

Saint Thomas Aquinas's Biblical Exegesis: Hebrews 2:9 as a Case Study

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“BIBLICAL THOMISM,” a term coined by the American theologian Matthew Levering, constitutes, together with the emphasis on the patristic sources of Saint Thomas and the renewed discovery of the commentatorial tradition of Thomism, one of the most vibrant features of contemporary Thomism. Its dynamic is rooted in its twofold aim.¹ Historically, biblical Thomism aims at uncovering the methods and sources of Saint Thomas's principal task as *magister in sacra pagina*, which consisted in reading and commenting on the Holy Scriptures. This approach should not be limited to his biblical commentaries or the scriptural references in his systematical works but can also include a reconstruction of the central ideas of Saint Thomas's commentary on a book of the Bible for which we do not have a commentary, as has been demonstrated recently by Serge-Thomas Bonino in his book *St. Thomas Aquinas: Reader of the Song of Songs*.² In doing so, biblical Thomism further aims at contributing to overcoming the typically modern gap between exegesis and speculative theology or to contribute to what Joseph Ratzinger in his famous 1988 lecture “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict” has called the “Method C” within biblical exegesis, that is to say, a perspective on Scripture which takes advantage of the strengths of “Method A” (the patristic-medieval exegetical approach) and “Method B” (The histor-

¹ For more on this, see Jörgen Vijgen, “Biblical Thomism: Past, Present and Future,” *Angelicum* 95, no. 3 (2018): 263–87.

² Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Lecteur du Cantique des cantiques* (Paris: Cerf, 2019). See also my review in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 2 (2020): 723–29.

ical-critical approach), while being cognizant of the shortcomings of both.³

In this contribution I would like to draw attention to his *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, his commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews, which still remains somewhat overlooked, by way of an analysis of Saint Thomas's reflections on Hebrews 2:9. For in these reflections he offers the contemporary reader an overview of his exegetical methods and as such his analysis can function as a case study for his biblical exegesis and an introduction to the way he reads the Scriptures. First, however, I present Saint Thomas's arguments for why one should not separate the three features mentioned above. Next, I briefly introduce his *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos* before offering in the final part a detailed analysis of Hebrews 2:9.

Distinguish to Unite

Although for practical purposes a division of labor is often necessary, it would be contrary to both the mind of Saint Thomas, as well as his explicit teaching, were one to separate these three features (the Scriptures, Church Fathers, and the commentators) so that his thought becomes detached from the tradition that formed his work and subsequently brought his work to us. Rather, due to the role of the Holy Spirit in history, there exists for Saint Thomas a profound unity between the reading of Scripture and its transmission and interpretation throughout the ages.

Saint Thomas argues, often with reference to Ambrosiaster's phrase *Omne verum, a quocumque dicatur, a Spiritu Sancto est* ("All truth, by whomever it is spoken, is from the Holy Spirit"), in favor of God's causal action with regard to the formal, efficient and exemplary role of the Holy Spirit in the constitution and recognition of any truth whatsoever.⁴ In particular regarding the truth of Scripture, Saint Thomas emphatically rejects an absolute separation between the inspired nature of the Scriptures and their subsequent interpretation. On the contrary, as he explains in one of his quodlibetal questions, the interpretation is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit so that at any given time in history the Holy Spirit is both the author and the interpreter of the Scriptures in so far as the "spiritual man" (1 Cor 2: 15) possesses the Holy Spirit and judges accordingly.⁵ The *sed contra* of

³ Here the work of Matthew Levering and Matthew Ramage in particular come to mind.

⁴ For an in-depth analysis, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, "'Toute vérité, quel que soit celui qui la dit, vient de l'Esprit saint': Autour d'une citation de l'Ambrosiaster dans le corpus thomasienn," *Revue thomiste* 106 (2006): 101–47 (now collected in Bonino, *Études Thomasiennes* [Paris: Parole et Silence, 2018], 113–56).

⁵ Asking whether all that the saintly doctors have said is from the Holy Spirit, St. Thomas writes in *Quodlibet XII*, q. 16[17]: "Dicendum quod ab eodem Spiritu

the same article expresses this even more clearly:

To the contrary: It belongs to one and the same person to do something for the sake of a goal and to lead to that goal. But the goal of the Scriptures, which stems from the Holy Spirit, is the erudition of man. This erudition of man from the Scriptures, however, cannot exist unless by way of the expositions of the saints. Therefore the expositions of the saints are from the Holy Spirit.⁶

Such a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led reading of the Scriptures leads Saint Thomas to observe that the Scriptures themselves, when properly read, act upon its readers in protecting the integrity of their faith as well as in valuing those readers upon whom the Scriptures acted in a similar way in the past. He writes:

Because when we preserve the Sacred Scripture, it is we who are preserved by the Sacred Scriptures and it is we who are assured by the Sacred Scriptures to preserve those who have preserved the Sacred Scriptures. Therefore, one has to preserve not only what is handed on in the Sacred Scriptures but also the sayings of the saintly doctors [*sacris doctoribus*] who have preserved Sacred Scripture in its integrity.⁷

scripture sunt exposite et edite. Vnde dicitur, I Corinthiorum II: *Animalis homo non percipit ea que Dei sunt . . . , spiritualis autem* etc.; et precipue quantum ad ea que sunt fidei, quia fides est donum Dei. Et ideo interpretatio sermonum numeratur inter alia dona Spiritus sancti, Corinthiorum XII [It is by the same Spirit that the Scriptures are interpreted and published. For it is said in 1 Cor. 2:14–15: *But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of God . . . but the spiritual man* [judgeth all things]; and especially regarding matters that pertain to the faith for faith is a gift of God. And thus the interpretation of sayings is numbered among the other gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11)]” (Leonine edition [LE], 25/2:421, lns. 22–28; translation mine, with Scripture translations from the Douay-Rheims translation).

⁶ *Quodlibet* XII, q. 16[17]: “Contra. Ad eundem pertinet facere aliquid propter finem et perducere ad illum finem; set finis scripture, quae est a Spiritu sancto, est eruditio hominum; hec autem eruditio hominum ex scripturis non potest esse nisi per expositiones sanctorum ; ergo expositiones sanctorum sunt a Spiritu sancto” (LE 25/2:421.15–21). Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

⁷ Aquinas, *In divinis nominibus*, ch. 2, lec. 1, no. 125: “Quia dum nos custodimus sancta ab ipsis custodimur et ab ipsis confirmamur ad custodiendum eos qui custodiunt sancta. Oportet enim non solum conservare ea quae in sanctis Scripturis sunt tradita, sed et ea quae dicta sunt a sacris doctoribus, qui sacram Scripturam

The qualification “in its integrity” (*illibatam*) is of course of importance here. Saint Thomas is not saying that the Scriptures and their saintly readers operate under the same mode of inspiration. He is fully aware that the Fathers have added personal opinions to their biblical exegesis about which they have erred.⁸ As Leo Elders writes: “The writings of the Fathers . . . are sources of doctrine insofar as they convey what is contained in the Bible and their doctrine has been received by the Church.”⁹

Moreover, because the Holy Spirit does not only move the intellect but also the will to perform actions worthy of “spiritual men,” the actions of the saints are a tool for how to interpret what that same Spirit has told us in the Scriptures. Following the lead of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas writes:

For, although we fail to understand many things that are written for us, we can gather their meaning from the deeds of the saints, and thus learn in what sense we are to interpret them. It is on this account that the Holy Spirit, Who speaks by the Scriptures [*loquitur in Scripturis*], inspires the actions of the Saints [*movet sanctos ad operandum*]. St. Paul tells us the same truth when he says, “Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8: 14).¹⁰

In other words, one cannot confine the function of the Scriptures to a passed event in the history of the transmission of the faith which would then be followed by Tradition and the Church. On the contrary, Scripture is the work of the same Holy Spirit who governs the Church; the Holy Spirit, who brings to fulfillment from Christ’s ascension to Christ’s return the work begun by Christ, is the same who “loquitur in Scripturis” and who “movet sanctos ad operandum.” Hence, it is the same Spirit who is both author and interpreter of the Scriptures.¹¹ Such a structural correlation

illibatam conservaverunt.”

⁸ See *Quodlibet* XII, q. 16[17], ad 1.

⁹ Leo Elders, “Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church,” in *Theological innovation and the Shaping of Tradition: The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West from the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Ignaz I. Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 337–66, at 340.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*, ch. 21 (LE, 41B:94.157–60), trans. John Procter, O.P. (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1950 [orig. 1902]). St. Thomas is influenced by remarks in St. Augustine’s *De mendacio*, ch. 15.

¹¹ See Romanus Cessario and Cajetan Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists: The Achievement of Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), and my review in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 17, no. 1 (2019): 291–96. For a concrete

between the sacred text and the reading of the text forms part of the theological justification for the twofold aim of biblical Thomism.

A brief note on the third feature of contemporary Thomism, the role of the commentatorial tradition as an integral part of the unity of the Thomist tradition, is in order. The observation by Romanus Cessario and Cajetan Cuddy that “those who follow and interpret Aquinas faithfully commit themselves to the project as an ecclesial vocation” at the service of evangelization, that is to say, as “developing a sanctified intelligence for service to the church’s ministry” resonates deeply with Saint Thomas’s view cited above (“*eruditio hominum ex Scripturis non potest esse nisi per expositiones sanctorum* [the erudition of man from the Scriptures cannot exist unless by way of the expositions of the saints]”).¹²

The Challenges of Aquinas's *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos*

In these last few decades numerous studies have appeared which examined either Thomas's exegetical methods in general or a particular biblical commentary.¹³ Far less scholarly work has been done on Saint Thomas's exegesis of the Letter to the Hebrews.¹⁴ One reason for this apparent lack of interest could be the considerable textual problems of the text of the commentary as transmitted to us in the Marietti edition. While we do not need to go into the details here, it is useful to recall that we possess two rather different student notes or *reportationes*, a short version and a long version. The longer version is thought to be the one written down by Saint Thomas's *socius*, Reginald of Piperno but was only discovered in the sixteenth century by Remigio Nanni, who incorporated parts of it, mainly

example see Michael O'Connor, *Cajetan's Biblical Commentaries: Motive and Method* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), and my review in *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 11, no. 3 (2018): 361–66.

¹² Cessario and Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists*, xvi.

¹³ See, e.g.: *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Levering and Dauphinais (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012); *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas. Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives*, ed. Piotr Roszak and Jürgen Vijgen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015); *Towards A Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology*, ed. Roszak and Jürgen (Pamplona, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2018).

¹⁴ An excellent introduction is Thomas Weinandy, “The Supremacy of Christ: Aquinas’ Commentary on Hebrews,” in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 223–44.

of the first six chapters, into the printed edition. From there onward, this text prepared by Nanni became the one that was printed in subsequent editions, including the Marietti edition.¹⁵ For the moment, very little research has been done to clarify the relation between these two versions, let alone the sources which influenced Saint Thomas.

While these textual questions certainly present a difficulty for us readers and might explain the apparent lack of interest for the commentary, the fact that the epistle itself presents the contemporary reader with significant challenges is equally as important. It presents the reader with a world which in many ways lies beyond the empirical and which even is more powerful than the empirically observable world. Hence, the importance of angels therein. Moreover, one of its central themes, Jesus's sacrificial suffering in obedience to the Father, does not resonate well in today's culture of absolute autonomy. Furthermore, as Luke Timothy Johnson observes, the epistle's suggestion that suffering "is not merely something that falls upon people from outside but rather the inevitable concomitant of obedience to God's promises, as exemplified in Christ's passion, is a very demanding one." This is particularly the case if some of the readers of Hebrews "make moral ambiguity and tolerance for wrongdoing the mark of maturity and consider suffering virtually equivalent to evil."¹⁶ Saint Thomas, however, commenting beautifully on Hebrews 12:3 ("For think diligently upon him that endured such opposition from sinners against himself that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds") and following Saint Augustine, presents the Cross as the place where Jesus reveals the perfection of his virtue and becomes a model for all to follow:

The reason for this is that the remedy for every tribulation is found in the cross. For obedience to God is found there: *he humbled himself, being made obedient* (Phil 2:8); so is piety towards one's parents, for he provided for his mother there; and also love of neighbor; hence, he prayed for sinners: *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34); *walk in love, as Christ loved you and delivered himself for you* (Eph 5:2); and

¹⁵ For more elements of textual criticism, see the only book length study of his *Super Heb*: Antoine Guggenheim, *Jésus Christ, grand prêtre de l'ancienne et de la nouvelle alliance: Étude du commentaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin sur l'épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2004).

¹⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 2.

patience in adversity: *I was dumb and was humbled and kept silence from good things: and my sorrow was renewed* (Ps 39:3); *he shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth* (Isa 53:7); and final perseverance in all things; hence, he persevered to the end: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* (Luke 23:46). Hence, an example of every virtue is found in the cross: *the cross was not only the altar on which he suffered, but the chair from which he taught* (Augustine).¹⁷

A final challenge worthy of mentioning deals with Jewish-Christian relations and in particular with the much-disputed issue of Christian supersessionism, present so it seems in Hebrews and in Aquinas, that is to say, the view that, in the words of Matthew Tapie, "the Christian claim that with the advent of Christ, the Jewish law is fulfilled and obsolete, with the result that God replaces Israel with the Church."¹⁸ Obviously,

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Super Heb* 12, lec. 1, no. 667: "Et huius ratio est, quia in quacumque tribulatione invenitur eius remedium in cruce. Ibi enim est obedientia ad Deum. Phil. II, 8: humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens. Item pietatis affectus ad parentes; unde ibi gessit curam de matre sua. Item caritas ad proximum; unde ibi pro transgressoribus oravit. Lc. XXIII, 34: Pater, dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt. Eph. V, 2: ambulate in dilectione, sicut Christus dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis. Item fuit ibi patientia in adversis. Ps.: obmutui et humiliatus sum, et silui a bonis, et dolor meus renovatus est. Is. LIII, 7: sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur, et quasi agnus coram tondente se obmutescet, et non aperiet os suum. Item in omnibus finalis perseverantia; unde usque ad mortem perseveravit. Lc. XXIII, v. 46: Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum. Unde in cruce invenitur exemplum omnis virtutis, Augustinus: 'cruce non solum fuit patibulum patientis; sed etiam cathedra docentis.'" Unless otherwise noted, all English translation of *Super Heb* is from in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Chrysostom Baer, O. Praem (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2006). The exact quotation from Augustine is: "Facit quod faciendum admonet, et exemplo suo suos instruxit praeceptor bonus, ut a filiis piis impendatur cura parentibus: tamquam lignum illud ubi erant fixa membra morientis, etiam cathedra fuit magistri docentis" ("The good Teacher does what He thereby reminds us ought to be done, and by His own example instructed His disciples that care for their parents ought to be a matter of concern to pious children: as if that tree to which the members of the dying One were affixed were the very chair of office from which the Master was imparting instruction") (*In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 119.2 [*Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina*, 36:658]; English trans. from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 7). See also Sermon 234, no. 2 (*PL*, 38:1116) and Sermon 315, no. 5[8] (*PL*, 38: 1430). See also Thomas's Sermon 18, *Germinet terra*, in particular part 3.

¹⁸ Matthew Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism*

I can merely draw attention to these challenges. However, and insofar as these challenges are perceived as counter-cultural, they might lead us to explore in more depth Saint Thomas's commentary.

Hebrews 2:9 and Its context

In this contribution, I will limit myself to expounding Saint Thomas's reading of a single verse, Hebrews 2:9, which reads in the Douay-Rheims:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor: that, through the grace of God he might taste death for all [Vulgate: Eum autem, qui modico quam angeli minoratus est, videmus Jesum propter passionem mortis, gloria et honore coronatum: ut, gratia Dei, pro omnibus gustaret mortem].

In particular, I will be focus on the last part: "that, through the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." The reason for this approach is that Thomas's commentary on the centerpiece of salvation, the salvific death of Christ, exhibits, as we will see, many of the features of his exegesis and can therefore function as a case study for his biblical exegesis.

Before doing so, however, it is worthwhile to place this verse into context. As in his other biblical commentaries, Saint Thomas takes the traditional topical approach, focusing on the subjects being discussed. The two central subjects of the Hebrews are logically interrelated. For if it can be shown that Christ's excellence takes precedence over all the angels, prophets and priests, which is the subject of chapters 1–10, respectively the angels (ch. 2), Moses (ch. 3), and the Old Testament priests (chs. 4–10), then one is justified to explain to the faithful how one can be joined to Christ and to admonish them to do so, which is the subject of chapters 11–13. The first subject is therefore foundational and is already contained in the first three verses of chapter

in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas, foreword by Pim Valkenberg (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 23–24. For a constructive engagement with Tapie, see Matthew Levering, "Aquinas and Supersessionism One More Time: A Response to Matthew A. Tapie's *Israel and the Church*," *Pro Ecclesia* 25 (2016): 395–412, and Levering, "Blood, Death, and Sacrifice in the Epistle to the Hebrews According to Thomas Aquinas," in *So Great a Salvation: A Dialogue on Atonement in Hebrews*, ed. John C. Laansma, George H. Guthrie, and Cynthia Long Westfall (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 120–43.

1. These verses show us not only the full divinity of the Son, and in particular his co-eternity ("splendor of his glory"), consubstantiality ("the figure of his substance"), and equality of power ("upholding all things by the word of his power"), but also that it is as incarnate that the Son inherits everything, for it is as incarnate that the Son overcomes sin ("making purgation of sins") and provides a new covenant.

Having emphasized in chapter 1 the Son's full divinity, Thomas turns to the life of the Word made flesh. He finds in the citation of Psalm 8 in verses 5–8 an overview of all the mysteries of the life of Christ, that is to say, his Incarnation, Passion, resurrection, ascension, and return at the final judgment.¹⁹ "What is man" refers to the cause of the Incarnation, that is to say, the sinful human race, unworthy of God's kindness. "The son of man that you visit him" describes the Incarnation itself. As he explains in his commentary on Psalm 8, while God has visited the entire human race in the past, he now visits "in particular this man assumed into the unity of the supposit."²⁰ "You have made him a little lower than the angels" applies to the incarnate Word in suffering and death as man. He explicitly rejects that Christ in his Passion lost the fullness of his divinity or was somehow diminished in anyway. Even the fact that in Luke 22:43 an angel appears to Christ on the Cross strengthening him should not for Thomas be read as if Christ needed the angel's strengthening, but rather as a reinforcement that Christ's Passion as man made him lower than the angels because, as Hebrews 2:16 says, "surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham." The final verses of the citation from Psalm 8 speak of the resurrection, ascension, and final judgment. He explores the last aspect in particular more fully in his commentary on Psalm 8.

Hebrews 2:9, and in particular the final part—"ut, gratia Dei, pro omnibus gustaret mortem"—contains the centerpiece of salvation, the salvific death of Christ. According to Saint Thomas, it describes Christ's Passion from three perspectives: "First, from its cause, when he says 'that,

¹⁹ Heb 2: 5–8 reads: "For God has not subjected unto angels the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place has testified, saying: *what is man, that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you visit him? You have made him a little lower than the angels: you have crowned him with glory and honor and have set him over the works of your hands. You have subjected all things under his feet* [Ps. 8]. For in that he has subjected all things to him he left nothing not subject to him. But now we see not as yet all things subject to him." I use the Baer translation (see note 17) and he uses the Douay-Rheims translation.

²⁰ *Super Psalmos* 8, no. 5: "Quia licet totum genus humanum visitaverit, specialiter tamen illum hominem assumptum in unitate hypostasis."

through the grace of God'; second, from its usefulness, when he says 'for all'; third, from the manner, when he says 'he might taste.'²¹ In what follows I will analyze these three perspectives more closely.

The Grace of God as the Cause of Christ's Passion

He starts out by explaining that God's grace alone (*sola gratia Dei*) was the cause of Christ's Passion; that is to say, the Father gave his only begotten Son as having to suffer in his human nature entirely out of grace.²² He invokes John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son") and Romans 5:8 ("But God commendeth His charity towards us: because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us") to clarify the Father's love as the motivating cause "of the good which is grace."²³ Commenting on this verse from Romans 5, he emphasizes that the Father "was not moved to do this by our merits, since we were still sinners,"²⁴ "for love is shown by a gift."²⁵ Christ's Passion was, therefore, "given freely."²⁶ The emphasis here on the freedom of the Father's gift should not be read as standing in contradiction with the meritorious nature of Christ's Passion. Inasmuch as he bore his suffering willingly—that is to say, inasmuch as he was resolved to fulfill God's will—he merited salvation. For Saint Thomas this follows from the reality of Christ's human nature and free will. "It is evident that whosoever suffers for justice's sake, provided that he be in a state of grace, merits his salvation thereby, according to Matt 5:10: 'Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake.'²⁷ This example shows that, because Saint Thomas's observations often stem directly from following the flow of the words of Scripture, a careful conclusion on the whole of a topic needs to depend on his systematical treatment of the topic.

²¹ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 2, no. 123.

²² For St. Thomas, the being made "little lower than the angels" in Heb 2:9a does not refer to the nature of the divinity, nor the human nature absolutely considered, but solely to the human nature as suffering; (see *Super Heb* 2, lec. 2, no. 122).

²³ *Super Ioann* 3, lec. 3, no. 477.

²⁴ *Super Rom* 5, lec. 2, no. 299. He refers to Eph 2: 4: "God who is rich in mercy, on account of the exceedingly great love wherewith he has loved us, while we were still dead in sins, has raised us to life with Christ."

²⁵ *Super Ioann* 3, lec. 3, no. 477: "nam dilectio ostenditur per donum." See also *Super Heb* 9, lec. 3, no. 444 where, commenting on Heb. 9: 14a ("How much more shall the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Spirit offered himself unspotted unto God. . ."), he notes that it is the Holy Spirit who caused Christ to shed his blood by the spiration of divine love, love of God, and love of neighbor which was infused into Him.

²⁶ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 2, no. 123.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] III, q. 48, a. 1.

One of the features of his exegesis is the presence of alternative explanations, introduced by *vel* or *aliter* or equivalent expressions, without a judgment which one is correct. This feature attests both to the primacy of God as the author of the Scriptures²⁸ and to what Gilbert Dahan has called a *souplesse* or absence of well-defined limits of scriptural interpretation.²⁹ Saint Thomas proposes an alternative reading which only makes sense for someone reading Hebrews in Latin; at least textually, it is incorrect for someone reading the original Greek. In Greek, *chariti*, from *charis* (grace) is dative and can only be dative, and means “by grace” or perhaps “in/with grace.” It is found on numerous occasions within the New Testament, for example in Ephesians 2:8 (“For by grace you have been saved, through faith”) or 1 Corinthians 15: 10 (“By the grace of God I am what I am”). In the Latin Vulgate translation, however, the equivalent word *gratia* in *gratia Dei* can grammatically be both an ablative and a nominative. In the former case, it would be construed similarly to the Greek dative: “by the grace of God.” In the latter case, it would be translated as “the grace of God,” so that the entire passage would indicate that Christ himself, who is the Grace of God, might taste death for all. For someone like Saint Thomas, who was not able to read Greek, this is a plausible reading.

But why did Saint Thomas offer this reading? The reason he mentions explicitly is the fact that it comes from the *Glossa Augustini*. His reverence toward the Fathers and in particular towards Saint Augustine is well known.³⁰ However, and at least to my knowledge, one cannot find in Augustine's writings a text in which Augustine argues for the nominative case of *gratia*. In Robert of Melun's (ca. 1100–1167) *Quaestiones* on the Pauline letters from around 1150, we find a rare example for such a read-

²⁸ Because God is the primary author of Scripture, it is possible that God could mean multiple literal meanings “but without any such meanings on the part of the author”; see John F. Boyle, “Authorial Intention and the ‘Divisio Textus,’” in Levering and Dauphinais, *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, 3–8, at 7. See also Aquinas, *De potentia*, q., a. 1, where he writes that it belongs to the dignity of Scriptures to “adapts itself to man's various intelligence, so that each one marvels to find his thoughts expressed in the words of divine Scripture.”

²⁹ Gilbert Dahan, “Tradition patristique, autorité et progrès dans l'exégèse médiévale,” in *Les réceptions des Pères de l'Église au Moyen Âge*, ed. Rainer Berndt and Michel Fédou (Münster: Aschendorff, 2013), 349–68. Note however: “But this freedom is part of the predefined framework of a tradition and cannot be the spontaneous product of a charismatic, individual approach” (361).

³⁰ See Leo Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers in His Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), ch. 6.

ing.³¹ Most likely, however, he found this reading in Peter Lombard's own commentary on Hebrews.³² These misattributions either by Saint Thomas himself, the *reportatores*, or even the scribes of the text of the commentary on Hebrews we possess at the moment were all too common in the Middle Ages.

I would offer another reason which he does not mention. The nominativus *gratia* can function as a metonymy by associating two closely related concepts. "Grace tasted death" because Christ is grace as well as the *auctor gratiae*, the author of grace. This is also the reading proposed by Hugh of Saint Cher's *Postilla*.³³ Thomas finds corroboration for this reading in John 1:17, where it is said, "Grace and truth come by Jesus Christ." As he

³¹ Robert of Melun, *Quaestiones de Epistolis Pauli de epistula ad Hebraeos*, ed. R.-M. Martin (Louvain, Belgium: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1938), 293: "Hence the Apostle adds: 'But we see [Jesus], who was made a little lower than the angels, etc.'; 'made a little lower,' I say, so that 'the grace of God, that is to say, the Son of God, might taste death for all' assumed in the flesh. For he could not die in his divinity" ("Unde et Apostolus supponit: Eum autem qui modico quam angeli minoratus est, videmus, etc., minoratus est dico, ut gratia Dei, id est Filius Dei, pro omnibus gustaret mortem in carne assumpta").

³² Peter Lombard, *Collectanea in omnes Pauli apostoli Epistulas: ad Hebraeos*, ch. 2: "And this is so that the grace of God, that is to say, that he himself who is the grace of God (because he freely gives, or because he is freely given to us), might taste death. Or such that it is in the ablative case, meaning: that the grace of God, that is to say, through the grace of God, which man did not merit, he himself might taste [death]. 'Might taste' in a proper sense because death is bitter or because it quickly goes by. For, just as he who tastes experiences briefly [what is tasted], after a brief moment of time he immediately rose from the death" ("Et hoc ideo ut gratia Dei, id est ipse qui est gratia Dei, quia gratis dat, vel quia gratis datus est nobis, gustaret mortem. Vel ita, ut sit ablativi casus hoc modo: ut gratia Dei, id est per gratiam Dei qua homo non meruit, ipse gustaret, proprie dixit gustaret, quia amara est mors, vel quia cito transiit. [Chrysost.] Breve namque intervallum in illa faciens confestim surrexit, sicut qui gustat breviter experitur"); (*PL*, 192:419).

³³ Hugo of St. Cher, *Postilla* (Venetis: Nicolaum Pezzana, 1703), 7:241b: "... grace of God, that is to say, that he himself who is the grace of God, who freely gives. ... Or grace of God in the ablative case, that is to say, through the grace of God the Father, who freely gives the Son" ("Ut gratia Dei, id est, ipse, qui est gratia Dei, qui gratis omnia dat. ... Vel gratia Dei, ablativus, id est, per gratiam Dei patris, qui gratis dedit filium"). Both Hugh and Thomas refer to Isa 9:6 and John 3:16. For more on the relation between Aquinas and Hugh of St. Cher, see Gilles Berceville, "Les commentaires évangéliques de Thomas d'Aquin et Hugues de Saint-Cher," in *Hugues de Saint-Cher* (+ 1263), *Bibliste et théologien*, ed. Louis-Jacques Bataillon, Gilbert Dahan, and Pierre-Marie Gy (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004), 173–212.

explains in commenting on that passage in the Gospel of John, Christ is the author of grace insofar as he is the originative cause of all graces and possesses the gifts of the Holy Spirit without measure because of Christ's consubstantiality with the Spirit.³⁴ In this fullness one can participate according to the measure which Christ grants to each. "Grace has been given to each of us according to the degree to which Christ gives it" (Eph 4:7).³⁵ Thomas thus uses Scripture to interpret Scripture, in accordance with the *analogia fidei*, or analogy of faith, that is, the understanding of individual texts on the basis of the whole as an inspired text.

Surprisingly, given his extensive knowledge of the Church Fathers, Saint Thomas does not appear to be aware of another difficult issue in the interpretation of this verse, which was perhaps also worthy of comment. A number of both Eastern and Western Fathers, and some later manuscripts, read the Greek as *chōris theou* ("apart from/except God") instead of *chariti theou* ("by the grace of God"), the earliest patristic attestation of both variants being that of Origen, who found no difficulty with both readings of Hebrews 2:9.³⁶ Various explanations have been given to account for the two readings, such as a scribal lapse or the introduction of a marginal gloss, which, inspired by 1 Corinthians 15:27, intended to clarify that, although Hebrews 2:8 speaks of everything being in subjection to God, God himself is not made subject to Christ.³⁷ Or the variant

³⁴ *Super Ioann* 1, lec. 10, no. 202; see also *Super Ioann* 15, lec. 1, no. 1993.

³⁵ See *Super Eph* 4, lec. 3, no. 205.

³⁶ See Origen, *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, Books 1–5, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 216 (PG, 14:946) and 351 (PG, 14:1036). See also Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Books 1–10, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 85–86, and Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Books 13–32, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 324–26. Of particular help in this regard has been the fact that Krista M. Miller, who wrote an MA thesis on the topic at the Dallas Theological Seminary, was willing to share her work with me, for which I am grateful. Appendix I of her thesis (40–64) gives an exhaustive list of citations from the Fathers on the matter ("Evaluating the Reading Χωρίς Θεοῦ in Hebrews 2:9 in Light of Patristic Evidence," [master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010], scholar.csl.edu/ma_th/25). For St. Thomas's reception of Origen, see Jörgen Vijgen, "Aquinas's Reception of Origen: A Preliminary Study," in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Roger Nutt, and Andrew Hofer (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2019), 30–88.

³⁷ This reconstruction "assurément fort conjecturale" ("certainly very conjectural") is offered for example by Albert Vanhoye, *Situation du Christ: Hébreux 1–2* (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 298–99.

chōris theou was intended to clarify that Christ did not die for God.³⁸ Many contemporary scholars favor *chariti* because it offers an easier reading, or because, conversely, *chōris theou* read as “apart from God” or even “forsaken by God” introduces the difficulty of the much-disputed question of Christ’s abandonment by God, which, as Ceslaus Spicq has argued, stands in contradiction to one of the central claims of the Letter to the Hebrews, that is to say, the claim that the death of Jesus is to be attributed to the divine will.³⁹ Some have argued that *chōris theou* does not offer a more difficult reading at all, given that the author “is talking about the suffering of Jesus as a human, i.e., how he suffered in his human nature,”⁴⁰ or, given that the Son’s participation in the human condition extends as well to death as the final absence from God.⁴¹

What is more important for our purposes is the claim that there was a theological motivation behind the variant, that is to say, the claim that *charati* became standard because *chōris* had been associated with Nestorianism. In effect, Philoxenus (ca. 440–523), Oecumenius (sixth century), and Theophylact of Bulgaria (ca. 1050–1108; a writer introduced to the Latin West by way of Saint Thomas) each believe Nestorius to be the originator of *chōris theou*. Theophylact, providing evidence that this view prevailed through the centuries, writes in his commentary on Hebrews: “But the Nestorians, falsifying the Scripture, say ‘apart from God, he might taste death on behalf of all,’ in order that they might contrive that the deity did not coexist in Christ who was crucified inasmuch as the deity was not unified with him in terms of person but in terms of relationship.”⁴²

This has led some scholars, most notably in the Bart Ehrman school, to cite this variant as evidence par excellence of his thesis that orthodox

³⁸ For a short overview of the proposals in this regard, see Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 218–19.

³⁹ See Ceslaus Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Paris: Gabalda), 419. For a recent discussion, see the articles by John Betz, Anne Carpenter, Gilles Emery, and Kenneth Oakes on Christ’s kenosis in the symposium in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 17, no. 3 (2019): 769–892.

⁴⁰ Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 67.

⁴¹ This is the central point of Richard J. Ounsworth, “Hebrews 2:9 and the Soteriological Journey of the Son in the Ecclesiology of Hebrews,” in *The New Testament and The Church: Essays in Honour of John Muddiman*, ed. John Barton and Peter Groves (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 52–63. I thank Fr. Ounsworth for his insightful comments after the lecture and for sending me this chapter.

⁴² Trans. Miller in “Evaluating the Reading Χωρίς Θεοῦ in Hebrews 2:9.” For the Greek and Latin text see Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Expositio in Epist. ad Hebraeos*, ch. 2 (PG, 125:209–10).

scribes have corrupted Scripture.⁴³ There are at least two difficulties with this claim. First, prior to Nestorius the reading “apart from God” appears in texts of Origen, Ambrose, and Jerome, and therefore it could not have originated with Nestorius. Second, Ehrman bases nearly the entirety of his argument on the patristic support of Origen. He cites Origen when he states that *chōris theou* “was acknowledged by Origen himself as the reading of the majority of manuscripts of his own day.”⁴⁴ Contra Ehrman, Origen is not of the opinion that a heretical interpretation necessarily follows from reading *chōris theou*. He is aware that such a heretical interpretation is possible—that is to say, “apart from God” might lead to the incorrect idea that God and Christ exist apart from each other, which is contrary to John 10:30, “I and the Father are one”⁴⁵—but when reading it as “except God,” Origen writes, “you have the sense in which God alone has immortality.”⁴⁶

If we return to Saint Thomas, it is remarkable that all this is absent from his commentary on Hebrews as well as from his other writings. It is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, as I have argued elsewhere, Saint Thomas held the exegetical writings of Origen in high regard, so much so that most likely he had excerpts from his commentary on John, in which Origen discusses these variants, especially translated for him.⁴⁷ Theophylact of Bulgary, an important witness to the prevailing view that *chōris theou* was inserted to combat the Nestorian heresy, was introduced to the Latin West precisely by Saint Thomas's efforts at having his texts translated while composing his *Catena aurea*.⁴⁸ Moreover, despite

⁴³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 146–50; Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 320–4; Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 144–48.

⁴⁴ See Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 146–50.

⁴⁵ Origen, *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide* 4.9–16 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 62.

⁴⁶ Origen, *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide* 27.6–8, 107 (English: *Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides and His Fellow Bishops on The Father, the Son and the Soul*, trans. Robert J. Daly, *Ancient Christian Writers* 54 [New York: Paulist, 1992], 77).

⁴⁷ See Vijgen, “Aquinas's Reception of Origen.”

⁴⁸ See: Jane Sloan Peters, “*Quidam Graecus*: Theophylact of Ochrid in the *Catena Aurea* in *Ioannem* and *Lectura Super Ioannem*,” in Dauphinais, Nutt, and Hofer, *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, 244–73; Giuseppe Carmelo Conticello, “Théophylacte de Bulgarie, source de Thomas d'Aquin (*Catena aurea* in *Ioannem*),” in *Philomathestatos: Studies in Greek Patristic and Byzantine Texts Presented to J. Noret*, ed. B. Janssens, B. Roosen, and P. Van Deun (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters,

his limited knowledge of Greek, Saint Thomas possessed a keen eye for the intricacies of textual criticism both when commenting on Aristotle and when commenting on Scripture, in the latter case mostly due to his reading of Saint Jerome.⁴⁹ Expressions for instance such as *alia littera* or *secundum aliam litteram* occur frequently in his writings (176 times, to be exact, seven of which are in his commentary on Hebrews). Finally, his biblical commentaries are filled with discussions of both early Christian heresies and those contemporary to his days. Among these, he considered Nestorianism and monophysitism as the two greatest Christological errors, critiqued by the Chalcedonian definition of Christ as one person/hypostasis in two natures. In fact, Saint Thomas is the first Scholastic of the High Middle Ages who quotes the text of Chalcedon directly. In his commentary on Hebrews, Saint Thomas, as Daniel Keating has shown, consistently reads the text within the context of what Keating has called a “two nature exegesis,”—that is, Saint Thomas explains a given text from Hebrews “according to one or both of the natures in Christ.”⁵⁰ At this point, I can only draw attention to the remarkable absence of any discussion of these variants in Saint Thomas’s works. Why he did not do so must remain a question for now.

The Usefulness of Christ’s Passion

Grace tasted death *hyper pantas*, in Latin *pro omnibus*, for all, says Hebrews 2:9. Saint Thomas comments, “ecce utilitas”—“behold the usefulness.”⁵¹ He does not enter into a question that can be raised on the basis of the Greek text, the question whether *pantas* (“all”) should be read as neuter (every thing) or as masculine (every person). The former possibility would entail that Christ’s salvific death concerns not just all human beings but also angels and the material cosmos. Origen, most notoriously, defends this possibility for several reasons. He defends a literal reading of Job 25:5 (“the stars are not pure in his sight”), whereas Saint Thomas reads this passage as a comparison (*simile*) to elucidate the corruption in

2004), 63–75.

⁴⁹ See Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors*, 151–56. For more information on medieval textual criticism, see Gilbert Dahan, “La méthode critique dans l’étude de la Bible (XIIe–XIIIe s.),” in *La méthode critique au moyen âge*, ed. Mireille Chazan and Gilbert Dahan (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 103–28.

⁵⁰ Daniel Keating, “Thomas Aquinas and the Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘The Excellence of Christ,’” in *Christology, Hermeneutics, and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, ed. Jon C. Laansma and Daniel J. Treier (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 84–99, at 86.

⁵¹ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 2, no. 124.

man.⁵² Neither can the much-used phrase from Ephesians 1:10 (“to bring all things together under one head, things in heaven and things on earth, in Christ”) be called upon in such a maximalist sense, as Saint Thomas makes abundantly clear when commenting on Ephesians 1:10:

Everything that is in heaven, namely, the angels. Christ did not die for the angels, but in redeeming mankind “he shall fill the ruins” (Ps 109:6) left by the sin of the angels. Beware of the error Origen fell into, as if the damned angels were to be redeemed through Christ; this was only a figment of his imagination.⁵³

He even thinks that the Nicene Creed incorporated the expression “for us men” (*propter nos homines*) to specifically exclude this error of Origen who “alleged that by the power of Christ’s Passion even the devils were to be set free.”⁵⁴

Saint Thomas takes a rather different perspective, a perspective to which he already alluded in his prologue. In a typically medieval fashion, he introduces his commentary with a prologue which uses a passage from elsewhere in the Bible to shed light on the principal theme of the epistle. In this case the *thema* is Psalm 85:8, which reads in the Vulgate: “There is none among the gods like unto Thee, O Lord, and there is none according to Thy works.” This verse expresses Christ’s excellence in terms of both who Christ is and what he does. Christ is more excellent than any angel, prophet, or priest, who can be called gods merely by participation whereas Christ is God by nature. Christ’s works, moreover, extend to every part of creation (“All things were made by Him” [John 1:3]); he alone is able to illuminate rational creatures (“That was the true light,

⁵² Compare Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 1.257 (trans. Heine, p. 86) with Aquinas, *Super Iob* 25 (LE, 26/2:143.74–91). Although Origen accounts for the possibility that Job 25:2 is said “hyperbolically,” his subsequent explorations do not show he takes this possibility seriously.

⁵³ *Super Eph* 1, lec. 3, no. 29: “Omnia, inquam, quae in caelis, id est Angelos: non quod pro Angelis mortuus sit Christus, sed quia redimendo hominem, reintegratur ruina Angelorum. Ps. CIX, 6: implevit ruinas, et cetera. Ubi cavendus est error Origenis, ne per hoc credamus Angelos damnatos redimendos esse per Christum, ut ipse finxit.”

⁵⁴ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 220 (LE, 42:173.8–11). The reason for the irrevocable nature of the demon’s will has to do with his fixity of the will from the start, and this due to his purely intellectual nature. See Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Angels and Demons: A Catholic Introduction* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), ch. 10.

which enlighteneth every man” [John 1:9]), as well as to justify the saints to a new life through him (“And the life was the light of men” [John 1:4]).⁵⁵ This excellence of Christ is therefore the material (*materia*) of the Letter to the Hebrews.

In the same prologue, he furthermore signals out two features of the epistle which distinguish it from the other Pauline letters. Not only is the principle subject unique among the Pauline letters, insofar as it is the grace of Christ as Head *as such*, but also—and equally importantly, I think—among the Pauline letters, Hebrews is uniquely addressed to the Hebrews, whereas all the other letters are addressed to the gentiles and their leaders.⁵⁶

Regarding its audience, he explicitly writes: “He [Paul] wrote this epistle against the errors of those converts from Judaism to faith in Christ who wanted to preserve the legal observances along with the Gospel, as though Christ’s grace were not sufficient for salvation.”⁵⁷ It is this audience and their claims which provide Paul with the thematic ordering of the epistle, for Thomas immediately continues, “hence [*unde*] the letter is divided into two parts.”⁵⁸ The exposition of the excellence of Christ (chs. 1–10) and the joining to this most excellent Christ through faith (chs. 11–13), the two parts, clearly have an apologetic function as well as a concrete purpose. The exposition on the excellence of Christ has as its purpose to show the “excellence of the New Testament over the Old” and the faith in Christ that should follow from this excellence. In other words, in showing why and how Christ excels every creature as well as their ability to respond to Christ’s headship in grace, he logically must also deal with the means of salvation as uniquely exemplified in Christ’s headship. Differently put, the sufficiency of Christ’s grace is inextricably connected to and follows from his excellence as Head.

With this in mind, what Saint Thomas actually has to say about the *pro omnibus* of Heb. 2:9 becomes more intelligible. Employing the famous or notorious method of distinction, he writes:

⁵⁵ *Super Heb*, prol., no. 3.

⁵⁶ An indication of the importance of this audience is the fact that it allows Thomas to give three reasons why the Letter to the Hebrews does not mention Paul’s name: Paul considered himself apostle to the Gentiles, he knew his name was an obstacle to the message he wanted to convey to the Jews, and he did not want to cause envy among the Jews because of his (Paul’s) own excellence.

⁵⁷ *Super Heb* 1, lec. 1, no. 6.

⁵⁸ *Super Heb* 1, lec. 1, no. 6.

But *for all* can be understood in two ways: either so that it may be an accommodated distribution, namely, for all the predestined, since it is only in the predestined that it is efficacious. Or as applying absolutely to all so far as sufficiency is concerned; for of itself it is sufficient for all: *who is the savior of all, but especially of the faithful* (1 Tim 4:10); *he died for all in general, because the price was sufficient for all. And if all do not believe, he nevertheless fulfilled his part* (Chrysostom).⁵⁹

As he writes elsewhere more succinctly when commenting on Hebrews 9:28 ("So also Christ was offered once to exhaust the sins of many. The second time he shall appear without sin to those who expect him unto salvation"), Christ's salvation becomes efficacious only to those who are "subject to him by faith and good works."⁶⁰ He also uses this distinction to further qualify the potentially maximalist cosmological reading of Ephesians 1:10 ("Everything that is in heaven and what is on earth"), as exemplified by Origen, and 1:20 ("Making peace through the blood of his cross, both as to the things that are on earth and the things that are in heaven"), when he writes: "This must be understood in reference to the sufficiency [of his redeeming actions], even though, with respect to its efficacy, everything will not be re-established."⁶¹ One can find these elements as well in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, where he regards all people as potentially united to Christ because his power is sufficient for the salvation of the

⁵⁹ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 125.

⁶⁰ *Super Heb* 9, lec. 5, no. 477: "He does not say *of all* because Christ's death, even though it was enough for all, has no efficacy except in regard to those who are to be saved: for not all are subject to him by faith and good works"; italics in Baer's trans.).

⁶¹ *Super Eph* 1, lec. 3, no. 29. Commenting on Heb 12: 15 ("See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God"), St. Thomas explores the conundrum of the fact that on the one hand "the grace of God is lacking to no one . . . just as the sun is not lacking to the eye of the blind," and on the other hand an obstacle for grace is not always removed. He concludes succinctly: "That an obstacle is removed from somebody, this is by the mercy of God; that it is not removed, this is by His justice" (*Super Heb* 12, lec. 3, no. 688). This touches upon the related but not identical question of if and how the human placement of an obstacle can resist the divine motion and if such a resistance is not a self-contradiction. On this, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, "Contemporary Thomism through the Prism of the Theology of Predestination," in *Thomism and Predestination, Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long, Roger Nutt, and Thomas Joseph White (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2016), 29–50.

whole human race, and yet only the divinely predestined will reduce this potentiality to act by having faith.⁶² Hence, “no condition of men [is] excluded from Christ’s redemption.”⁶³

In employing the distinction between sufficiency and efficiency, Saint Thomas is by no means original.⁶⁴ The origins of the sufficiency–efficiency distinction can be traced back to Lombard, who in his *Sentences* observes that Christ offered himself on the Cross “for all with regard to the sufficiency of the price, but only for the elect with regard to its efficacy, because he brought about salvation only for the predestined.”⁶⁵ It became, as Arthur Landgraf has shown many years ago, the classic solution to the question of relating universal and particular salvation.⁶⁶ Lombard’s influence is not limited to a borrowing of a classical distinction. In commenting on Hebrew 2:9, Thomas closely follows Lombard’s own Hebrews commentary, including the use of a quote from a homily on Hebrews by John Chrysostom’s (349–407), as can be shown in the following table:

⁶² *ST* III, q. 8, a. 3, in particular ad 3: “Those who are unbaptized, though not actually in the Church, are in the Church potentially. And this potentiality is rooted in two things—first and principally, in the power of Christ, which is sufficient for the salvation of the whole human race; secondly, in free-will” (all trans. from *ST* is from that done by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province [New York: Benziger, 1947]).

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 36, a. 3.

⁶⁴ Even posing the question of whether a medieval thinker is original displays a somewhat misplaced and typically modern emphasis on originality as the hallmark of the search for truth. The Schoolmen were fundamentally traditional, as is shown by the well-known remark about dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants. As John of Salisbury points out, the advantage of seeing more and farther than their predecessors is not due to a keener vision or a greater height, but “because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature” (*Metalogicon* 3.4 [*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 98]).

⁶⁵ Peter Lombard, *Sentences* III, d. 20, c. 5: “. . . pro omnibus, quantum ad pretii sufficientiam: sed pro electis tantum, quantum ad efficaciam, quia praedesinitatis tantum salutem effecit” (ed. Grottaferrata [1981], 128, lns. 5–6).

⁶⁶ Arthur Landgraf, “Die Unterscheidung zwischen Hinreichen und Zuwendung der Erlösung,” *Scholastik* 9 (1934): 202–28, reprinted in *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, vol. 2/2 (Regensburg: Pustet, 1954), 329–58.

Peter Lombard, <i>Glossam in Hebraios</i> 2:9 (PL, 192:419B, no. 236)	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Super Hebraios</i> 2, lec. 3, no. 125	John Chrysostom, <i>Homilia IV</i> (PG, 63:38)
Gustaret, dico, pro omnibus, scilicet praedestinati qui per ejus mortem redempti sunt et salvati. Vel pro omnibus hominibus, generaliter mortuus est, quia omnibus pretium sufficit. Ideo proprie dixit pro omnibus, quia non pro fidelibus tantum, sed pro mundo universe mortuus est. <i>Et si omnes non credunt, ipse tamen quod suum est implevit.</i>	Sufficiens enim quantum ad se omnibus est. I Tim. IV, v. 10: qui est salvator omnium, maxime autem fidelium. Chrysostomus: pro omnibus hominibus generaliter mortuus est, quia omnibus pretium sufficit. <i>Et si omnes non credunt, ipse tamen quod suum est implevit.</i>	Ut gratia Dei pro omnibus gustaret mortem: non pro fidelibus solum, sed pro universo orbe terrae; nam ipse quidem mortuus est pro omnibus. Quid tum autem, <i>si non omnes crediderunt? Ipse quod suum erat implevit.</i> Et proprie dixit, Pro omnibus gustaret mortem.
That he might taste, I say, for all, namely for the predestined who by his death are redeemed and saved. Or he died for all in general because the prize was sufficient for all. Hence he said rightly for all because he died not for the faithful only, but for the whole world. And if all do not believe, he nevertheless fulfilled his part. (trans. mine)	For of itself it is sufficient for all: who is the savior of all, but especially of the faithful (1 Tim 4:10); he died for all in general, because the price was sufficient for all. And if all do not believe, he nevertheless fulfilled his part (Chrysostom). (from Baer trans. given in note 17)	“That by the grace of God He should taste death for every man,” not for the faithful only, but even for the whole world: for He indeed died for all; But what if all have not believed? He hath fulfilled His own part. (trans. from <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>, series 1, vol. 14)

Christ's death is sufficient for all because, despite what the human response will be, at least “he himself nevertheless fulfilled what is his [*ipse tamen quod suum est implevit*]. In this sense, it belongs to God *ex officio* to save and for this reason he became incarnate and was given the name ‘Jesus,’ which is identical to ‘Savior.’”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See *Super I Tim* 4, lec. 2, no. 164: “And we endure because of the hope of life, because we hope in the living God, who is the Savior of the present and the future life. And because of God's work, which is to save. Isa 43:11: *there is no savior besides*

Far from introducing a foreign element in to the scriptural text, a proper exegesis requires, so Saint Thomas thinks, the use of the (for him) classic distinction between sufficiency and efficiency as a way to do justice to Hebrews 2:9 in light of the whole of Scripture. Such a holistic exegesis, integrating Scripture, the Fathers, and his Scholastic predecessors, enables Saint Thomas, moreover, to show that it fits well with the Nicene Creed as a magisterially promulgated *regula fidei*.

The Mode of Christ's Passion

Recall that the phrase under investigation reads “through the grace of God he might taste death for all.” The mode of Christ's Passion is expressed by “to taste death,” which Saint Thomas does not consider identical to “to die.” On the contrary, given that the metaphor of “tasting death” belongs to the literal sense, he explores its various meanings in depth. The first thing he does is to assign a temporal meaning to the verb “to taste” by noting that the verb “to taste” contains the idea of moving quickly rather than lingering on, similar to someone who merely sips at a drink rather than taking in the entire drink. Hence, Christ merely tasted death and then “he rose at once.” Saint Thomas seems to have borrowed this idea either directly from the homily by John Chrysostom I mentioned above⁶⁸ or indirectly from Hugh of Saint Cher's *Postilla*.⁶⁹ He also finds inspiration for this reading in Psalm 110, which the author of Hebrews uses frequently to establish a connection between the death and resurrection of Christ and the establishment of Christ's new priesthood. In particular Psalm 100:7—“He will drink from the brook [*de torrente*] by the way [*in via*]; therefore he will lift up his head”—gives Saint Thomas the occasion to depict Christ's death as the death of a wayfarer (*viator*) who quickly (*statim*) drinks from a brook, which indicates his Passion, and then crosses it, which indicates his resurrection.⁷⁰ Such a

me. This is God become incarnate and called Jesus. Matt 1:21: *For he shall save his people from their sins*. And Jesus is the same as Savior, because he saves with a bodily salvation which extends to all; hence he says *of all men*. And with a spiritual salvation which extends only to the good; hence he says, *especially of the faithful*.”

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilia IV*: “Et proprie dixit, pro omnibus gustaret mortem” (PG, 63:40).

⁶⁹ Hugo of St Cher, *Postilla*, 7:241b: “Pro omnibus gustaret mortem, id est, experiretur breviter dolorem mortis, cito enim transit” (compare with Chrysostom's sermon in the third column of the table above).

⁷⁰ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 126: “*Might taste*: behold the manner. For a person who has not eaten or drunk much is said to have tasted. Hence, because Christ did not continue in death but rose at once, he tasted death: *he shall drink of the torrent in the way* (Ps 110:7). One who is on the way hurries.” Commenting on Matt 16: 28 (“Amen I say to you, there are some of them who stand here, who will not taste

temporal understanding of “to taste” fits well with a contemporary observation. The Vulgate uses two expressions for the Greek *brachy*: *paulo minus* in Hebrews 2:7, and *modico* in 2:9. While the Latin points more to a spatial meaning “a little lower,” the Greek can have both a spatial and a temporal meaning: “for a short time.” Unaware of the Greek original but inspired by Isaiah 54:7—“For a brief moment [*modico*] I have forsaken thee”—Thomas intimates a temporal meaning, “since the Passion lasted for a small time.”⁷¹ The longer version of the commentary explains further that Christ tasted death only for a little while in order to express his hope in the resurrection of his body. Saint Thomas finds this expressed in Psalm 15:10: “Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; nor wilt Thou give Thy holy one to see corruption.” In commenting on this verse of Psalm 15, a psalm which prefigures Christ’s triumph by way of the Cross over principalities and power (Col 2:15),⁷² he comments that the Christ’s time spent in hell served to prove both the “truth of his humanity” and the truth of him possessing “a true body.”⁷³

The tasting of death does not merely refer to intended unity of Christ’s Passion and resurrection. Saint Thomas observes: “Taste is a discernor of flavor; hence, one who tastes discerns more than one who drinks.”⁷⁴ As if to refute the claim that a mere tasting of death stands in contrast with a “real” death in the full sense of the word, Saint Thomas turns

death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom”), he writes: “Sinners are swallowed up by death, but the just taste death” (*Super Matt* ch. 16, lec. 3, no. 1416). For the brook as indicating His passion, see the comment on John 18:1 (“Haec cum dixisset Jesus, egressus est cum discipulis suis trans torrentem Cedron”) in *Super Ioann* 18, lec. 1, no. 2274: “It is fitting for this mystery that he cross a brook, because the brook indicates his passion” (trans. Fabian Larcher and James Weisheipl [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010]).

⁷¹ See *Super Heb* 2, lec. 2, no. 109: “Secundo dicitur paulo minus quantum ad durationem, quia modicum duravit. Is. LIV, 7: in modico dereliqui te, et cetera.”

⁷² See *Super Psalmos* 15, no. 1: “This is the title of Christ, who was triumphant through Cross: *triumphing over them in himself, despoiling the principalities and powers* (Col. 2:15). Here it is being indicated therefore that in this Psalm the kingdom of Christ is particularly treated. He raises the question in the same place of whether Christ possessed the virtue of hope and responds: “It should be said like this: he indeed hoped for the eternal life for others but for himself he hoped for the glorification of his body. The glorification of his soul, however, he possessed from in the instant of his conception.”

⁷³ See *Super Psalmos* 15, no. 7: “The reason is that the resurrection requires the union of body and soul. Therefore the soul conjoined to the divinity did not have to remain in hell but she had to remain there until the moment the truth of his humanity and of his true flesh might be proven.”

⁷⁴ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 126. For the Aristotelian foundations of this claim, see *In II De anima*, lec. 21, nos. 506–7.

things around and claims that in tasting one arrives at a more profound knowledge of a substance than in actually consuming that substance. In other words, Christ really did experience death and pain. Here also, as in numerous other places in his biblical commentaries, we find Thomas using Scripture to refute the position that Christ assumed an illusory or imaginary body (Manichaeus), or that, even if his body was real, he did not assume a rational soul (Apollinaris).⁷⁵ The expression “tasting death” as used by Scripture, therefore, refutes the idea that Christ did not truly experience pain or death because he had an imaginary body.⁷⁶ This apologetic function of Scripture is, as I have argued elsewhere, a striking feature of his exegesis and what motivates him to explicitly recommend the study of Scripture as a protection against heretics.⁷⁷

Saint Thomas further observes that “tasting or not tasting lie in the power of the taster [*in potestate gustantis*].” Given that the recitation of Scripture, in particular within a liturgical context, stimulates verbal similes, this immediately brings to mind for Saint Thomas John 10:18: “potestatem habeo ponendi animam meam.” In other words, Hebrews 2:9 affirms that it was Christ who gave himself up to death; he was not forced into it but embraced his sufferings and death willingly: “I have the power to lay down my life.”⁷⁸ Elsewhere, commenting on Gal 1: 4 (“Who gave himself for our sins”), he makes the same point (*sponte se obtulit*) by stringing together our verse with Ephesians 5: 2 and Titus 2: 14: “Christ also hath loved us and hath delivered Himself for us” (Eph 5:2); “That He might taste death for all” (Heb 2:9); “Who gave Himself for us” (Titus

⁷⁵ Here one has to take into account that the death of Christ refers to his body only. In fact, when collecting the sayings of the Fathers on Matt 16:28 and Luke 9: 1 in *Catena aurea* he quotes St. Ambrose and Rabanus Maurus to the effect that the effect that the “tasting of death” mentioned in these passages refer to the death of the body and not of the soul.

⁷⁶ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 126: “Furthermore, taste is a discerner of flavor; hence, one who tastes discerns more than one who drinks. Therefore, to indicate that he tasted death and pain, and that his death was not imaginary, as Mani and Apollinaris claim, he says that he might taste death; Lam 1:12: *O, all you that pass by the way* [attend and see, if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow].”

⁷⁷ See *Super Titus* 1, lec. 3, no. 24: “Ut custodiant [doctrinam sanam] contra haereticos . . . per studium sacrae Scripturae.” See my essay “Scripture as a Guidepost for How Not to Read Scripture: Aquinas on the Apologetic Function of Scripture,” in *Thomas Aquinas, Biblical Theologian*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Roger Nutt (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020).

⁷⁸ For more on this, see the contribution of Piotr Roszak in the present issue of *Nova et Vetera* (English).

2:14).⁷⁹ Moreover, the fittingness of the mode of Christ's Passion never stands alone, but always exists in view of its goal: "grace is ordered to glory."⁸⁰ In other words, the acceptance of death on Christ's part is ordered toward the glory of the adoptive sonship of the children of the heavenly Father. In this sense, Saint Thomas can write: "For He only *tasted* death, since He did not accept it except so that through the merit of the Passion He would be perfected. For His very perfection is His glorification."⁸¹

Saint Thomas concludes his observations by noting that "to taste" expresses "the bitterness of death [*mortis amaritudinem*], which is experienced by taste," recalling Lamentations 1: 12 ("O, all you that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow") and Isaiah 24:9 ("the drink shall be bitter to those who drink it"). Is this observation merely reflective of a typically medieval sense of devotional piety? There are serious problems with this view.⁸²

The verse from Lamentations occurs frequently in Saint Thomas's writings and in particular in his early *Super Isaiam* 53, the chapter on the Suffering Servant. Commenting on the meaning of *novissimus* in the Vulgate of Isaiah 53:3 ("despectum, et novissimum virorum, virum dolorum."), he writes, "On the word 'most abject' [*novissimum*], note that Christ was the most abject of men, first of all because of the bitterness [*acerbitatem*] of his suffering," and illustrates this once again with Lamentations 1:12.⁸³ In his final years, he returned to this same verse as a key

⁷⁹ *Super Gal.* ch. 1, lec. 1, no. 14.

⁸⁰ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 127: "Gratia vero ordinatur ad gloriam."

⁸¹ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 128 (emphasis mine).

⁸² In so far as devotion is nowadays often equated with mere sentimentality, the question in itself already contains an anachronism. St. Thomas considers devotion to be a virtue and therefore to contain an act of the will concerned with "to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God" (*ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 1). This is not to say that he does not value the accompanying affections of such an act. See for instance *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 4, ad 3: "Tears are caused not only through sorrow, but also through a certain tenderness of the affections, especially when one considers something that gives joy mixed with pain. Thus men are wont to shed tears through a sentiment of piety, when they recover their children or dear friends, whom they thought to have lost. In this way tears arise from devotion." See the foundational contribution by Leo Elders, "The Inner Life of Jesus in the Theology and Devotion of Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Faith in Christ and the Worship of Christ: New Approaches to Devotion to Christ*, ed. Leo Scheffczyk (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 65–80.

⁸³ *Super Isa* 53 (LE, 28:216.149–52): "Nota super illo verbo, *novissimum*, quod Christus fuit novissimus, primo propter doloris acerbitatem. Thren. 1: *o vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus*" (LE, 28:216.149–52). See also *In Symbolum Apostolorum*, a. 4.

to exploring why the sufferings of Christ were indeed the greatest.⁸⁴ In fact, when the *Doctor Eucharisticus* was asked which sign was the greatest, Christ giving his body to us for food or Christ suffering for us on the Cross, he was adamant in choosing the latter, for the measure and proof of a man's love consists in what he is willing to lose out of love for others. In his Passion and death Christ surrendered His most precious possession, his own life.⁸⁵ It is this prevalence which causes him to insist that Christ's real presence is not merely the presence of the body and blood of Christ, but of the body that was given for us and the blood that was poured; that is to say, it is *Christus passus* who is really present.⁸⁶

As Jean-Pierre Torrell has pointed out on numerous occasions, the conformity to Christ in his Passion is a key element of Saint Thomas's spirituality.⁸⁷ Peter Kwasniewski has observed, following Ulrich Horst, that Jerome's striking phrase *nudum Christum nudus sequi* ("following naked

⁸⁴ ST III, q. 46, a. 6, sc: "On the contrary, it is written (Lam. 1:12) on behalf of Christ's Person: *O all ye that pass by the way attend, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow*" ("Sed contra est quod habetur Thren. I ex persona Christi, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus"). Jean-Pierre Torrell remarks: "If no one has suffered as Christ has, it is less so because of the quantity or quality of the sufferings endured than on account of the person who suffers, the Word of God himself in his humanity" (*Encyclopédie. Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d'Aquin: Texte de la Tertia Pars (ST IIIa) traduit et commenté, accompagné de données historiques et doctrinales et de cinquante textes choisis* [Paris: Cerf, 2008], 570).

⁸⁵ See *Quodlibet* V, q. 3, a. 2 [6] (LE, 25/2:371.44–52). His reasoning here is an excellent example of the interplay of Aristotle and Scripture. The *sed contra*, that is to say, the scriptural authority is John 15:13 ("Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"). First, he uses Aristotle to argue that self-love, as the willing of the good for oneself, is the measure of every kind of love. If for the sake of another someone wants to disregard the good that one wants for oneself and self-love is the measure, it follows that this love for another is the highest love. This is confirmed by Prov 12:26: "He that neglecteth a loss for the sake of a friend, is just" (Douay-Rheims). There are three goods one wants for oneself: exterior things, the good of the body, and the good of the soul. Just as it is a greater sign of love to want to loose an exterior things for the sake of a friend, so also to will the loss of the soul in death for a friend constitutes the greatest sign of love.

⁸⁶ See: ST III, q. 73, a. 5, ad 2; q. 73, a. 6; q. 74, a. 1; q. 79, a. 1. For recent treatments: see Matthew Levering, *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 49–75; Reinhard Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 175–92 (ch. 3).

⁸⁷ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 118–20, 141–43; Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), ch. 5.

the naked Christ") is a leitmotif in Thomas's portrayal of the *sequela Christi*.⁸⁸ Moreover, given both the particular nature of Christ's suffering as the Word of God incarnate and the fact that the "the humanity of Christ is the way by which we come to the divinity,"⁸⁹ Saint Thomas extols the Cross above all other things as belonging to the *sequela Christi*:

But among all that Christ did and suffered during His mortal life, the example of His most holy Cross is, above all other things, proposed to Christians for their imitation. He Himself says, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). St. Paul also, speaking as though crucified with Christ, and exulting only in His Cross, says (Gal 6:17), "I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body," being a diligent follower of the example of the Cross.⁹⁰

The principle mentioned above that grace is ordered to glory also enables Saint Thomas to use the patristic image of Christ as the Divine Physician in order to emphasize the "bitterness of death" as a salutary mean because final salvation can only occur after death. "Just as a physician tastes a medicine so that a sick man may not loath it, but drink it more securely, so Christ himself . . . tasted death, so that no one might flee from death; since without death there is no salvation."⁹¹

⁸⁸ Peter Kwasniewski, "Golden Straw: St. Thomas and the Ecstatic Practice of Theology," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 2, no. 1 (2004): 61–90, at 80. See also: Ulrich Horst, "Was hat Thomas von Aquin veranlasst, in den Predigerorden einzutreten," *Archä Verbi* 6 (2009): 102–20; Horst, "Thomas von Aquin und der Predigerorden," *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte* 17 (1998): 35–52; Horst, "Christ, Exemplar Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum, According to Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans*, ed. Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 256–70. These studies are now collected in *Thomas von Aquin. Predigerbruder und Professor* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2017).

⁸⁹ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 2 (LE, 42:83.14–15).

⁹⁰ Aquinas, *Contra doctrinam retrahentium*, ch. 15 (LE, 41CL69.80–89; in *An Apology for the Religious Orders*; trans. John Procter, O.P. [London: Sands, 1902]). See also *Super Matt* 16, lec. 3, no. 1408; *In Symbolum Apostolorum*, a. 4, and *Sermon Germinet terra* (LE, 44/1:290–592).

⁹¹ *Super Heb* 2, lec. 3, no. 128: "Gustavit etiam, quia, cum ipse adduxerit filios in gloriam, sicut medicus gustat medicinam ne infirmus abhorreat sed ut securius bibat, ita ipse gustavit mortem, ut quia sine morte ingrediente necessitate, non est salus, nullus mortem refugiat." For the patristic sources see Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Concept of 'Christus Medicus' in St. Augustine," *Traditio* 10 (1954): 1–28; Michael Dörnemann, "Einer ist Arzt, Christus: Medizinales Verständnis von Erlösung in

Furthermore, this “devotional” exegesis of the expression “to taste death” as referring to the “bitterness” of Christ’s death seems inextricably connected to Saint Thomas the Dominican friar. The early account of the first members of the Order of Preachers, the *Lives of the Brethren (Vitae fratrum)* by Gerald de Frachet, written between about 1255 and 1260, contains several testimonies of the brethren’s devotion to Christ’s Passion (the Cross, the Five Wounds, etc.).⁹²

Seen in this light, one can concur with the apt description of Antoine Touron (1686–1775), the French Dominican biographer and historian. In his biography of Saint Thomas, first published in 1737, he devotes a chapter to “sources from which Saint Thomas has drawn science and wisdom.” In describing the second source as “the knowledge and love for Jesus Christ and His Cross” (the first being “intimate union with God through continual prayer”), he notes: “The Cross of his Savior was his first Book, the great object of his meditations, the rule of his entire life. It is at the foot of the Cross that he humiliated his mind in order to merit the understanding of the Mysteries. At the foot of the Cross he purified his heart in order to render it able to receive such understanding. . . . This divine wisdom, which the Apostle acquired in the third heaven, the beloved disciple on the breast of the Savior, Saint Augustine in the Scriptures, Saint Thomas learned at the feet of the Cross. The wounds of Jesus Christ were the masters whom he consulted in his doubts, and to whom he listened in his difficulties. . . . It is from this source that he drew the principles of his science, the abundance

der Theologie der griechischen Kirchenväter des zweiten bis vierten Jahrhunderts,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 17 (2013): 102–24. Most likely, however, Hugh of St. Cher is St. Thomas’s direct source. Compare the passage of St. Thomas with Hugo of St. Cher, *Postilla*, 7:241vb: “To taste. By this it is indicated that he could not be detained in death. Chrys. Just as a physician does not need to taste the nutriment that is prepared for the infirm but tastes it beforehand so that the infirm may be given the confidence to taste, so also men were afraid to receive death. Hence he himself did not have to die as is said in John 14 [30]: ‘The prince of this world cometh and in me he hath not anything’” (“Gustare. In hoc notatur quod non potuit detineri in morte. Chrys. Sicut medicus non habens necessitatem cibaria, quae infirmo praeeparata sunt gustare, gustat inde prior, ut infirmo fiduciam gustandi praebeat; ita homines formidabant mortem suscipere; ideo ipse non habens necessitatem moriendi sicut dicit Ioan. 14. [30] Venit Princeps mundi hujus; & in me non habet quincquam”).

⁹² *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. B. M. Reichert (Louvain: Typis E. Charpentier and J. Schoonjans, 1886). A few examples: 4.5.1; 4.24.9; 5.1.2; 5.2.8; 5.3.16; 5.6.4–5. One example of a later date is Heinrich Seuse, for whom the contemplation of Christ’s “suffering humanity” (*gelitten menscheit*) is the way to arrive at the “heights of the divinity” (*Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1907], 205 [in ch. 2: “Büchlein der ewigen Weisheit”]).

and purity of his doctrine."⁹³

Finally, what Tournon captures in his biography about the importance of Saint Thomas's devotion to the salvific suffering of Christ for his theology resonates perfectly with what a generation earlier Vincent Contenson (1641–1674) set out to do in his *Theologia mentis et cordis*. In one of the opening chapters, entitled *Commercium theologiae et pietatis* ("The Communication or Fellowship of Theology and Piety"), he laments the fact that many have been adding to the concise presentations of Saint Thomas himself unsuitable perplexities so that "you could very well call it dialectics instead of sacred doctrine." Not only is the result foreign to the mind of Saint Thomas but it deters many from studying theology "because the sterile speculation dries up piety and almost extinguishes it." He advises his readers, in fact, that it is better to ignore theological truths if the only reason they want to know them is out of curiosity, which is "the concupiscence of the eyes." An "integral Thomistic theology" (*theologiae thomisticae integrae*), however, recognizes the primacy of God's initiative⁹⁴ and the response by someone pure of heart, as Saint Augustine writes: "So he who holds charity in his conduct grasps both what is plain and what is hidden in divine words: It is a love that asks, a love that seeks, love that

⁹³ Antoine Tournon, *La vie de S. Thomas d'Aquin de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs, Docteur de l'Église, avec un exposé de sa doctrine et de ses ouvrages* (Paris: Gissey, 1740), 363. Tournon's original French (a very valuable but also very difficult to find work) reads: "La Croix du Sauveur fut son premier Livre, le grand objet de ses méditations, la règle de toute sa vie. C'est aux pieds de la Croix qu'il humiliot son esprit, pour mériter l'intelligence des Mystères; et qu'il purifioit son coeur, pour se rendre capable de la recevoir. Là, il apprenoit le secret d'entrer dans la vérité par la charité, et de rapporter toutes ses connoissances à celle de Jesus-Christ, de soi-même et de son salut. . . . Cette divine sagesse, que l'Apôtre avoit apprise dans le troisième Ciel, le Disciple bien-aimé sur la poitrine du Sauveur, saint Augustin dans les Ecritures; saint Thomas l'apprenoit aux pieds du Crucifix. Les plaies de Jesus-Christ étoient les maîtres qu'il consultoit dans ses doutes, et qu'il écoutoit dans ses difficultés: c'étoit comme autant de bouches qui parloient à son coeur, et dont ce coeur docile entendoit parfaitement la langage: c'est de cette source qu'il tiroit les principes de sa science, l'abondance et la pureté de sa doctrine: c'est de là que sortoient des rayons, à la saveur desquels il approfondit en peu de tems tout ce qu'un Théologien peut sçavoir, tout ce que l'esprit humain paroît capable de pénétrer dans les vérités de la Religion. Si la vivacité de sa foi, son amour pour Jesus-Christ crucifié, et son attention à écouter celui, qui dans les infirmités de la chair est la sagesse incréée, augmentoient tous les jours; il recevoit aussi continuellement de nouvelles preuves de la bonté de Dieu."

⁹⁴ He refers to 1 John 2:20 ("You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you know all things") and 2:27 ("You have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything").

knocks, love that discloses and love too that abides in that which has been disclosed.”⁹⁵ Or in the words of Contenson himself, “*Gustanda sunt prius divina mysteria quam videnda per speculationem*” (“The divine mysteries are first to be tasted before they are seen through speculation”)⁹⁶

Conclusion

In our detailed analysis of Thomas’s commentary on Hebrews 2:9, we have come across many of his hermeneutical methods and features of his biblical exegesis such as the *divisio textus*, the admission of different readings of even a single word, the Christological reading of the Psalms, the influence of the Fathers, mediated by Peter Lombard and possibly by Hughes of Saint Cher’s *Postilla*, Scholastic distinctions, the analogy of faith, warnings against heretical readings of a passage, and an interest, albeit limited, in issues of textual criticism and misattributions of sources either by him or his scribes. As such, his analysis of this verse might serve as an excellent example of how Saint Thomas reads Scripture. Whether his analysis of this verse can still be fruitful today—that is to say, whether it can function as an example of reading Scripture with Saint Thomas—does not depend, arguably, so much on the details of his exegesis but rather, or much more, on the philosophical and theological assumptions with which one approaches the biblical text. This means, to put it slightly differently, whether Saint Thomas can still speak from the heart to the heart of his readers in a Newmanian fashion (*cor ad cor loquitur*), as his Dominican brothers Vincent Contenson and Antoine Tournon intimated. N.V

⁹⁵ This phrase strings together an excerpt from Augustine’s Sermon 350 (*PL*, 39:1534) with his *De moribus Ecclesiae* 1.17.31 (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 90:35–36). Contenson further invokes *De doctrina christiana* 1.36.40—“So anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbour, has not yet succeeded in understanding them” (trans. R. H. P. Green [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995], 49)—and *Confessiones* 4.11: “Of what use to me then was my intelligence, swift to run clear through those sciences, of what use were all those knotty books I unravelled without the aid of any human teacher, when in the doctrine of love of You I erred so far and so foully and so sacrilegiously?” (trans. F. J. Sheed [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943], 80).

⁹⁶ Vincent Contenson, *Theologia mentis et cordis, seu speculationes universae sacrae doctrinae pietate temperatae, e Patribus, Sancto potissimum Augustino ac Doctore Angelico D. Thoma derivatae* (Venetiis: Joannes Baptistam Recurti, 1727; first published 1675), 11 (bk. 1, diss. 1: praeambula, appendix II: Commmercium theologiae et pietatis).