

The decisive event in the history of the world, is the victory of the Lamb, the death and resurrection of Jesus, which moves world history on to endtime, judgement and salvation, the death of Satan and the renewal of the cosmos. Because the victory has already been won, the Lamb is able to take and open the scroll, thus setting these events in motion. God's kingdom already breaks through on earth. The faithful are already seen in heaven. The the Lamb is seen to be in heaven, yet world events show that the hostile powers on earth are already giving way to the rule of the Lamb.

- 1 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, (Marshall, Morgan Scott, 1974), p.155.
- 2 Margaret Barker, *The Lost Prophet*, (SPCK, 1988), p. 72.
- 3 Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia) p.46–48.
- 4 E. Lohmeyer, *Di Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tubingen 1926; 1953).
- 5 Beasley-Murray, *ibid*, p. 124.
- 6 Beasley-Murray, *ibid*, p.208ff.
- 7 Schüssler Fiorenza *ibid*, p 56.

Saint Thomas Aquinas and Theological Exegesis of Sacred Scripture

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St. Thomas Aquinas is primarily a theologian. He writes of Sacred Scripture not only as a theologian, but because he is a theologian. As a master of theology his essential textbook was the Bible. From earlier theologians St. Thomas received an understanding of theology, which he shared with his contemporaries and which he in turn was to deepen and strengthen: Sacred Scripture provides the *auctoritas* of theology. It gives rise to theology, enables and governs it. M-D Chenu has emphasized and demonstrated St. Thomas' fundamental reliance on the Bible as the foundation of his theological work.¹

St. Thomas says that 'the truth of faith is contained in Sacred Scripture.' He understood that a cursory reading of the text would not reveal this truth very clearly, because it is in Scripture, but 'diffusely, in

diverse ways and sometimes darkly.' Thomas provides an insight into his own approach to exegesis when he continues: 'the result is that to draw out the truth of faith from Scripture requires a prolonged study and practice.'² Here we see Thomas the theologian approaching the sacred books in order to draw out carefully from them what faith teaches through them.

St. Thomas served the Church as a 'Master of the Sacred Scriptures' (*Magister in Sacra Pagina*) and, therefore, as J. Mahoney states, the systematic works of Aquinas do not constitute his truly magisterial activity.³ Mahoney notes the valuable work of H. Denifle who, in his discussion of the text-books of the medieval professors of theology, shows the Bible to be the basic text-book and indicates that 'the theologian of that day knew no book so well as the Bible.'⁴

Pope Leo XIII described St. Thomas as the leading exegete of Sacred Scripture among the theologians of the scholastic age.⁵ This also illustrates that an adequate understanding of the theological work of Aquinas requires a knowledge of his theological use of the Bible and indeed, a consideration of his specifically exegetical works.

S. Lyonnet holds that the modern exegete would be wrong to reject the help which St. Thomas can supply, notwithstanding the deficiency of the tools of exegesis at his disposal in comparison with those available today. He offers an example of the value of his exegesis: the interpretation of the Pauline opposition between the 'letter' and the 'spirit'. This was a doctrine most dear to St. Paul and central to his teaching. St. Thomas also gives special place to it: his theology of the new law of the Gospel which presents his teaching on Christian morality is founded on this doctrine. The exegesis here has much to recommend it and Lyonnet cites this instance as but one of many which could be fruitfully considered.⁶

St. Thomas had a profound respect for the mystery and the power of the Word of God. Steeped in the traditions of the Fathers, he elevated the theology of the Word of God to new importance with frequent and strong emphases, such as when he comments on the soul's need, for its subsistence, of the spiritual nourishment which is the Word of God.⁷ In several places in his *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, he describes the effective power of the Word of God in the lives of its hearers.

The terms *sacra doctrina*, *sacra scriptura* and *scientia divinitus inspirata* are used with apparently identical signification by St. Thomas in the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*. This is not unusual. Other theologians of his time did likewise. In the writings of St. Albert the Great, 'theology,' 'theological science' and 'Scripture' are synonymous. For Robert Kilwardby there was no difference between 'Scripture' and 'theology.' In the same first question St. Thomas even equates Scripture

and theology when he writes: *sacra scriptura seu doctrina*. And in the preface to his exposition of the Pauline writings, he states that the doctrine of theology, almost in its totality, is contained in the Psalms and in the Epistles of St. Paul.⁸

In stressing that Sacred Scripture and theology 'are organically tied together and can never be separated,' J. van der Ploeg adds that St. Thomas would emphatically deny the saying of some theologians, 'that (literal) biblical exegesis is no theology, and that the exegete of the Bible is no theologian.'⁹

Y. Congar notes that *Sacra Pagina (Scriptura)* became the technical and official name of the theological discipline and was retained even when there was a development in the form of teaching from the actual explication of the text to covering points of theological systematization.¹⁰

There is no doubt that St. Thomas saw all sacred doctrine as comprising a unity. It is interesting, too, and not often realized, that following his graduation as a master, the ordinary lectures of Aquinas dealt totally with the explanation of the letter of Sacred Scripture. The Thomist scholar Thomas Gilby could write as lately as 1963: 'Perhaps only in recent years have we recovered the sense of how profoundly scriptural St. Thomas' theology is.'¹¹

The *Summa Theologiae* makes consistent use both of scriptural citation and commentary. The other theological works of Aquinas also include many quotations from the Bible with an interpretation frequently provided. In the *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas gives a detailed exegesis of the first chapter of Genesis.¹² The *Summa* is in fact so scriptural that it should be read, according to one view, as a technical biblical commentary.¹³ Moreover, it seems that St. Thomas intended the *Summa* to be a work for beginners in the study of sacred doctrine as a means of assisting them in reaching a synthesis of scientific reflection on the major tracts of theology.¹⁴

St. Thomas wrote the *Summa* but he never taught it.¹⁵ This is not surprising since the work of a medieval theologian was to concentrate on the Word of God and to teach the interpretation of the books of Sacred Scripture. This involved neither the formation of a systematic theology nor the creation of a theological synthesis but the gradual pilgrimage of serious thought through the Word of God.

It is clear then that neither the *Summa Theologiae* nor the apologetic *Summa Contra Gentiles* can be considered to be the primary theological works of Aquinas. The Scripture commentaries, as the immediate fruit of his life of teaching, represent a notable contribution to theology. What is important, therefore, is the essential bond between the new systematic of the thirteenth century and the exegesis of Scripture which prepared the

way for them.¹⁶ It is surprising that St. Thomas' so-called theological works have been studied for so long in almost total isolation from his biblical writings. Since the commentaries, in fact, contain much that contributes to a clearer reading of the *Summa Theologiae*, they are the means to a deeper understanding of the theological thought of St. Thomas. Moreover, to appreciate the usage of scriptural texts in the theological writings, it is frequently necessary to read St. Thomas' treatment of these texts in his commentaries, and particularly when the quotations are given without comment, which is often the case.

Mahoney has pointed out the paleness of the description of St. Thomas as an Aristotelian or a Schoolman and offers an interesting observation:

He was a man who, for his day, had a comprehension and a penetration of Scripture which are astonishing. It is true that he did not speak Scripture almost as a second language, as St. Bernard did. But, if one may use the phrase, he walked about inside Scripture. It was his world; and of that world he was a theologian, at home in it, appropriating it calmly and imperturbably, and showing to his contemporaries what he considered its sweet reasonableness.¹⁷

The well-known story told of St. Thomas: that he would rather have a copy of the commentary of St. John Chrysostom on St. Matthew's Gospel (translated by Burgundio of Pisa in the late twelfth century), than the city of Paris illustrates his love of and dedication to Sacred Scripture and its exegesis. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the biblical commentaries of St. Thomas have suffered such great neglect, because an increased knowledge of them can only enhance appreciation of his actual contribution to theology. Obviously the exegetical scholar of the late twentieth century will recognize difficulties and imperfections in these thirteenth-century texts; yet, he may also be surprised by the wealth of profound reflection which they offer. Indeed, according to M-D Philippe, the Scripture-commentaries represent the theological work 'par excellence' of St. Thomas, and he singles out in particular the *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*.¹⁸

As the Second Vatican Council carefully explains in *Dei Verbum*, Tradition together with Sacred Scripture constitute the source of revelation. It is remarkable that the specific notion of Tradition is not explicitly developed in the writings of St. Thomas. Y. Congar, however, demonstrates that it would be erroneous to conclude that St. Thomas ignored the idea of oral tradition.¹⁹ In his presentation of the meaning of Tradition and *sacra doctrina* in the work of Aquinas, Congar indicates how there is a correspondence between the *sacra doctrina* of St. Thomas

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and Tradition as it is understood today.²⁰

St. Thomas adheres to the custom of the Fathers in appealing to Scripture for evidence in demonstration of the truths of faith. 'Necessary truths of faith' is a term which he repeatedly employs in his *Expositio super Symbolum Apostolorum* (opusc. 33). St. Thomas holds, as does St. Augustine, that Sacred Scripture contains the clear formulation of all these 'necessary truths of faith.' On the other hand, St. Thomas has frequent recourse to the designation: 'the faith of the whole Church.' However, Catholic theology's regular use of the term 'unanimous opinion of the Fathers' begins later, with the Council of Trent. It is noteworthy also that St. Thomas respects the time-honoured exegesis of many biblical texts, especially when this teaching is found in papal writings or conciliar conclusions.

He concurs with the medieval theologians who viewed the Sacred Word as organically joined to the Gloss of the Fathers, the liturgy and the spirituality of the living Church. His stance can be contrasted with that of the Reformers who regarded the Bible apart from its necessary association with the ecclesial tradition, liturgy or spirituality. Recognizing the living Church, and indeed, enlivened by it, St. Thomas could speak of 'the whole Church from whom the Gospel is received.'²¹

St. Thomas' approach to exegesis and to the teaching of theology was of course influenced and in large measure determined by the reverence in which he held the sacred text. In a discourse given in 1256 when he was appointed a master in theology, he himself outlines the qualities which should mark a teacher of Sacred Scripture.²² St. Thomas here identifies three aspects of *sacra doctrina* which ground its elevated nature and purpose: its origin, the subtlety of its matter, and the sublimity of its end. The origin of *sacra doctrina* is the Wisdom, of which the Word of God is the source; eternal life accounts for the sublime finality of Sacred Scripture.

In this text also, St. Thomas speaks of the dignity of the 'doctors' of sacred doctrine. His comments are clearly eschatological. He applies the text 'our homeland is in Heaven' (Phil. 3: 20) to teachers, indicating that their concern should be the things of heaven. The dignity of which he speaks belongs not to the teachers personally, but is applied to the *sacra doctrina* with which they are entrusted, and therefore, their lives he says, should be upright and innocent and holy.²³

The Expository Works of St. Thomas: His Method and Qualities

Although the *Summa Theologiae* is the most widely known and highly acclaimed work of St. Thomas, his commentaries on Sacred Scripture are

his real master-pieces, quite literally, because they are the direct fruit of his immediate work as a master of sacred theology and represent his actual teaching on the Word of God. Because of the theology which they expound, they are in their own right, masterly works. It is interesting that the combined scriptural writings of St. Thomas exceed in length the *Summa Theologiae*.

The exegetical works of St. Thomas Aquinas were written between the year 1256, when he became a master of theology, and 1274, when he died. During those years, he produced commentaries on the following books of the Bible: Isaiah, the Canticles, Lamentations, Jeremiah, Job, the Psalms, the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistles of Paul, and the Gospel of John. He also composed the *Catena Aurea*, a commentary on the four Gospels, consisting of a selection of patristic texts which he personally chose. The *Commentary on the Canticles* has unfortunately not survived, although there have been two spurious commentaries on this biblical book ascribed to him.

B. Smalley recorded the view, current at her time of writing, that the exposition on Isaiah was composed during St. Thomas' last years at Naples.²⁴ However, the research of A. Dondaine clearly establishes this commentary as one of Aquinas' earliest works and probably as his first biblical commentary.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is probable that there were two distinct parts with separate dating.²⁶ There is a similar lack of certainty with regard to the subsequent exegetical works since the chronology of St. Thomas' writings has been a subject of much controversy. The conclusions of J.A. Weisheipl,²⁷ however, drawing from the most recently available scholarship, allow the following dating to seem plausible: *Expositio in Job 'ad litteram'*, Orvieto 1261–1264; *Postilla super Psalmos* (Ps 1–54), Naples 1272–1273; *Glossa continua super Evangelia (Catena aurea)*, Orvieto, Rome, 1262/3–1267; *Lectura super Matthaeum*, Paris, 1256–1259; *Lectura super Johannem*, Paris, 1269–1272; *Expositio et lectura super Epistolas Pauli Apostoli*, Italy, 1259–1265, and Paris 1270–1272. The commentaries on Jeremiah and Lamentations have been assigned to Viterbo (1267–1268) by P. Glorieux.²⁸ However, the cursory nature of these two commentaries adds weight to I. T. Eschmann's view, adopted by Weisheipl, that they belong to Thomas' years at Cologne (1248–1252) under the guidance of Albert the Great, for whom Thomas was a *cursor biblicus*.²⁹

Since St. Thomas was regarded as an excellent teacher, he lectured and 'disputed' more than was customary for professors at that time, at the university of Paris. The text of his lectures, given as *magister sacrae paginae* (1256–1273), constitute his actual commentaries on Sacred Scripture. As a professor of the thirteenth century, he was, according to P.

Mandonnet, 'the most complete type.'³⁰ He was committed not only to teaching well, but also to finishing the course he set out to teach. His lectures on the Psalms were terminated abruptly on December 5, 1273, at the end of his working life.³¹ His other unfinished commentaries are those on Jeremiah and the Pauline Epistles. The reason for their incompleteness is not definitively known. However, since St. Thomas expounded the Epistles of St. Paul twice, a combination-commentary has survived.³² In teaching it appears that St. Thomas presented an exegesis of a book of the Old Testament first, followed by a work from the New Testament.

The forms both of *reportatio* and *ordinatio* combine in creating the biblical commentaries of St. Thomas. These forms correspond respectively to *lectura* and *expositio*, other terms which are sometimes used. *Ordinatio* refers to a commentary written or dictated by the author himself. The *reportatio* is a work of a student or scribe who attends the commentator's lecture, takes notes and then writes up the report. *Reportatio* and dictation are not synonymous. The gist of the lecture is produced, sometimes with omissions or abbreviations, sometimes with inaccuracies. B. Smalley suggests that the *reportatio* can have no pretensions to literary quality. It is distinguished by its 'ragged, colloquial style', although it is still a skilled work.³³

It appears that St. Thomas himself wrote the commentaries on the Old Testament, except for the lecture on the first four nocturns of the Psalter, while most of his exegesis of the New Testament comes to us from his disciples. Research to date concludes that the commentaries on Romans and First Corinthians 1–10 are the written exposition of St. Thomas. The commentary from chapter 11 of First Corinthians through to the end of the Letter to the Hebrews is a *reportatio*, as is the commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel. From Tolomeo of Lucca and Bernard Gui, early confrères and biographers of Aquinas, it is known that he wrote the commentary on the first five chapters of St. John's Gospel. The rest of this commentary is a *reportatio* by Reginald of Piperno which was 'corrected' by St. Thomas. The 'correction' theory is confirmed and strengthened by the evidence of Bartholomew of Capua who was a witness at the process for the canonization of St. Thomas.³⁴

P. Mandonnet detected little difference of style between the *reportatio* and *expositio* of St. Thomas and concludes that this may indicate that he dictated or lectured very slowly.³⁵ However, the similarity may also reflect the capability of his secretaries and the care with which he chose them. Secretaries certainly played an important role in his work of study and writing. Among his secretarial staff during his first term in Paris were the Dominicans, Peter d'Andria, Raymond Severi and Nicholas of Marsillac.³⁶ Although Thomas also had a large secretarial staff

during his second term in Paris, many of them remain anonymous. It is known, however, that among them were the particularly reliable and esteemed Reginald of Piperno, who was his secretary from 1259 until his death, and Evan Garnit, a cleric from the diocese of Treguier.³⁷

Records testify to the astounding fact that Thomas used to dictate in his cell to three and sometimes four secretaries at the same time, on different subjects. Concerning this, Weisheipl insists that the testimony of Evan Garnit leaves no room for doubt.³⁸ It seems then that St. Thomas' prolific output with its consistent high quality is due in no small measure to his extraordinary gift of intense concentration.

When Thomas was writing and teaching he had access to many *glossae* and medieval works of exegesis, as well as to the patristic writings. Referring to the Bible, its books and learned apparatus, B. Smalley speaks of the 'evolution' in the middle ages, and especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The modern chapters of the biblical books were finally established by 1300 and various sub-divisions within chapters were under experiment. This was also a time of perfecting the textual reform, first begun by Alcuin under Charlemagne, on the part of the Paris masters, who fostered interest in the purity of the text and in greater standardization. Furthermore, in the thirteenth century, the Paris masters supplemented their glossed text with *correctoria*.³⁹ These lists of corrections and alternative readings, first introduced by the Dominicans, laid the foundation for a specialization on textual criticism.⁴⁰

St. Thomas recognized from his own study that the manuscripts of the Vulgate were not textually identical and, from his knowledge of the writings of St. Jerome, he was familiar with the fact of differing texts of Scripture.⁴¹ J.A. Weisheipl points out that St. Thomas was dependent both on a personal non-critical copy of the Latin Vulgate and on the teachings of the available Latin and Greek patristic writings.⁴² T. Gilby suggests the likelihood that St. Thomas consulted the corrected version of the Vulgate, the Jacobin Bible, edited by his own community of Saint-Jacques in Paris.⁴³

In considering the style and form of the expositions, it must be remembered that St. Thomas was a medieval writer. He cannot therefore be assessed in the light of the new discoveries and 'developments of modern critical exegesis. As V. Bourke has noted, the impassioned dialogues between Job and his friends are treated as philosophical discourses or scholastic debates, following the pattern of *Quaestiones disputatae*.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, St. Thomas was certainly not prevented by the scholastic method from delivering an impressive exegesis of the books of Scripture, as in the case of the Book of Job, described by the medieval scholar, John of Colonna, as a *mirabile opus*.⁴⁵

St. Thomas' commentaries contain many short quotations of Scripture from books other than the actual book being expounded. He explained the Bible by the Bible, sometimes with parallel texts, sometimes with texts conveying apparently opposite or divergent meanings. These latter texts St. Thomas applies to the issue being discussed, both so as to enable a more profound understanding of Scripture to emerge and so as to show from the tenor of the texts that no contradiction exists.⁴⁶ He offers, for example, ingenious resolutions of the discrepancies between St. John and the Synoptics. The great number and variety of scriptural texts quoted by St. Thomas throughout his commentaries and the nature of his selection demonstrate his extraordinary familiarity with and profound appreciation of the books of the Bible.

One of the most outstanding differences to be noticed between St. Thomas and anterior exegetes is his penchant for original and detailed systematization.⁴⁷ The Pauline Epistles, for example, are expounded within the framework of a rigorous doctrinal plan. The *Commentary on John's Gospel* manifests a highly technical scholarship and a deeply penetrating doctrinal analysis. The prologue to the Johannine commentary is in itself remarkable for its theological affirmations and Christological summary.

The role of 'heresy' in the medieval Bible commentaries is interesting because the erroneous interpretations of Scripture proposed by heretics found frequent allusion in twelfth-century writings. Then, in the thirteenth century, with the refutation of heresies as a new feature of theological exegesis, apologetics came to be accepted as one of the explicit ends of exegesis. This explains the presence of many references to heretics in the commentaries of St. Thomas. To exemplify this, C. Spicq singles out the *Commentary on Romans*, chapter I, which is more heresy-conscious than most, with its refutation of Photinus, the Manichees, Eutyches, Sabellius, Apollinaris, Arius and Nestorius.⁴⁸

The patristic and monastic commentaries differed from the thirteenth-century commentaries; the former were largely homiletic, pastoral, personal and mystical, whereas the latter 'scholastic' commentaries were more formal and literal. They set out to teach students the literal meaning of the text, drawing much assistance in the Aristotelian manner from grammar and logic.⁴⁹ Perhaps the difference may be summarized in part, by stating that the patristic commentaries can be read while the scholastic commentaries need to be studied. Consequently, some of St. Thomas' commentaries may not be easy to peruse but they are worthy of reflection.

As already noted, apart from the commentaries, St. Thomas wrote what he himself called the *Glossa continua super Evangelia*, later known as the *Catena aurea*. He composed the continuous gloss on the four

Gospels as a concatenation of texts from the Latin and Greek Fathers. It seems that Thomas arranged for the original translation of some texts from the Greek Fathers for inclusion in this work.⁵⁰ The *Catena* demonstrates the wide range of Thomas' patristic knowledge, and while it does not offer a personal commentary, it interestingly reveals some of his preferred patristic emphases. This work attracted much medieval attention and acclaim; for example, H. de Lubac refers to the esteem in which the *Catena* was held by Erasmus.⁵¹

However, although in his actual commentaries, the Fathers are frequently cited, usually in the manner of citations, St. Thomas prefers expounding Scripture with Scripture. He draws occasional assistance from profane authors but he does not quote copiously from them. It may be said that he adopted their methods more than their matter; yet he recognized the value of wisdom and truth, irrespective of their source. In his *Commentary on the Letter to Titus* he declares that the doctor of Sacred Scripture accepts the testimony of truth, wherever it is to be found.⁵²

B. Smalley notes that the medieval biblical commentators were not primarily Scripture-scholars: St. Albert came to the Bible as a philosopher; St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure came as theologians.⁵³ Spicq proposes that the commentaries of St. Thomas on St. John's Gospel and on the Epistles of St. Paul represent the most perfect realization of scholastic medieval exegesis.⁵⁴ However, J.A. Weisheipl adds the apt reminder that St. Thomas did not have at his disposal the varied skills and modern techniques which current biblical scholarship has come to acquire and require.⁵⁵

T. Gilby indicates that St. Thomas' 'great commentaries on St. John's Gospel and the Epistles of St. Paul are directly theological in intention.'⁵⁶ And Spicq, having described the *Catena aurea* as a manual for preachers as much as for students, concludes that the other commentaries, particularly those on St. John and St. Paul, are scientific, scholarly and theological works.⁵⁷

In a recent article, C. Clifton Black II proposes that the biblical exegesis of St. Thomas defines a field of inquiry whose richness is exceeded only by its relative neglect in contemporary scholarship. Acknowledging that there are general presentations of his exegetical assumptions and techniques as well as some historical and theological contextualizations of his exegesis, he laments the rarity of detailed analyses of St. Thomas at work specifically as interpreter of Scripture.⁵⁸ 'It is altogether odd,' writes Clifton Black, 'that this aspect of Thomas' scholarly output should be given such short shrift.' He later advises against consigning Thomas' exposition of John to the realm of mere historical curiosity. Indeed, the entire scriptural exegesis of Thomas

should be preserved from such treatment.

R.E. Murphy observes that nearly every biblical commentary gives a curtsy to the history of interpretation, including the patristic and medieval periods, but wonders why this is done since it has so little influence on the commentary and seems to be an implicit paradigm of what not to do.⁵⁹ From the examination of St. Thomas' commentaries, certain noteworthy traits emerge. These have been well summarized by Clifton Black:

. . . an orderly and systematic presentation, conducted by means of division, definition and demonstration; scrutiny of the precise wording of Scripture; a predilection for the plain meaning of the text, coupled with a restrained spiritualizing exegesis; confirmation and critique of his interpretation with evidence drawn . . . from the full range of biblical testimony; and attention to the text's deeper theological implications.⁶⁰

B. Smalley's study of St. Thomas' Gospel-commentaries led her to make certain conclusions with regard to his exegetical characteristics. In the last work completed by her before her death in 1984, she states that Thomas distinguishes himself from most earlier commentators by keeping to the point, concentrating with a fierce singlemindedness on the text in hand. With an amusing touch she adds: 'To read him after Albert is like passing from a Victorian salon, littered with furniture and ornaments, to a white-washed 'functional' living room. Thomas ignored what struck him as irrelevant.'⁶¹ She observes that *distinctiones* serve to clarify the meaning of the word in the text rather than to provide miscellaneous items of information.

Clifton Black II's appraisal of the commentary on the Johannine prologue draws attention to some features which apply to St. Thomas' exegesis as a whole.⁶² Modern exegetes would not look to the Bible as an all-purpose, doctrinal sourcebook, as St. Thomas together with his contemporaries and predecessors appear to have done. The identification of exegesis with dogmatics would not find favour today, but it was the medieval method. The unity of the Scriptures seems to be over-stressed in the frequent fusion of diverse biblical perspectives whereby distinct scriptural tones suffer.

On the other hand, Clifton Black II claims that Thomas' particular contributions to the discipline of exegesis are 'by no means inconsiderable.'⁶³ There is disciplined, systematic, dialectical exposition. Clifton Black II's most lasting impression of the Johannine commentary is its indefatigable interrogation. And this is common to all the commentaries. Since there are questions rolling upon questions, raised by the interpreter of the text, by the text of the interpreter, by the interpreter

of other interpreters, it is concluded that 'if it be true that 'conversation remains the key heuristic model for hermeneutics' (Tracy), then the validity of that insight was scarcely lost upon Thomas Aquinas.'⁶⁴

It is further noted that Thomas' tendency to homogenize the different biblical perspectives through his unmitigated concern to read the Bible holistically, may have the advantage of informing the current resurgence of interest in canonical criticism with which it resonates. The work of St. Thomas is also a valuable reminder of the truth that the Bible, much more than an academic sourcebook, while coming from particular believing communities, is God's Word for people in every age. This is described as a Thomist insight which has not been diminished since 'theological reflection, in conversation with the community of faith, remains a necessary step in the enterprise of biblical hermeneutics.'⁶⁵

The scriptural commentaries of St. Thomas are enhanced by his astounding patristic erudition which demonstrates his respect for the history of exegesis, intrinsic in his work of fully informed biblical interpretation. This supports D. Tracy's view of the exegetical necessity to understand in conversation with all the classic attempts to interpret the Scriptures from Jesus and Paul to our own day.⁶⁶

To St. Thomas, the literal sense of Scripture was of sacred and fundamental importance. His emphasis on the use of the literal sense and his understanding of it in exegesis comprise one of the great contributions of his theological scholarship. The teaching of the Bible was his predominant theological concern and this he expounded through the literal sense in which everything the sacred writer meant to say is included.⁶⁷ Spicq expresses it as an 'exact coincidence' between the literal sense and the intention of the author.⁶⁸ Furthermore, according to St. Thomas, the literal sense is always the basis of the spiritual sense⁶⁹ and theological argument must be founded on the literal but never on the spiritual sense.⁷⁰ It is God, the divine author, who has granted the spiritual senses to persons and events of the narrative. Even so, there is nothing necessary for faith contained under the spiritual senses that is not openly conveyed elsewhere in Scripture through the literal sense.⁷¹

It is noteworthy also that St. Thomas did not confine his exegetical comment to sections and words of the text which might appear to be theologically useful to him. His work discloses that he considered everything in Sacred Scripture worthy of exegesis, including even the names of people and places. Through the literal sense, then, St. Thomas conveyed the theological sense in his commentaries.

In this context, Smalley singles out the innovatory contribution of St. Thomas. Though he embraced current teaching on the senses of Scripture, he enlarged it through demanding a new and occasional awareness of the

mind of the author. By perceiving the individual gifts and purpose of the human inspired writer, 'he crossed over a border within which earlier commentators on the Gospels had been happy to stay.'⁷² Since her study of medieval Gospel commentary brings Smalley's scholarly work to an end, her significant concluding words bear a certain poignancy: 'Thomas' lectures, traditional at first sight, mark a new sense of direction, hence a new beginning, and so a good place to stop.'⁷³

The appreciation of St. Thomas' exegetical interpretations requires, therefore, a consciousness of his understanding of the senses of Scripture, in particular the literal and spiritual senses. Irrespective of the forms of speech used, the literal sense includes the inspired author's whole intention. The writer was inspired by God who granted spiritual significance to the events, persons and things mentioned by the writer. This occurred without the author's awareness and had as its purpose the continuing benefit of revelation.⁷⁴ However, the literal sense is important in itself and is not to be seen as a mere means to the spiritual. This stated, it is further obvious from the Scripture-commentaries that the spiritual exposition of the Bible-texts have, in his view, an essential function in Christian doctrine. The over-arching reason demanding this method of interpretation is particularly clear from the given textual teaching: the Bible is Christ-centred.

Deprived of allegory and metaphor, patristic and medieval exegesis would be extremely emaciated. Referring to a use of allegory in the commentary on the Johannine prologue, C. Clifton Black II makes the significant observation:

If this be too rashly written off as improbable allegorical exegesis, we shall miss here a very important hermeneutical point: namely, that there is, for Thomas, a rich depth of meaning in Scripture, a profundity that goes beyond, but cannot be tapped apart from, the literal sense.⁷⁵

T.F. Torrance, in his discussion of the scientific hermeneutics of St. Thomas, proceeds from the basis that divine truth comes to us through the literal sense and states that in the fecundity of the Scripture which it has through the Holy Spirit, the intellect apprehends an objective reality with an infinite richness of implication reaching out finally to the perfect vision of God in heaven.⁷⁶ For St. Thomas, allegory and metaphor became useful sources and channels of reflection in his exegesis.

As already observed, in the light of modern developments in the discipline of biblical exegesis, there are clear deficiencies in the work of St. Thomas. Nevertheless, Clifton Black offers the valid and striking conclusion:

. . . in our age of heightened sensitivity to hermeneutics, we may be able to recover, with renewed appreciation, Thomas' understanding of texts and their fecundity of meaning. . . . Thomas' exposition of the Bible . . . can enrich our own critical reflection upon the practice and interrelation of exegesis, church history, theology and hermeneutics. It is true that we are children of Wellhausen and Bultmann; still, ours is a rich exegetical heritage, and anyone whose memory of it extends no farther than the nineteenth century is, in the end, an orphan.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The biblical commentaries of St. Thomas, even with their limitations, have a fruitful exegetical and theological offering to place before contemporary scholarship. Not the least important is that union of Sacred Scripture and theology which they may be seen to celebrate. The gift should not be refused. Indeed the doctrinal reflections of St. Thomas, suggested by the Bible and dominating his exegesis, assume an added significance with the renewed appreciation in recent decades, not only of the supreme value, but also of the essential place, of Sacred Scripture in theology.

Granted the rich theological insights that the commentaries possess, it must be pointed out, nevertheless, that in his doctrinal teaching, St. Thomas did not always follow a systematic line. The *Summa Theologiae*, for example, is painstakingly systematic, but this work, though written by St. Thomas, does not represent his actual teaching of theology, which was conducted through biblical exegesis, the method of his day. It must therefore be said that the biblical theology of St. Thomas cannot, automatically or easily, be set alongside the discussions of contemporary theologians, because theology today is pre-eminently systematic and methodological. When compared in their written form, with current works in theology, the scriptural commentaries of St. Thomas contain minimal meeting-points, since they are not systematic theological compositions. Even though in the general introduction to his exegesis of St. Paul, St. Thomas suggests a basic systematic approach to the Pauline commentaries in relation to the theology of grace, many of the deeper questions emerge here and there, without obvious organization, on the prompting of a word or a phrase from Sacred Scripture.

What is of value, however, is the thought of St. Thomas, which lies, as it were, beneath the texts of Scripture as he meditates on them, and then breaks out from place to place, a succession of profound reflections, but lacking in orderly thematic structure. For the reader, there are, therefore, many encounters with profoundly rich considerations which appear unexpectedly. Consequently, much scholarly labour is required in order to

compile from the extensive commentaries of St. Thomas, a pattern of ideas which can then be applied or offered to contemporary discussion. An immediate reading of the expositions in their 'natural' form will not assist the seeker of specific theological themes. Study, research, organization and synthesis are required. It is necessary to weave into a system, the undoubtedly significant thought which is to be discovered within the exegesis. Then, the usefulness of it is striking.

If, therefore, St. Thomas in his exegesis has much to offer to contemporary theology, this will appear only as a result of what contemporary scholarship and methods can supply to these works of Aquinas. In other words, modern scientific theology can benefit from the exegesis of St. Thomas so that, in turn, he can be of value to theological discussion today, because of the resourceful depth of reflection contained in his biblical writings.

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Recasting a Classic: A Reconsideration of Meaning in the Book of Job

Barbara Green OP

The goal of this article is to show how all parts of the Book of Job function coherently, co-operatively and brilliantly. Though commentators continue to assert¹ that the frame of the work (1–2, 42:7–17) is easily separable from the body of the work (3–42:6), that contention is simply not true. The prose prologue and epilogue pose the book's central and crucial issues, which are then partially, and slightly unrealistically, dealt with in the work's central, poetic dialogue section. The 'game' of understanding the work would be much easier to play if the frame—front and back—were not there. But it is there; and it is indispensable. The prologue raises the theological stakes of the dialogue.²