



## Divine Goodness, Predestination, and the Hypostatic Union: St. Thomas on the Temporal Realization of the Father's Eternal Plan in the Incarnate Son

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### Abstract

This article considers Aquinas' doctrine of predestination as an eternal reality in God in light of its temporal realization in time by the incarnation of the eternal Son. In particular, Aquinas' repeated recourse to the ratio of the divine goodness as the motive of predestination is documented in conjunction with his teaching on the fittingness of the incarnation. In this light, the relation of the natural sonship of Christ to the grace of adoption is developed by Aquinas as the temporal realization of the eternal reality of predestination in God.

### Keywords

Aquinas, predestination, Incarnation, Filiation, Sonship

### Introduction

In his contemplative little book on grace, Charles Journet offers a word of warning about the proper mode of discourse when treating predestination. "If we forget," Journet cautions, "that God is a God of love, if we speak [about predestination] without steeping [it] in the atmosphere of divine goodness that knocks at men's hearts, we may well say what would seem theologically—or rather, verbally, literally,—exact, but what would in fact be a deformation, misleading and false."<sup>1</sup> Whatever concerns one may have about Journet's own contributions to the question of predestination, his advice corresponds perfectly with Thomas' manner of proceeding

<sup>1</sup> Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Grace*, trans. A. V. Littledale (Princeton: Scepter Publishers, 1996), 47.

when discussing predestination; namely, to remain steeped in the doctrine of the divine goodness. Thomas' treatment of Christ's predestination is no exception to this practice.

Indeed, in a helpful summary statement that accentuates this point well, Daria Spezzano argues:

The entire graced journey of the human person to beatitude is properly understood as a particular manifestation of God's goodness, willed in the plan of divine wisdom for that individual. Thomas places it within the larger context of the communication of divine goodness, which is the *ratio* of creation and the effect of divine love.<sup>2</sup>

The place of the incarnation within the plan of the manifestation of the divine goodness may be quite obvious on the surface, but perhaps, too, it is not always appreciated and integrated within treatments of the doctrine of predestination as much as it could be.<sup>3</sup>

Authors have tended to reflect on the doctrine of Christ's predestination in two related, but distinguishable ways. On the one hand, Christ's predestination is taken to affirm the revelation of Christ's two natures, the divine nature, and the human nature predestined in the flesh to descend from David's lineage.<sup>4</sup> This account says little about the relation of the incarnation to predestination as such.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2015), 46.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the biblical texts that commonly ground discourse about predestination, such as those in Paul's Letter to the Romans that discuss predestination and election in terms of the preordained plan for salvation of the elect, and in addition to Paul's teaching in Ephesians 1:5 that God "has predestined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ," there is also a text affirming the predestination of Christ in the opening greeting of the letter to the Romans, where Paul affirms that the Son of God "was descended from David according to the flesh and predestined (Latin text) or destined Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness." (1:4). The Greek word used in this text, *ὑποθέτως*, does not have the preposition "pre" attached to it. The Vulgate renders this word as "*praedestinus*." It seems that Latin authors, for better or worse, from Jerome onwards did not perceive a substantial distinction between "destined" and "predestined." For a helpful summary of the biblical doctrine of predestination, see Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13–35.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, book 3, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: PIMS, 2008), 41 [distinction X, Chapter 1 (29), 1]. As Lombard explains: "Whether Christ, according to his being a man, is a person or anything. It is also usual for some to ask whether Christ, according to his being a man, is a person, or even is anything."

<sup>5</sup> "If it is then asked," Lombard wonders in reference to Paul's affirmation in Romans 1:4, "whether the predestination which the Apostle recalls is of the person or of the nature, it can truly be said that the person of the Son, which existed always, was predestined according to the human form taken, namely that the same person, being man, be the Son of God and the human nature was predestined that it be united personally to the Word of the Father." Ibid., 44 [distinction X, Chapter 3 (31)].

On the other hand, Augustine<sup>6</sup> views the Christological material as the realization of the divine plan to restore all things under Christ's headship.<sup>7</sup> In this light, the predestination of Christ is at one and the same time Christological and the highest instance of predestination,<sup>8</sup> which also has significant anti-Pelagian connotations given that the Lord's incarnation was not brought about by any preceding merits.<sup>9</sup> This is especially evident in his work *On the Predestination of the Saints*, which Thomas frequently turns to in his teaching on Christ's predestination.

The central claim of this paper is that Thomas' theology of the predestination of Christ is the locus where he ties together his theology of predestination— theology proper as discourse about God—with the realization of the eternal plan of predestination in the temporal order. This is so because Christ's predestination is not first to the created effect of filial adoption by grace, but to the diffusion of the divine goodness through the personal union of the two natures in the Word, from which the redemptive effects of eternal predestination are realized in time.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is not

<sup>6</sup> For a helpful summary of the doctrine of predestination in the patristic period, with developed consideration of Augustine, see Levering, *Predestination*, 36–67.

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine, "On the Predestination of the Saints," in *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. John Mourant and William J. Collinge, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 86 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1992), 254 [31].

<sup>8</sup> "These things," Augustine notes, "God beyond all doubt foreknew that he would accomplish. This then is that predestination of the saints, which appeared most clearly in the saint of saints." *Ibid.*, 254. Likewise, Invoking Romans 1:4, Augustine reasons that the predestination of the human nature of Christ to union with the Word establishes "an elevation [of human nature] so great, so lofty, and so sublime that our nature could not be raised higher . . . just as that one man was predestined to be our head, so we, being many, are predestined to be his members." *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>9</sup> "Anyone who can discover in our head," Augustine challenges, "the merits which have preceded his unique generation, let him seek in us his members those merits which preceded our multiple regeneration." *Ibid.*, 255. And the incarnation, Augustine cautions, "was not given to Christ as a recompense, but rather given, so that he should be born of the Spirit and the Virgin, apart from all the bond of sin." *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> It is well-documented that Aquinas and Scotus differ on the motive of the incarnation. This difference is inextricably linked to the doctrine of predestination. For Aquinas, God's diffusion of goodness is ordered to the redemption of humanity from sin. Scotus, Richard Cross explains, "concludes that Christ would have become incarnate irrespective of the Fall of Adam." This is so because "God predestines Christ's soul to glory," which is prior to anything willed as a result of the Fall. See Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 128. Aquinas affirms the eternity of Christ's predestination, but rejects the notion that this eternal decree did not take sin into account. For example, in ST, III, 1, a. 3, ad 4, Aquinas grants the eternal predestination of the incarnation, while also affirming its redemptive character: "Predestination presupposes the foreknowledge of future things; and hence, as God predestines the salvation of anyone to be brought about by the prayers of others, so also He predestined the work of Incarnation to be the remedy of human sin." Further, in ST, III, 24, a. 1, ad 3, on Christ's predestination, Aquinas argues: "If Christ were not to have been incarnate, God would have decreed men's salvation by other

claiming too much to assert that Thomas recounts the totality of his doctrine of predestination only within his articulation of the predestination of Christ. As such, this material is a helpful resource for understanding his teaching on predestination, especially in light of how late it comes within his career and how complementary it is to his teaching earlier in the *Summa*.<sup>11</sup>

This consideration focuses mostly, but not exclusively, on the *Summa theologiae*, and proceeds in three interrelated parts, moving from general principles to their temporal execution in Christ.

## Part I: Predestination and the *Ratio* of Divine Goodness

Thomas' sympathies in treating the predestination of Christ lie in the direction mapped out by St. Augustine in which the Christological aspects of Christ's predestination are presented in relation to their soteriological significance.<sup>12</sup> He opens his treatment of predestination in *prima pars*, question 23, by affirming that the

means. But since He decreed the Incarnation of Christ, He decreed at the same time that He should be the cause of our salvation." What is at stake, ultimately, is whether Christ is predestined to glory (Scotus) or to the hypostatic union. For a helpful summary of these issues, with an expansive consideration of major thinkers on each side of this issue, see Trent Pomplun, "The Immaculate World: Predestination and Passibility in Contemporary Scotism," *Modern Theology* 30 (2014): 525–51.

<sup>11</sup> Speaking of contingency and causation in relation to the use of 1 Timothy 2:4 by Albert, Thomas, and Scotus in their commentaries on Lombard's *Sentences*, Franklin T. Harkins notes, "Although much modern scholarship on these high medieval *magistri in sacra pagina* has emphasized the philosophical nature of their work in general and of their *Sentences* commentaries in particular, it has paid noticeably less attention to how their particular philosophical engagement informed their exegeses of Scripture and, conversely, how scriptural and theological questions gave rise to new philosophical insights." See his, "Contingency and Causality in Predestination: 1 Tim. 2:4 in the *Sentences* Commentaries of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus," *Archa Verbi* 11 (2014): 35–72, at 35.

<sup>12</sup> In *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, Thomas affirms the parameters of Christological orthodoxy with the following interpretation: "predestination must be attributed to the very person of Christ. But because the person of Christ subsists in two natures, the human and the divine, something can be said of him with respect to either nature . . . It is in this way," Thomas continues, "that he is said to be predestined according to his human nature. For although the person of Christ has always been the Son of God, nevertheless it was not always a fact that, while existing in human nature, he was the Son of God; rather, this was due to an ineffable grace." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 19 [cap. 1., lect. 3, #51]. The maintenance of the synthesis of the Council of Chalcedon, however, is not where Thomas concludes his treatment of Christ's predestination. In all of his works, including his commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, he follows St. Augustine's lead and further develops his doctrine of predestination in light of the reality of Christ's. This broader articulation unfolds a *ratio* that Thomas introduces in his general doctrine of predestination and carries through to his discussion of Christ's predestination. It is this broader *ratio* that is the primary focus throughout the remainder

rational creature is predestined by God—hardly a significant contribution. What is unique, however, about his affirmation of the rational creature’s predestination by God is the *ratio* that he puts forward for the fittingness of this predestination—the very one that Journet urges to be kept in mind. What makes the predestination of the rational creature fitting is the two-fold end to which the creature is directed by God. On the one hand, providence directs creatures to a proportionate natural end, which, Aquinas affirms, “created being can attain according to the power of its nature.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, there is the end of eternal life, “that consists in seeing God, which is above the nature of every creature.”<sup>14</sup> This end, Thomas teaches, “exceeds all proportion and faculty of the created nature.”<sup>15</sup> Thomas affirms the special grace filled divine direction of the creature to beatitude by using the passive verb “*perducitur*” and the participle “*transmissa*,” the creature is “led” and “carried” or “transmitted” by God to the end of eternal life. What makes this divine direction of the creature fitting is that the *ratio* of the ordering in Thomas’ words “pre-exists in God . . . as the *ratio* of the order of all things towards an end.”<sup>16</sup> This makes it fitting for God to predestine precisely because, Thomas reasons, “the *ratio* in the mind of the doer of something to be done, is a kind of pre-existence in him of the thing to be done.”<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the fittingness of the predestination of the rational creature by God is rooted in the preexistence of the reality of what the creature is predestined to in God himself. It is true that human nature has an obediencial potency to be elevated in this fashion, but the question that Thomas raises is about God—whether it is fitting for him to predestine. Commenting on this, Reinhard Hütter explains that “*Convenientia* rejects these alternatives [whether the fittingness stems from one of either of the rational creature’s two-fold ends] by referring the matter to the mystery of God’s goodness which is identical with God’s justice as well as mercy, utterly unfathomable in the glorious simplicity of the divine perfection.”<sup>18</sup>

of this paper. See, Steven C. Boguslawski, O.P., *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews: Insights into his Commentary on Romans 9–11* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), especially 8–11.

<sup>13</sup> ST, I, 23, a. 1. Translations from the *prima pars*, with an occasional slight modification, are taken from *Summa theologiae, Prima Pars* 1–49, trans. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. and eds. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 164.

Hütter's insight underscores a foundational element of the entire Christian doctrine of predestination, one that is often obfuscated by the complexity of the issue, namely, that the *ratio* of the movement or transmission of the rational creature to eternal life by God is the divine goodness itself.<sup>19</sup> This *ratio* is something that St. Thomas carries forward from his treatise on God to his treatment of the incarnation and the predestination of Christ.

In his work on the development of the doctrine of predestination in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, Michal Paluch notes a change in emphasis that takes place in Thomas' articulation of predestination between the *prima pars* and the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*.<sup>20</sup> Given that several years and several thousand pages of material stand between the composition of question 23 of the *prima pars* and question 24 of the *tertia pars*, which considers the predestination of Christ, perhaps readers should not be surprised by some divergence in Thomas' language.

Yet, in this case of *tertia pars* 24 on the predestination of Christ, Thomas refers the reader right back to the discussion of predestination that was put forward in *prima pars* 23, articles 1 and 2 as if he has the earlier material immediately before his eyes. "As is clear," Thomas teaches, referring to *quae in prima parte dicta sunt*, "predestination, in its proper sense, is a certain Divine preordination from eternity of those things which are to be done in time by the grace of God."<sup>21</sup> This statement is a very straightforward summary of the material in *prima pars* 23, but it is not reducible to any of the definitions that Thomas had set forth in the earlier material. Such as, for example, the "direction of a rational creature towards the end of life eternal" (ST, I, 23, a.1) or the "type of the ordering of some person towards eternal salvation, existing in the divine mind." (ST, I, 23, a. 2).<sup>22</sup>

The shift in emphasis to which Paluch draws attention to from *prima pars* 23 to *tertia pars* 24 stems from Thomas' coupling of the eternal divine preordination that constitutes predestination in the

<sup>19</sup> In *Summa contra gentiles* 2, 46, Aquinas is even more explicit: "Ad productionem creaturarm nihil aliud movet Deum nisi sua bonitas, quam rebus aliis communicare voluit secundum modum assimilationis ad ipsum."

<sup>20</sup> See Michal Paluch, *La profondeur de l'amour divin: Evolution de la doctrine de la prédestination dans l'œuvre de Thomas d'Aquin*. Bibliothèque thomiste vol. 55 (Paris: J. Vrin, 2004), 245.

<sup>21</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 1. Translations from the *tertia pars*, with occasional slight modification, are taken from *Summa theologiae, Tertia Pars* 1–59, trans. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. and eds. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Following Paluch, ST, I, 23, a. 1 defines predestination as "... ratio... transmissio- nis creaturae rationalis in finem vitae aeternae . . ." Whereas ST, III, 24, a. 1 defines it as follows: "quaedam divina praeordinatio ad aeterno de his quae per gratiam Dei sunt fienda in tempore."

divine mind with the working out in time of that preordination in the incarnation and gift of grace. This coupling is significant for a complete understanding of Thomas' teaching on predestination. As Joseph Wawrykow notes, "There are in fact two aspects of, or 'notes' to, providence. Primarily, providence is the ordering by God of every creature to their ends: it is the plan that God has for their fulfillment. Secondly, however, providence also involves the implementation of this plan that extends to all creatures. God orders; God implements the ordering, bringing every creature to the end set for it by God."<sup>23</sup> The movement, therefore, from the treatment of predestination in terms of discourse about God to the implementation of the divine plan in Christ, indicates the reason for the shift in Thomas' emphasis: he is speaking of the same divine reality in the *tertia pars*, but from the aspect of its implementation.

## Part II: The Diffusive Nature of the Divine Goodness and the Fittingness of the Incarnation

This shift in emphasis from the eternal to the temporal aspects of predestination accentuates the recurring importance of the *ratio* of the divine goodness in Thomas' account of predestination. This *ratio* creates a bond—solidified on predestination—between question 1 and question 24 of the *tertia pars*, and much of the material in-between.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas inaugurates both questions by inquiring of the fittingness of something pertaining to Christ, the incarnation in the case of the former question, and his predestination in the case of the latter.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that the *ratio* of the fittingness of the incarnation is theological in nature, namely, that "the very nature of God is goodness."<sup>26</sup> So Thomas seats the fittingness of the incarnation in the divine nature.<sup>27</sup> The fittingness of the incarnation is on account of the divine goodness, Aquinas reasons, because "it belongs to the

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Wawrykow, "Grace," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 200.

<sup>24</sup> For a presentation of Aquinas' appropriation of the work of Dionysius in his treatment of the diffusion of divine goodness, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), especially 225–74. See also, Bernhard Blankenhorn, OP, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> For a helpful discussion of the predestination of Christ in Thomas' work, see Levering, *Predestination*, 82–3.

<sup>26</sup> ST, III, 1, a. 1.

<sup>27</sup> For a helpful discussion of the ontology of the hypostatic union, see Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 73–125.

essence of goodness to communicate itself to others.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the incarnation is not simply a common mode of participation between God and creation. Rather, Thomas adds that the incarnation is the communication “of the highest good . . . in the highest manner.” The incarnation reaches this zenith, Thomas reasons, “by His so joining created nature to Himself that one Person is made up of these three—the Word, a soul and flesh.”<sup>29</sup>

Thomas then develops a three-fold “*magis conveniens*” and “*convenientissimum*” for the incarnation of the Son rather than the Father or Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> He derives the second *ratio* for the special symmetry (*congruentiae*) of the incarnation of the Son and not the Father or the Holy Spirit, from the end of the hypostatic union, which, interestingly, he states to be “the fulfilling of predestination.”<sup>31</sup> The incarnation of the Son brings the plan of predestination to a more perfect fulfillment than would an incarnation of the Father or the Holy Spirit because the divine preordination is ordered to a heavenly inheritance that is bestowed Thomas observes, “only on sons.”<sup>32</sup> The incarnation as such is not fitting under the *ratio* of the divine goodness in a generic sense, but the *ratio* is further specified by the ordination of the saints to adoptive sonship—to a special conformity of the saints to the reality of the Word’s eternal sonship. “That by Him,” Thomas argues, “Who is the natural Son, men should share this likeness of sonship by adoption.”<sup>33</sup>

In his commentary on Romans, Thomas explicitly links God’s plan to communicate the divine goodness with the Son’s wish to communicate his sonship to the faithful. “For just as God willed to communicate his natural goodness to others by imparting to them a likeness of his goodness,” Thomas notes, “so that he is not only good but the author of good things, so too the Son of God willed to communicate to others conformity to his sonship, so that he would not be the only Son, but also the firstborn among sons.”<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, when considering whether, given the sinful creatures’ distance from God, it is fitting for God to adopt, Aquinas yet again

<sup>28</sup> ST, III, 1, a. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. John of St. Thomas likewise affirms the God-centered basis for Thomas’ discussion of the incarnation. “Saint Thomas discusses the fittingness of the Incarnation from the side of God,” he observes, “which is that he might communicate himself to the creature in the fullest manner.” See, John of St. Thomas, *Introduction to the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Ralph McInerney (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004), 154.

<sup>30</sup> For a helpful exposition of Thomas’ purposes in this challenging question, see Joseph Wawrykow, “Hypostatic Union,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, op. cit., 233–37.

<sup>31</sup> ST, III, 3, a. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 235 [cap. 8, lect. 6, #706]. Translation slightly modified.



appeals to the divine goodness: “God is infinitely good: for which reason He admits His creatures to a participation of good things,” and this, for the rational creature, “consists in the enjoyment of God, by which also God Himself is happy and rich in Himself.”<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to look at the question devoted to Christ’s predestination under the light of this recurring theme: fittingness, each time he invokes it, is affirmed in relation to the divine goodness. When Thomas offers his tweaked definition of predestination as “a certain Divine preordination from eternity of those things which are to be done in time by the grace of God,” he immediately connects this definition with the superlative communication of the divine goodness that is realized in the hypostatic union: “Now, that man is God, and that God is man is something done in time by God through the grace of the union.”<sup>36</sup>

### Part III: Predestination as the Father’s Gift to Christ—and to the Faithful through Christ

In the structure of the third part of the *Summa theologiae* Thomas locates his treatment of predestination within a two-fold order. First, the question on Christ’s predestination is included in a group of eleven questions commencing with question 16 which, in Thomas’ words, “consider the consequences of the union.”<sup>37</sup> Within this grouping of topics that follow upon the union, Thomas identifies a subgrouping of questions on Christ’s subjection, prayer, priesthood, adoption, and predestination. This group of topics, Thomas explains, pertain to “such things as belong to Christ in relation to the Father.” So, Christ’s predestination is (a) a consequence of the union and (b) something that belongs to Christ in relation to the Father.

Thus Thomas views the hypostatic union as the realization of the diffusive nature of the divine goodness, which in turn corresponds to the fittingness of the predestination of Christ, as it accomplishes in time the divine preordination of the rational creature to eternal life.

There is a kind of connecting member that is provided here for the overall plan of the *Summa* and Christ’s place therein. “It cannot be said,” Thomas argues in defense of the fittingness of the predestination of Christ,

that God has not from eternity pre-ordained to do this in time: since it would follow that something would come anew into the Divine Mind. And we must admit that the union itself of natures in the Person of

<sup>35</sup> ST, III, 23, a. 1.

<sup>36</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 1.

<sup>37</sup> See the preface to ST, III, 16.

Christ falls under the eternal predestination of God. For this reason do we say that Christ was predestined.<sup>38</sup>

What is to be made, then, of the Thomas' clear and consistent declaration that predestination properly understood is a theological reality in the strong sense of the word theological—something whose *ratio* is in the goodness of the divine essence and not in the creature? Thomas identifies his treatment of the predestination of Christ as a consequence of the hypostatic union, and further as an instance of Christ's relation to the Father and not to humanity. To what degree, then, does the properly theological nature of predestination allow for Christological and temporal articulations?

To explain this difficulty, Thomas argues that “two things may be considered in predestination. One on the part of eternal predestination itself: and in this respect it implies a certain antecedence in regard to that which comes under predestination.”<sup>39</sup> This is the properly theological domain of predestination. From another perspective, however, Thomas explains, “predestination may be considered as regards its temporal effect, which is some gratuitous gift of God.”<sup>40</sup> How then does this pertain to Christ's relation to the Father and not the Father's or Christ's relation to humanity?

Thomas supports this point by underscoring the link between Christological orthodoxy, on the one hand, and the eternal plan for the predestination of Christ, on the other: from both the eternal and the temporal point of view “we must say that predestination is ascribed to Christ by reason of his human nature alone: for human nature was not always united to the Word; and by grace bestowed on it was it united in Person to the Son of God.”<sup>41</sup> The hypostatic union is a singular, gratuitous effect realized in time of the Father's eternal plan.

Given the unmerited gratuity of the predestination of Christ's human nature to the grace of personal union with the Word, to what degree can the incarnation as such be said to contribute anything whatsoever to the realization of the plan of salvation in history? Thomas readily concedes that “on the part of the act of predestination,” on the side of its eternity in God, “Christ's predestination cannot be said to be the exemplar of ours: for in the same way and by the same eternal act God predestined us and Christ.”<sup>42</sup>

However, Christ's predestination, as an unmerited gift from the Father, can be considered in relation to ours from the perspective of its term or *ad quem* point of reference. “In respect of the

<sup>38</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 1.

<sup>39</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 3.

good to which we are predestined,” Thomas notes that Christ, “was predestined to be the natural Son of God, whereas we are predestined to the adoption of sons, which is a participated likeness of natural sonship.”<sup>43</sup> The perfection of filiation communicated to the creature in predestination resides in the natural sonship of the incarnate Word.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, Thomas speaks of the “manner of obtaining this good” to which predestination is ordered, “—that is, by grace.” So how does God move the rational creature to the good of participation in eternal life—how is the divine goodness diffused? Christ’s predestination to natural sonship—personal union—exemplifies filial adoption because “human nature in Him, without any antecedent merits, was united to the Son of God: and of the fullness of His grace we all have received.”<sup>45</sup> So Christ’s predestination does relate to the predestination of the saints as possessing the perfection of natural sonship to which they are ordered to participate, and the means to this participation, namely, his own fullness of grace.

Affirming that the exemplar realities of predestination reside in Christ’s predestination does not clarify the manner, if there be one, of any causation that can be attributed to Christ. In fact, as Thomas recognizes in an objection, it seems impossible, given his general teaching on predestination as an eternal reality in God, that Christ’s predestination exercises any soteriological influence on the faithful. “For that which is eternal has no cause,” Thomas affirms in an objection, “But our predestination is eternal. Therefore Christ’s predestination is not the cause of ours.”<sup>46</sup>

To address the causal relation of Christ’s predestination to that of the saints, Thomas again turns to the distinction between the act and the term of predestination. In so doing he gives explicit articulation to his affirmation in the *prima pars* of the role that secondary causes have within the unfolding of the divine plan. By the act of predestination Christ’s cannot be the cause of ours, Thomas teaches, “because by one and the same act God predestined both Christ and us.”<sup>47</sup> This seems to negate any causal agency on the part of Christ in relation to our reception of grace. Yet Thomas argues that “Christ’s predestination is the cause of ours: for God, by predestinating from eternity, so decreed our salvation, that it should be achieved through

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> In Christ’s *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, Thomas underscores the participatory nature of the predestination of his members: “Christ is the measure and rule of our life and therefore our predestination, because we are predestined to adoptive sonship, which is a participation and image of natural sonship.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, 17 [cap. 3, lect. 3, 48].

<sup>45</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 3.

<sup>46</sup> ST, III, 24, a. 4, ob. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., corpus.

Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> Here Thomas makes explicit how secondary causes are related to the eternal plan of predestination: “eternal predestination covers not only that which is to be accomplished in time, but also the mode and order in which it is to be accomplished in time.”<sup>49</sup>

These reflections raise the question of a putative equivocation to which Thomas is especially sensitive in his commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences*. In what sense can predestination as an eternal decree, Christ’s predestination to natural sonship, and the predestination of the saints be treated under any common notion? “In predestination there are two things,” Thomas adds in his commentary on the *Sentences*, “one eternal, namely the very operation of God, and another that is temporal, namely the effect of predestination.”<sup>50</sup>

From the formally theological perspective, no created agency, not even Christ’s, causes God’s eternal decree. “Therefore our predestination as that to which is eternal in itself, does not have a cause but,” Thomas quickly adds, “as to the effect it can have a cause, namely in so far as its effect is produced by means of some created cause.”<sup>51</sup>

This establishes a connection between Christ’s predestination and that of the saints: “according to this,” Thomas affirms without hesitation, “the cause of our predestination is the predestination of Christ. Efficiently in so far as he is the mediator of our salvation; and formally in so far as we are predestined children of God in his image; and finally, in so far as our salvation overflows from his glory.”<sup>52</sup>

The believer is, furthermore, granted a participation in Christ’s fullness through the providential establishment of the causal efficacy of the sacraments. Because “divine providence” provides for each thing, Aquinas notes, “according to the mode of its condition. Divine wisdom, therefore, fittingly provides man with the means of salvation, in the shape of corporeal and sensible signs that are

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *Scriptum super III Lib. Sententiarum*, ed. R. P. Maria Fabianus Moos, O.P. (Paris, 1933,) dist. X, solutio III, #118 (p. 352). Our own translation.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. (p. 352–33).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., #117 (p. 353). “And therefore,” Thomas concludes, “the predestination of Christ and ours is not of one univocal *ratio*, but according to analogy.” Ibid. In ST, III, 8, a. 3, Thomas even locates the reprobate within the plan of Christ’s predestination and headship over all: “Hence we must say that if we take the whole time of the world in general, Christ is the Head of all men, but diversely. For, first and principally, He is the Head of such as are united to Him by glory; secondly, of those who are actually united to Him by charity; thirdly, of those who are actually united to Him by faith; fourthly, of those who are united to Him merely in potentiality, which is not yet reduced to act, yet will be reduced to act according to *Divine predestination*; fifthly, of those who are united to Him in potentiality, which will never be reduced to act; *such are those men existing in the world, who are not predestined, who, however, on their departure from this world, wholly cease to be members of Christ*, as being no longer in potentiality to be united to Christ.” Emphasis added.

called sacraments.”<sup>53</sup> This does not mean that the sacraments of the Church somehow constitute a second or secondary plan of salvation within the plan of predestination. Rather, Aquinas explains, “Christ’s passion is, so to say, applied to man through the sacraments.”<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

To return again to the work of Daria Spezzano, it is worth quoting at length a helpful summary that she makes of many of these themes:

As the creature is conformed to the Word by wisdom and in the intellect, so it is also conformed to the Word insofar as it is through the Word that God carries out the divine plan of wisdom for the universe and for each individual creature, manifesting his glory. The predestination of the elect to beatitude, toward which they move by participation in the Word and Love through wisdom-perfected charity, fully reveals the splendor of God’s glory—the knowing and praise of the divine goodness—in the divine plan of providence.<sup>55</sup>

Thomas’ doctrine of the predestination of Christ provides light and clarity to his general treatment, especially concerning how the eternal reality of predestination unfolds in time and how the incarnation realizes the divine plan under the ratio of the goodness of God. Thomas accomplishes an elusive theological task with his doctrine of the predestination of Christ: namely, the articulation of the unfolding of the divine plan in time under the *ratio* of the divine goodness, while openly affirming the created means used to confer the temporal effects of the divine plan, without ever abandoning a gratuitous and God-centered account of predestination.

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<sup>53</sup> ST, III, 61, a. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 3.

<sup>55</sup> Spezzano, *The Glory of God’s Grace*, 340.