering

¹⁰⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 19 (fear); q. 121 (piety); q. 139 (fortitude).

¹⁰¹ *ST* II-II, q. 139, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁰² In other words, in purgatory, the soul cannot by its own acts merit diminution of the debt, but must pay all that it owes. In this life, acts of charity can gain remission of the debt of punishment for venial sins by way of merit (*ST* III, q. 87, a. 1). However, because the will is immutable after death, no merit is then possible (*De malo*, q. 7, a. 11: “Because there is no condition of meriting after this life ends, the movement of love in persons in purgatory indeed takes away the impediment of venial sin but does not merit the discharge or diminution of punishment, as the movement of love in this life would”; cf. *In IV sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 1, ad 4).

¹⁰³ *De mal.*, q. 7, a. 11, corp. and ad 7; *In IV sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1. Thomas disagrees with the common opinion that all guilt of venial sins would be forgiven in death by the grace of final perseverance.

¹⁰⁴ *In IV sent.*, d. 21, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ombres, “Doctrine of Purgatory,” 281.

therefore prepares the soul to animate its glorified body in the resurrection. Purgatory, as the manifestation of Christ's particular judgment, is the last step before that final completion of his work as mediator in saved sinners, begun in them by grace. The same Christ who is our mediator, as infallible judge and merciful high priest, is the exemplar to whom the suffering of purgatory finally conforms us in body and soul so that we can attain the vision and enjoyment, in him and with him, of the Father.

Insights for a Renewed Catechesis

Christ as Judge Is Mediator of Our Salvation in His Body, the Church

There are at least three ways in which Thomas's account of purgatory might aid a renewed teaching on Christ's judgment that could be helpful in a renewed catechesis, countering some of the neo-gnostic and neo-Pelagian tendencies in the contemporary Church. First, Thomas's explanation of why Christ must be our judge in his humanity not only is thoroughly Chalcedonian, but therefore, I think, offers a helpful clarification that the primary purpose of this judgment is not merely punitive but primarily salvific, and is in fact a gift of the Father's love. Question 59's placement at the end of the discussion of the mysteries of Christ's life confirms that, for Thomas, Christ's judgment in his human nature brings to completion the saving purpose of the Incarnation: to mediate between, and so unite, fallen humans and God. It is no coincidence that question 59 on Christ's judicial power is structurally parallel to the last question on the Incarnation itself—question 26 in *ST* III, on Christ as our mediator. Question 26 is the last on the consequences of the union, and completes a section on Christ's relationship as human with God the Father: his subjection to the Father, his prayer and sacrifice as priest, his sonship and predestination. All these make Christ our principle, exemplar, and mediator, through whom alone we are united to the Father. His judgment and purification of souls, conforming them fully to himself, completes the work of mediation that he begins in each individual soul in baptism, when he begins to conform them to his sonship by grace. And, as we have seen, because Christ is judge not only as God but in his humanity, he is a just and compassionate judge who has himself given us everything we need for salvation.¹⁰⁶ In the *Compendium theologiae*,

¹⁰⁶ Thomas quotes a homily by Gregory the Great on the ascension (Homily 29 on the Gospels), to argue that Christ in his humanity, seated at the right hand of the Father, is both our judge and our helper: "It is the judge's place to sit, while to stand is the place of the combatant or helper. Consequently, Stephen in his toil of combat saw Him standing whom he had as his helper. But Mark describes him as seated after the ascension

Thomas notes that, in Christ's Passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, he acquired for us the goods of salvation, while in his judgment, he distributes those goods to us: "Therefore, Christ, in the human nature in which he has accomplished the mysteries of human salvation, is fittingly appointed to be judge over the men he has saved."¹⁰⁷ We can be judged as righteous only at the last because he has given us a share in his own justice at first and pleads for us to the end. Without Christ's mediation and final judgment, in other words, we would have no access to the Father.

We Should Approach Divine Judgment with Holy Fear

But why do we actually need to be judged and purified in the first place? Although the primary purpose of judgment is salvific rather than punitive, secondarily of course, it *is* punitive for those who will have effectively rejected God's offer of salvation. It goes without saying, perhaps, that Thomas, like all his contemporaries, had a deeper sense than many Catholics today not only of human sinfulness and unworthiness to stand righteously before God, but also of the generosity of divine condescension in making it possible for any human person to do so. In his sermons on the Apostles' Creed given during Lent near the end of his life, Thomas underlines the salutary fear that should prepare us for the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead: first, because of Christ's wisdom by which he will know every thought, as well as the infallible witnesses of our own consciences which will be revealed; second, because he is all-powerful to carry out his judgments; third, because, while this life is the time for mercy, then his justice will be unbending; and finally, because of the "anger of the judge" toward the unjust. The wicked will see him as "wrathful and fearful," while to the just he will appear as "sweet, delightful and kind."¹⁰⁸ Commenting on the final article of the Creed—"I believe in eternal life"—Thomas describes the eternal blessings of the just and punishments of the wicked, remarking that this article is placed last because in that way it might always be more firmly impressed in the memory; one should frequently bring it back to mind in order to be spurred on to good

because, after the glory of his ascension, he will at the end be seen as judge" (*ST* III, q. 58, a. 1, ad 3). Matthew Levering comments that, "through his paschal mystery, the incarnate Son ascends to the right hand of the Father in order to exercise, in the flesh, the royal and priestly work of ruling and judging all creation, that is, of bringing the Church, as 'the body of Christ' (1 Cor 12:27), to share in the Father's bliss through the Holy Spirit" (*Jesus and the Demise of Death: Resurrection, Afterlife, and the Fate of the Christian* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012], 51–52).

¹⁰⁷ *CTI*, ch. 241.

¹⁰⁸ *Coll. credo in Deum* 10 (p. 108).

works and to draw back from evil ones.¹⁰⁹ Thomas, living in the century that produced the *Dies irae*, is not at all troubled, as some modern theologians might be, that fear of damnation and desire for beatitude are defective or excessively self-serving motives for good behavior; indeed, in his view, servile fear of punishment, while imperfect, can be praiseworthy insofar as it disposes one for penance that turns one back to God.¹¹⁰

The idea that Christ's mercy is exercised for us in this life and his unbending justice in the next does not contradict the idea that he is a compassionate judge. Thomas says that God's mercy manifests God's goodness in that he bestows perfections to expel the defects that make one miserable.¹¹¹ In this life, God shows mercy by offering through Christ the transforming help of grace, with which one must cooperate meritoriously in order to reach the end of beatitude; in the next life, he also mercifully mitigates the punishment justly imposed on sinners in purgatory and even on the reprobate due to their demerits.¹¹² But, after death, as we have seen, the will in the separated soul is immutable; one can no longer repent of mortal sin or perform acts with moral value that change one's judgment or merit the end of beatitude, because these must be done in the body. Standing before God in individual judgment, the time for conversion and meriting has come to an end.¹¹³ All

¹⁰⁹ *Coll. credo in Deum* 15 (p. 156).

¹¹⁰ *ST* III, q. 85, aa. 5–6.

¹¹¹ *ST* I, q. 21, a. 3.

¹¹² *ST* I, q. 21, a. 4, ad 1. Roszak argues that Thomas's "fundamental conviction" is that "the main purpose of judging is the good." With reference to *Super Matt* 25, lec. 2 ("grace is a weight that inclines the soul"), he notes that, "theologically, giving an account of one's life on Judgment Day concerns the manner in which man used God's grace" ("Judge of the Living and of the Dead," 113, 114).

¹¹³ As noted above, after death, the will is immutable. Therefore, although one in purgatory who is saved (whose will is fixed on God) can cooperate with purification from venial sins, saving repentance for mortal sin is no longer possible. The reprobate have in their life themselves fixed their end in sin, inclining their will to the evil end in a way that can no longer be changed after death (indeed, the wicked still desire it, while hating the punishments it incurs): *ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 3, ad 1; III, q. 13, a. 4; *CT* I, ch. 175; *SCG* IV, ch. 93. It is precisely because "judgment cannot be passed perfectly upon any changeable subject before its consummation" that judgment must take place after death, for "many actions appear to be profitable, which in their effects prove to be hurtful. And in the same way perfect judgment cannot be passed upon any man before the close of his life, since he can be changed in many respects from good to evil, or conversely, or from good to better, or from evil to worse. Hence the Apostle says (Heb. 9:27): 'It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the Judgment'" (*ST* III q. 59, a. 5). See Lew, *Why Can We Not Repent after We Die?*, 56–77. The idea of saving repentance after death is often part of a theory of universalism; however, this idea proposes a neo-Gnostic account of salvation outside of the body, as White, drawing on Aquinas,

that is left is the revelation of the truth. Judgment, as an act of justice, denotes “a right decision about what is just,” founded on a correct discernment of the truth.¹¹⁴ Christ judges the dead with a simple unwavering discernment of the truth of how each has responded to his mercy, and a compassionate remission of some of the punishment due. This judgment is profoundly personal. Those whom he judges worthy of entrance to purgatory will praise him for his justice and mercy, for in spite of all their failings, they have come there in a cooperation made possible by his gifts. Their liberation is certain; like Israel, they have “come forth from Egypt,” chosen from the beginning “to be holy and without blemish before him” (Eph 1:4). To our generation, sometimes presumptuous about salvation,¹¹⁵ Thomas’s teaching on the humble fear of divine judgment and the necessity of timely and grateful cooperation with God’s grace is, I think, a salutary reminder of God’s transcendence and merciful condescension in bringing anyone to the gift of eternal life.

Eschatological Judgment Is Adequation to the Truth

Finally, Thomas’s teaching gives helpful insight into the nature of Christ’s judgment, that is, as final and perfect adequation to the truth. In this life, he says—commenting on 1 Cor 4:3, “I do not judge myself”—we should not judge rashly, because we can hide our sins and motives even from ourselves,¹¹⁶ but in our particular judgment, God will bring to light all that has been mystifying, entangled, and obscure.¹¹⁷ Here there will be no fifty shades of grey. Christ will judge and reward by the rule or *ratio* of his own perfect truth exactly how much we are conformed to him, that is, how willingly our lives have been ordered by divine wisdom, and therefore lived in accord with the

has argued against Balthasar (*Incarnate Lord*, 426–28). White suggests the possibility rather of a grace offered *in* death to all (413–14).

¹¹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 60, a. 1; q. 58, a. 4, ad 1.

¹¹⁵ The most recent and radical theological proposal for universalism is David Bentley Hart’s *That ALL Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell & Universal Salvation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019). However, universal salvation without strenuous objective moral or religious demands is often popularly assumed in a culture shaped by what sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton Christian have termed “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005]).

¹¹⁶ *Super I Cor* 4, lec. 1, nos. 192, 195.

¹¹⁷ In the particular judgment, while the separated soul knows only through divinely infused species that give it a confused or indeterminate knowledge of singulars in general, it does know the singulars that pertain to itself, “to which they are determined by former knowledge in this life, or by some affection, or by natural aptitude, or by the disposition of the Divine order” (*ST* I, q. 89, a. 4; cf. *Quaest. disp. de an.*, q. 20, a. 10). The soul can thus retain the memory of the acts on which it is judged.

objective order of divine justice, in which “it is due to God that that there should be fulfilled in creatures what his will and wisdom require, and what manifests his goodness.”¹¹⁸ The order of justice is founded on God’s causal knowledge of things, which establishes the truth of reality; our attempted self-construction of any opposing reality is a futile attempt to live autonomously outside of that order and can end only in self-destruction. In the end, we will be conformed to truth whether we like it or not. As fearful as this sounds, it should also be deeply consoling for those who will have really sought to love and obey God in spite of every weakness and failure. Christ’s judgment is a just reckoning of the whole truth of the moral condition they have forged by their own cooperation with grace—however fumbling—or their persistent rejection of it, to the end.¹¹⁹ Our particular judgment and subsequent purification is the uniquely personal fulfillment of God’s particular plan of providence for us. Our truth will be made known with perfect clarity; if we have been conformed to justice by being conformed to Christ in faith and charity, we will be judged with “the judgment of reward and approval”¹²⁰ and, passing to beatitude through Christ the Door of Truth, will manifest and rejoice in the truth of God’s goodness.¹²¹

Thomas emphasizes the revelatory nature of the last judgment, when “every eye will see” Christ the Word in his glorified humanity, and the truth of each life with all its circumstances and consequences, including all the effects our life has had on others through time, will be made known to all. In effect, public revelation begun in Scripture will be fulfilled at the last judgment.¹²² In his commentary on Matt 25, Thomas writes that those whose lives are manifestly good or wicked are not judged then because the

¹¹⁸ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1.

¹¹⁹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 209.

¹²⁰ *Super Ioan* 3, lec. 3, no. 485. The judgment of each after death will involve “separation and examination” (*Super Ioan* 5, lec. 4, no. 776). Each one of us, as Paul says, will “stand before the tribunal” of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), and “give an account of himself before God” (Rom 14:12).

¹²¹ *Super Ioan* 10, lec. 1, no. 1370: Christ says, “I am the door” (John 10:7), because as God, he is the truth: “No one can enter the door, i.e., to beatitude, except by the truth, because beatitude is nothing else than joy in the truth.”

¹²² Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) teaches that “we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (§4). At the last judgment, “since there are some other things pertaining to a man which go on through the whole course of time, and which are not foreign to the divine judgment, all these things must be brought to judgment at the end of time. For although in regard to such things a man neither merits nor demerits, still in a measure they accompany his reward or punishment. Consequently all these things must be weighed in the final judgment” (*ST III*, q. 59 a. 5, ad 3). Then, “each one’s

truth about them is already evident. Only those with a mixture of good and evil—presumably most of us—will be separated like sheep and goats in a full public accounting, on the basis of our own history of free assent to grace.¹²³ Thomas underscores too the ecclesial and corporate nature of this judgment: the saints who have been most detached from earthly things will judge alongside Christ by “cooperating in the task of revealing to each individual the cause of the salvation or damnation of himself and others.” This dignity will belong especially to the Apostles, “who have left all to follow Christ” (and so perhaps, also to Dominicans). Detached from earthly things by voluntary poverty, they are unswayed by them; conformed to truth, they can judge with truth.¹²⁴ Perhaps one could say that this full and final revelation, the consummation of *sacra doctrina* giving complete understanding of God’s plan of providence for the whole human race, not only completes the revelation of Scripture and magnifies God’s goodness in answer to the mystery of evil, but also justly satisfies the natural desire for truth that underlies the gnostic impulse, even for the wicked who will not have supernatural knowledge of God in the Beatific Vision.

Conclusion: *Te Deum Laudamus*

Thomas’s insights about Christ as mediator and judge and his teaching on purgatory offer helpful points for a renewed teaching in response to a postmodern tendency to neo-Gnosticism and the neo-Pelagianism that often accompanies it. Thomas also responds to contemporary concerns by offering a way of arguing, in principle, that to posit the need for mediators of salvation besides the Word made flesh simply underestimates the universal extent of God’s wisdom, justice, and love in Christ. Christ is the Head of all men and women, in body and soul, and his power to give them eternal life in the resurrection is in contact with all times and places.¹²⁵ There can

salvation or damnation will be made clear to him” by divine power (*Super Rom* 2, lec. 3, no. 222).

¹²³ *Super Matt* 25, lec. 3, no. 2096.

¹²⁴ *CTI*, 245. Cf. *Super Matt* 19, lec. 1, nos. 1611–19.

¹²⁵ *ST* III, q. 8, aa. 2–3; q. 56, a. 1, ad 3. Thomas argues that the offer of salvation is extended to all, for “God wills all to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4) antecedently, though consequently he wills that sins be justly punished. See *Super I Tim* 2, lec. 1, no. 62. See also *SCG* III, ch.159, no. 2, *ST* I-II, q. 89, a. 6, and Thomas’s commentary on John 6:44 (“No one can come to me unless the Father draw him”): “God, in so far as it depends on him, extends his hand to every one, to draw every one; and what is more, he not only draws those who receive him by the hand, but even converts those who are turned away from him. . . . Therefore, since God is ready to give grace to all, and draw them to himself, it is

be no other mediator and judge but the one who is Truth itself, and who therefore takes into account all the circumstances of each life—religious, personal, and cultural. And, if Truth discerns that the soul, in spite of all its frailty, has in the end still clung to God, it will be, like Dante at the end of the *Purgatorio*, “remade, as new trees are renewed when they bring forth new boughs, . . . pure, and prepared to climb unto the stars” (canto 33).¹²⁶

For Thomas, Christ’s judgment in his humanity is a gift of the Father’s love; it is his crowning salvific activity as our mediator, head, and priest. The divine judge was begotten and came into the world not to keep men away from the Father, but to give them access to him. Although we should tremble in holy fear, we should hold fast to the Creed and rejoice in hope because it is he, our friend, who is our judge. It seems that Thomas meditated on this often; his biographers record that, when he celebrated Mass, at the elevation of the Host, Thomas recited the last part of the *Te Deum*, with its credal formula that praises Christ, who freed us by his Incarnation, and prays that he will come again as judge, to bring his own—if necessary, through purgatory—to glory.¹²⁷ I will finish with his prayer:

You, Christ, are the King of Glory,
The eternal Son of the Father.
When you became man to set us free,
you did not spurn the virgin’s womb.

not due to him if someone does not accept; rather, it is due to the person who does not accept.” Before the Fall, there was no obstacle to the drawing of God’s grace; however, in the state of fallen nature, all are turned away from God, and may resist though God extends his hand. Touching on the mystery of predestination, Thomas goes on to say that “God does not draw all who are turned away from him, but certain ones, even though all are equally turned away. The reason is so that the order of divine justice may appear and shine forth in those who are not drawn, while the immensity of the divine mercy may appear and shine in those who are drawn. But as to why in particular he draws this person and does not draw that person, there is no reason except the pleasure of the divine will” (*Super Ioan* 6, lec. 5, nos. 937–78). Thomas’s thirteenth-century perspective on the *de facto* likelihood of salvation for non-Christians after the Incarnation is arguably more restricted than that of the contemporary Church (cf. *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 5 on the necessity of explicit faith after Christ). Fr. Thomas Joseph White argues that Thomas does have “a doctrine of the universal offer of salvation by grace to each human being” that could take place in the context of moral decision making (cf. *ST* I-II q. 89, a. 6); *Incarnate Lord*, 399.

¹²⁶ Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 33, nos. 143–45.

¹²⁷ William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino de Guillaume de Tocco* (1323), *Édition critique, introduction et notes*, ed. C. Le Brun-Gouanvic, Studies and Texts 127 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1996), 381.

You overcame the sting of death,
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
You are seated at God's right hand in glory;
we believe that you will come to be our judge.
Come then Lord, and help your people
bought with the price of your own blood,
and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.

N·V