The Structure and Protreptic Function of Thomas's Prologue to the Gospel of John

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One of Thomas's most elegant prologues is certainly his prologue to his commentary on the Gospel of John, which is structured around the passage from Isaiah 6:1 that reads: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty, and the whole earth was full of his majesty, and the things that were under him completely filled the temple [Vidi dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum, et plena erat omnis terra maiestate eius, et ea quae sub ipso erant, replebant templum]."[1] In what follows, I have attempted to set forth the essential elements of what I take to be the structure and function of this prologue.

We begin with an analysis of its mnemonic structure. This prologue, as with nearly all of Thomas's prologues, from his *Sentences* commentary on, uses the structure of the preaching style common at the time—what was called the *sermo modernus* style of preaching. As we examine each part of the prologue, we will also want to ask:

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[1] All references to Thomas's prologue to the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (including parenthetical Latin terms) have been taken from the on-line version at dhspriory.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm (accessed July 28, 2017). References to the prologue will be to the section numbers in that translation. And, since my topic is the prologue and not the body of the commentary itself, references will be of the form of, e.g., "Prologue, 3," which would refer the reader to section 3 in the Weisheipl translation of the prologue.

This dhspriory.org text is the electronic version of the translation by Fr. James Weisheipl the commentary, originally published as Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. James Weisheipl, O.P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1980), which will be cited as "Weisheipl, *Commentary*."

"What was the *purpose* of this prologue?" To put this in Aristotelian terms, we might say: As we examine the *formal* elements of the prologue, we will also want to ask about its *final* cause. What was the prologue supposed to do *for* its readers or do *to* its readers?

I will be suggesting that, just as the structure of the prologue is very different from anything the reader will find in contemporary literature, so too our contemporary expectations about what a prologue should do are very different from those of Thomas Aquinas and his audience. Our expectations about appropriate material for a prologue have been conditioned in large part by nineteenth- and twentieth-century concerns about the importance of historical, literary, and intellectual context. Living as we do in the wake of the Freudian revolution, we have come to assume that the biography of the life of the author will somehow be revelatory of the text we are about to read. So too, living as we do in the wake of Hegel and his followers, we assume that a text must be understood in terms of its historical and intellectual context. And living as we do in the wake of the great advances in philological scholarship of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, we have come to expect an introduction to tell us numerous details about the manuscript tradition of the text, as well as the status of various previous editions. Finally, if the text is what we generally describe as a "literary" one, contemporary literary scholarship has conditioned us to expect an introduction to compare our text's literary style with those written contemporaneously or those on which our author's text was based. These were not, I would suggest, for good or for ill, the expectations of Thomas's medieval audience. What those expectations were and the difference they made will be the subject of final section of this article.

Prologues and the *Sermo Modernus* Style

In a "modern sermon" of the sort that was common in Thomas's day, the preacher did not set out to comment on the opening biblical verse, called the *thema* of the sermon. Rather, the medieval preacher would use this verse as a mnemonic device to structure the message he wished to deliver. Thus, the first task for the preacher, after locating the right *thema* verse, was to divide it into three or four major parts, each of which he would then expand upon or "dilate" in the body of the sermon itself.[2]

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[2] I cover these three major stages of sermon production—selecting the *thema*, *divisio*, and *dilation*—in my book *Reading the Sermons of Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*, Renewal within Tradition (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic,

Thomas divides the *thema* verse for this particular prologue, Isaiah 6:1, into three parts: (1) "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty"; (2) "the whole house was full of majesty"; and (3) "the things that were under completely filled the temple." In each phrase, there is a dominant image: in the first, "high and lofty" (*excelsum et elevatum*); in the second, "full" (*plena*); and in the third, "filled completely" (in Latin, *replebant*, from which we get the English word "replete," a detail that will become clearer in a moment).[3]

2016). A very fine introduction can also be found in Michèle Mulcahey, *"First the Bow is Bent in Study": Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), esp. 403–9. Another short introduction to this style can be found in a previous article of mine, "How to Read a Sermon by Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 10, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 775–804.

[3] Fr. Weisheipl notes in one of the several invaluable essays at the back of the Magi Press volume—essays not reprinted on the dhspriory web site noted above—that the text of Isa 6:1 that appears here with all three of its parts—"Vidi Dominus sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum, et plena erat domus a maiestate eius, et ea quae sub ipso erant, replebant templum"—cannot be found this way in any of the ordinary editions of the Latin Vulgate that have come down to us, nor in the Clementine version, nor in the Greek Septuagint or the Hebrew Masoretic text of Isaiah. It does, however, show up this way in Thomas's running gloss on the book of Isaiah (see the *Expositio super Isaiam ad Litteram*, in *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. 28 [Rome 1974], Isa 6:1, lns. 96–103), and we find Thomas's teacher St. Albert the Great quoting it as well in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Second Book of the Sentences* (*Opera Omnia*, ed. Augusta Borgnet and E. Borgnet [Paris: L. Vivès, 1890–1899], 27:1–3). Thus, the "historical and textual problem," as Weisheipl points out, "is to locate the vulgate tradition to which the Bible of Thomas and Albert belonged," which as he also points out, "has not yet been done" (see Weisheipl, *Commentary*, 447–49).

The Latin text of Isa 6:1 the reader will find in modern critical editions of the Latin text reads as follows: "Vidi Dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum, et ea quae sub eo erant implebant templum." In other words, it is identical to the version Thomas uses with regard to its first and third parts, but the second part in Thomas's version is missing. One can scarcely blame Thomas for the imperfections in the texts available to him in his time and circumstances. This might be more of a concern if Thomas had been commenting upon the verse and if he were deriving from it a meaning not contained within the actual text itself. But this is not the case. Rather, in this case, he is simply using the text as a mnemonic structuring device. It is no more of a concern that Thomas's text is corrupted here than it is of concern whether it is actually true that "every good boy does fine," which is the mnemonic device by which the lines on the treble clef are remembered. It would undoubtedly be more accurate to say something like: "Some good boys *sometimes* do fine," but that would not serve the mnemonic purpose of the phrase.

"These are the words of a contemplative," says Thomas, referring, it seems, to Isaiah the author; yet, "if we regard them as spoken by John the Evangelist they apply quite well to showing the nature of this Gospel." It is important to recall in this regard that, for Thomas and his contemporaries, a key to reading and interpreting the Scriptures was recognizing its Christocentric character. Thomas believed he could use a text spoken by Isaiah to elucidate a text of John's because of their intrinsic connectedness through Christ. When Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord," he spoke truly, but he may not have realized that the *person* he was seeing was Jesus Christ. The scene in which this verse occurs is the commissioning of the prophet, where his mouth is purified by the application of a burning coal to his lips so that he can speak "fittingly" of the Lord. The book of Isaiah is particularly interesting in this regard, given how often passages from Isaiah show up in the Gospels and are directly prophetic of events that happen to Christ, especially those concerning the so-called "Suffering Servant of God" in the latter part of Isaiah. Thus, as Isaiah's mind was elevated above what reason alone could grasp so that he was privileged to see the coming of the Christ, so too John's mind, St. Thomas will say, was elevated above what reason alone could grasp so that he was privileged to see the full truth of Christ's divinity.

It is in the sense of seeing Christ's *divinity* in a particularly full way that Thomas will claim John is especially *contemplative*, and he will describe the three-fold nature of John's contemplation in relation to the three images in Isaiah 6:1 we distinguished above—high, full, and perfect: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne *high* and lofty"; "the whole house was *full* of his majesty"; and the things that were under him *completely filled* the temple" (reading the Latin word related to "replete," *replebant*, as "filled completely," which is the image Thomas has in mind by saying "perfect," which, in the Latin *perfectere*, means "to complete" or to bring something to its proper end or completion). These three phrases will also suggest the matter, the order, and the end of the Gospel, but we will get to these in due course.

John's Contemplation Was "High"

John's contemplation was "high," says Thomas, in that it rose to a knowledge of God, the highest object of contemplation, and this in four different ways, each of which is suggested by the phrase "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty": one can come to a knowledge of God, says Thomas, by *authority* (which is suggested by the phrase "I saw *the Lord*"), by reasoning from *eternity* (which is suggested by the

phrase *seated*, that is "presiding without any change"), by reasoning from *dignity* or *nobility* (which is suggested by the throne's being *high*), and by reasoning from *incomprehensibility* (which is suggested by the throne's being *lofty*).

The attentive reader will notice that the word "high" is doing double service here: Thomas uses it to suggest the basic distinction between "high," "full," and "perfect," on the one hand, while also using it to suggest "dignity" as opposed to "authority," "eternity," and "incomprehensibility," on the other. This is fine, as long as the chain of associations is clear. The goal ultimately is to be able to *use* the word to recall a list of various associations, and as a word can have multiple associations, so it can send the reader off into various directions mnemonically to recall various trains of thought. When the reader reads the entire verse, the words "high," "full," and "perfect" in each phrase stand out first. As the reader focuses in on the first phrase of the verse, he or she can distinguish four elements—"I saw the Lord," "seated," on a throne "high," and "lofty"—and these four will suggest the four ways in which we come to know God: by authority, through eternity, through dignity or nobility, and through incomprehensibility.

Knowing God from His Authority

Some have arrived at the knowledge of God from his *authority*, says Thomas, but by "authority" here he does *not* mean the sort of authority to which he is referring in the *Summa theologiae* when, in the very first question, of the *prima pars*, he lists as an objection that "authority is the weakest kind of proof, as Boethius says."[4] In the *Summa*, Thomas will turn that argument on its head, allowing that "although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest," yet, "the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest."[5] Here, however, the notion of "authority" is very different; it is, as Thomas describes it, the "authority in governing" (*gubernandi auctoritas*) by which God directs all created things back to Himself as their source and ultimate end:

> For we see the things in nature acting for an end, and attaining to ends which are both useful and certain. And since they lack intelligence, they are unable to direct themselves, but must be

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4 *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, obj. 2, quoting Boethius, *Topics* 6.

5 *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

> directed and moved by one directing them, and who possesses an intellect. Thus it is that the movement of the things of nature toward a certain end indicates the existence of something higher by which the things of nature are directed to an end and governed. And so, since the whole course of nature advances to an end in an orderly way and is directed, we have to posit something higher which directs and governs them as Lord; and this is God.[6]

Those who know Thomas's *Summa theologiae* will recognize this argument as the famous "fifth way" of arriving at knowledge of God's existence—"from the governance of things" (*ex gubernatione rerum*)—in which Thomas says:

> We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.[7]

Why appeal to the fifth way in particular in this context? I suggest that the answer has something to do with the fact that the word Thomas is using to make the association in this context is "Lord" and that the word "lord" suggests "governance." Indeed, Thomas tells us as much, saying:

> This authority in governing is shown to be in the Word of God when he says, "Lord." Thus the Psalm (88:10) says: "You rule the power of the sea, and you still the swelling of its waves," as though saying: You are the Lord and govern all things. John shows that he knows this about the Word when he says below (1:11), "He came unto his own," i.e., to the world, since the whole universe is his own.[8]

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6 Prologue, 3.
7 *ST* I, q. 3, a. 3.
8 Prologue, 3.

What this passage suggests is that the so-called "fifth way" *fits* both the mnemonic device from Isaiah 6:1 *and* the content of John's Gospel that Thomas wants to emphasize. As we will see in more detail below when we get to the comments Thomas makes related to the word "full," the theological point he wishes to emphasize is that God's power extends to *all* things, and thus, it is in this way that "the whole earth" is said to be "*full* of his majesty." But we will get to this point in due time.

Knowing God from His Eternity

For now, we must return to the list of four ways in which John's contemplation led to God. The first, as we have seen, was by means of "authority," although perhaps it would be clearer if we describe it as "the authority of governing." The second way of arriving at the knowledge of God, then, says Thomas, was "from his eternity" (*ex eius aeternitate*), which Thomas associates with the word "seated" in the phrase "I saw the Lord *seated*"—that is, "presiding without any change and eternally" (*idest absque omni mutabilitate et aeternitate praesidentem*).

If the reader is tempted to find the association between "being seated" and "presiding without any change" rather far-fetched (especially those with children who, when seated, are very rarely "still" or "unchanging"), please remember that Thomas is not "commenting" he is simply associating. The word "seated" merely has to *suggest* the ideas Thomas wants his reader to remember, not *denote* them. The *modus significandi* (the "manner of signifying") here is not *direct*, as in the way words regularly denote things; in this case, the relationship is *indirect*. The word being used as a mnemonic device needs to call to mind an *image* lively enough and interesting enough to allow it to be associated with a specific chain of ideas to be recalled. The word "seated" may have any number of other associations for any particular reader, but the issue at hand is whether, in the context of reading the phrase "I saw the Lord *seated*," a particular reader can call to mind the chain of associations leading to the way the mind can arrive at the knowledge of God by way of His eternity (*ex eius aeternitate*).

How does this approach to the knowledge of God "by way of His eternity" work? According to Thomas, we reason from the mutability of things in the created world to the immutability (and thus the eternity) of their Creator. In the prologue to the commentary on John, the argument goes like this:

> [Others] saw that whatever was in things was changeable, and that the more noble something is in the grades of being, so much the less it has of mutability. For example, the lower bodies are mutable both as to their substance and to place, while the heavenly bodies, which are more noble, are immutable in substance and change only with respect to place. We can clearly conclude from this that the first principle of all things, which is supreme and more noble, is changeless and eternal.[9]

This argument is similar in certain respects to the first of the "five ways" in Thomas's *Summa*, but it is not identical.

In the first of the "five ways" in the *Summa*, Thomas argues famously for the existence of an "unmoved mover." But, in the *Summa*, Thomas is careful to define "motion" as "the reduction of something from potency to act." And since nothing can be reduced from potency to act except by something else already in act, and since there cannot be an infinite series of movers, else "there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover," therefore there must be a "first mover" not moved by another (*primum movens, quod a nullo movetur*); that is to say, there must be an ultimate act that contains no potency to become anything else. In short, the "first mover" must be the changeless source of all change in the created realm.[10]

I have suggested above that this argument in the *Summa*, although "similar in certain respects," is "not identical" to what we find here in the prologue. In an essay at the back of his translation of *The Commentary of the Gospel of St. John by St. Thomas Aquinas*, Fr. James Weisheipl points out that:

> This argument, it would seem, was never used elsewhere by St. Thomas. It suggests, however, Plato's famous argument that from contemplating "that which is Becoming always and never is Existent" one is led to "that which is Existent always and has no Becoming" (*Timaeus* 27d6–28c4)—an idea Thomas could have read in the translation and commentary by Calcidius (early 4th century). A similar argument from the mutability of all creatures to the absolute immutability of God is also

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9 Prologue, 4.

10 *ST* I, q. 3, a. 3.

> suggested in Malachi (3:6): "I, the Lord, do not change"; while the whole universe constantly changes.[11]

"Some contemporary commentators, however," says Fr. Weisheipl, "have reduced this argument to the 'first' [way] given in the *Summa*," citing an essay by J. A. Baisnée as an example.[12] "But this view does not seem tenable," argues Weisheipl, "since the argument in the Prologue is cast entirely in terms of temporality and eternity, which is not at all the same as Aristotle's argument from motion (the first way in the *Summa*)."[13] Fr. Weisheipl's point here is well worth considering, especially for those (and there are many) who specialize in parsing out the exact character of each of the "five ways."

There are, however, things that remain to be said for the other side. Although Fr. Weisheipl claims, as we have seen, that "the argument in the Prologue is cast entirely in terms of temporality and eternity, which is not at all the same as Aristotle's argument from motion," if we look again at the Prologue, we find Thomas at several points referring to the issue of the "mutability" of created things and the

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[11] Weisheipl, *Commentary*, 455. The passage Fr. Weisheipl has in mind from Calcidius's translation of Plato's *Timaeus* reads as follows in the Latin: "Est igitur, ut mihi quidem uidetur, in primis diuidendum, quid sit quod semper est, carens generatione, quid item quod gignitur nec est semper, alterum intellectu perceptibile ductu et inuestigatione rationis, semper idem, porro alterum opinione cum inrationabili sensu opinabile proptereaque incertum, nascens et occidens neque umquam in existendi condicione constanti et rata perseuerans. Omne autem quod gignitur ex causa aliqua necessario gignitur; nihil enim fit, cuius ortum non legitima causa et ratio praecedat." A contemporary English translation of the original Greek text by W. R. M. Lamb (in vol. 9 of *Plato*, 12 vols., trans. W. R. M. Lamb [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925]) reads as follows (with the relevant Greek text in parentheses): "Now first of all we must, in my judgment, make the following distinction. What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent (γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε)? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent. Again, everything which becomes must of necessity become owing to some Cause; for without a cause it is impossible for anything to attain becoming (πᾶν δὲ αὖ τὸ γιγνόμενον ὑπ᾽ αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίγνεσθαι: παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατον χωρὶς αἰτίου γένεσιν σχεῖν).

[12] J. A. Baisnée, "St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in Their Chronological Order," in *Philosophical Studies in Honor of the Very Reverend Ignatius Smith, O.P.*, ed. J. K. Ryan (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952), 29–64.

[13] See Weisheipl, *Commentary*, 455.

"immutability" of God alone. There is a gradation: earthly things are "mutable" with regard to both substance and time, while heavenly things are "immutable" with regard to substance but not with regard to time; thus the First Principle must be "immutable" with regard to both. But it is the "immutability" (*immutabilia*) of God as opposed to the "mutability" (*immutabilia*) of everything else that is at issue, and the conclusion Thomas derives from his argument is this: "We can clearly conclude from this that the first principle of all things, which is supreme and more noble, is changeless (*immobile*) and eternal."[14] So it is not as though "motion" in the sense of "mutability" or "change" is *not* involved here in the prologue. Moreover, if what Thomas has in mind here is an argument from Plato, as Fr. Weisheipl suggests, then it is odd that Thomas explicitly associates the *next* argument—the one from "dignity"—with "the Platonists" but not this one.

Thomas certainly is not presenting *Aristotle's* version of the argument for a Prime Mover here in the prologue; that much is certain. But that is not the question. The question is whether the argument here has at least *some* similarity to the argument *Thomas* makes in the first of the "five ways" in the *Summa*, an argument that, though based on Aristotle's argument for a Prime Mover, is not identical to it. It is, I have suggested, "similar in certain respects." And yet, Fr. Weisheipl is certainly right to point to the differences between the argument here and the first of the "five ways" in the *Summa*, warning us against too facilely equating the two. Whether the differences between the two are relatively unimportant or whether they are crucial to the very nature of the argument is for the reader to decide. What is clear is that Thomas did not merely "cut and paste" his argument from the *Summa* into the prologue, although we know he certainly had the memory to be able to do so if he had wished.

Knowing God from His Dignity

Along with knowing God through his "authority" of governing and through his eternity, one can also come to know God, says Thomas, through his *dignity* or *nobility*, which is suggested by the word "high" in the phrase "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, *high* and lofty." As before, this way of coming to know God corresponds, loosely but identifiably, with one of Thomas's famous "five ways," in this case the fourth way, from participation. Here is how the argument runs in the prologue to Thomas's commentary on John:

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[14] Prologue, 4.

> Still others came to a knowledge of God from the dignity of God; and these were the Platonists. They noted that everything which is something by participation is reduced to what is the same thing by essence, as to the first and highest. Thus, all things which are fiery by participation are reduced to fire, which is such by its essence. And so since all things which exist participate in existence [*esse*] and are beings by participation, there must necessarily be at the summit of all things something which is existence [*esse*] by its essence, i.e., whose essence is its existence. And this is God, who is the most sufficient, the most eminent, and the most perfect cause of the whole of existence, from whom all things that are, participate in existence [*esse*].[15]

And here is the famous "fourth way" from the *Summa*:

> The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph*. II. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.[16]

There are differences between the two, no doubt (about which I will have more to say shortly). But I suggest that the upshot of the two is basically the same: all things that exist merely *participate* in existence (*esse*), as that which is hot *participates* in hotness when it is not itself the source of its own hotness. Since neither we nor anything else we can point to in the created world is the source of its own existence, there must necessarily be a *source* of the very *being* (the *esse*) of things: a source

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[15] Prologue, 5.

[16] *ST* I, q. 3, a. 3.

of being that does not *participate* in being as we do but is, rather, the source of its own being.

In my case, my essence is "human being." I exist *as* a human being. "Human" is the way I do my existing; it defines my way of being in the world. But I am not the source of my own being; I did not create myself. There was a time when I was not—a time *before* I existed—as there will be a time in the future when I will cease to exist. Thus, I merely *participate in* existence for a time. I *have* some existence, but I am not the source of my own existence. Not so with God. God *is* His own existence. He is, as Thomas says in *On Being and Essence* "Subsisting Being Itself" (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*). All of us in the universe who have some being have it from that which is the Source of All Being. Those of us who *participate in* being participate in the being of Subsisting Being Itself. And it is for this reason that Thomas concludes that "there must necessarily be at the summit of all things something which is existence (*esse*) itself, i.e., whose essence is to exist."

Thomas's argument here is *similar* to the fourth of the "five ways" in the *Summa*, but it shares even more in common with several arguments he uses in his disputed question *On the Power of God*, q. 3, a. 5, arguments he traces back to Plato, Aristotle, and Avicenna, respectively. The question posed in the article is "whether there is anything not created by God?" And, in his reply, Thomas seeks to show that "reason proves," just as faith holds, "that all things are created by God." In particular, Thomas sets out to show that "the philosophers Plato, Aristotle, and their disciples attained to the study of universal being, and hence they alone posited a universal cause of things from which all others came into being," which, says Thomas, "is in agreement with the Catholic Faith."[17] In the three sections that follow, Thomas outlines three arguments for the existence of God: the first of which he attributes to Plato; the second to Aristotle; and the third to Avicenna.

The first argument, which he attributes in a guarded way to Plato (*ista videtur ratio Platonis*), involves the notion that, "if in a number of things we find something that is common to all, we must conclude that this something was the effect of some one cause," and since

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[17] *On the Power of God*, q. 3, a. 5. English and Latin quoted from dhspriory.org/thomas/QDdePotentia.htm (accessed July 28, 2017). This is an electronic version of Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952; repr. of 1932).

"being [*esse*] is found to be common to all things, which are by themselves distinct from one another, it follows of necessity that they must come into being [*esse*] not by themselves, but by the action of some cause [*de necessitate eis non ex se ipsis, sed ab aliqua una causa esse attribuatur*]."[18]

The second argument, which he attributes to Aristotle (cf. *Metaphysics* 2.1), is that:

> Whenever something is found to be in several things by participation in various degrees, it must be derived by those in which it exists imperfectly from that one in which it exists most perfectly: because where there are positive degrees of a thing so that we ascribe it to this one more and to that one less, this is in reference to one thing to which they approach, one nearer than another: for if each one were of itself competent to have it, there would be no reason why one should have it more than another. Thus fire, which is the extreme of heat, is the cause of heat in all things hot. Now there is one being most perfect and most true: which follows from the fact that there is a mover altogether immovable [*aliquid movens omnino immobile*] and absolutely perfect. . . . Consequently all other less perfect beings must needs derive being therefrom [*omnia alia minus perfecta ab ipso esse recipient*].

"This," says Thomas, "is the argument of the Philosopher."[19]

The third argument is based on the principle that whatsoever is through another is to be reduced, as to its cause, to that which is of itself (*illud quod est per alterum, reducitur sicut in causam ad illud quod est per se*):

> Wherefore if there were a *per se* heat, it would be the cause of all hot things, that have heat by way of participation. Now there is a being that is its own being [*quod est ipsum suum esse*]: and this follows from the fact that there must needs be a being [*aliquod primum ens*] that is pure act and wherein there is no composition. Hence from that one being all other beings that are not their own being, but have being by participation [*quae-*

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

> *cumque non sunt suum esse, sed habent esse per modum participationis*], must needs proceed.

"This is the argument of Avicenna," says Thomas.[20]

I suggest that there are ways in which Thomas's discussion in the prologue of the argument "from dignity" is an amalgamation of all three of these. That is to say, what Thomas formulated while writing *On the Power of God* (probably sometime during 1265–1266) he was able to synthesize and condense for his purposes here in the prologue to John's Gospel (probably from the second Parisian period, 1268–1272). This little paragraph in this prologue, in other words, possesses a rich philosophical background and owes a debt to many different sources, all of which have come together in Thomas's retelling.

Indeed, I have gone through this rather complicated business of tracing out the sources behind these last two paragraphs in Thomas's prologue—the one related to the word "seated" and this one, related to the word "high"—to suggest to the reader that there is some serious heavy lifting that is going on behind these relatively simple comments in the prologue, all of it tethered to the two words "seated" and "high." Thomas has simplified for his readers into a single paragraph a large and immensely complicated quantity of material. That was one of his great gifts as a master teacher and preacher. Indeed, this comment about the intellectual and philosophical depths underlying what appear to be relatively simply points in the prologue is something we can say about Thomas's sermons as well. The reader should not be misled by the ostensible simplicity of these sermons. We should not mistake simplicity for a lack of sophistication or depth; the simplicity is the result of a superb mind. If the reader were to scratch the surface and probe a bit more deeply at any point, he or she would unravel a world of interesting detail.

Knowing God from the Incomprehensibility of Truth

The last of the ways of arriving at the knowledge of God, says Thomas, is "from the incomprehensibility of truth," which he associates with the word "lofty"—that is, "above all the knowledge of the created intellect." If the reader were to ask, "Couldn't Thomas have used the word 'high' for this purpose as well?" the answer is "yes." Indeed, if the verse had been written in some other way or the points he wanted to make

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[20] Ibid.

somewhat different, then he might have done so. But in this context, *this* was the association he needed to make, and so Thomas says:

> Yet others arrived at a knowledge of God from the incomprehensibility of truth. All the truth which our intellect is able to grasp is finite, since according to Augustine, "everything that is known is bounded by the comprehension of the one knowing"; and if it is bounded, it is determined and particularized. Therefore, the first and supreme Truth, which surpasses every intellect, must necessarily be incomprehensible and infinite; and this is God. Hence the Psalm (8:2) says, "Your greatness is above the heavens," i.e., above every created intellect, angelic and human. The Apostle says this in the words, "He dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16). This incomprehensibility of Truth is shown to us in the word, *lofty*, that is, above all the knowledge of the created intellect.[21]

As there must be an ultimate source of all *being*, so too there must be an ultimate source of all *truth*. J. A. Baisnée reports in his study "St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in Their Chronological Order" that he could find no other appearance of this particular argument, which can be traced back ultimately to a comment St. Augustine makes in *The City of God* 12.18 while refuting those who held that God could not comprehend all numbers.[22]

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[21] Prologue, 6.

[22] Baisnée, "St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs," 64. The original text of Augustine's *City of God* 12.18 reads as follows: "And thus, if everything which is comprehended is defined or made finite by the comprehension of him who knows it, then all infinity is in some ineffable way made finite to God, for it is comprehensible by His knowledge. Wherefore, if the infinity of numbers cannot be infinite to the knowledge of God, by which it is comprehended, what are we poor creatures that we should presume to fix limits to His knowledge, and say that unless the same temporal thing be repeated by the same periodic revolutions, God cannot either foreknow His creatures that He may make them, or know them when He has made them? God, whose knowledge is simply manifold, and uniform in its variety, comprehends all incomprehensibles with so incomprehensible a comprehension, that though He willed always to make His later works novel and unlike what went before them, He could not produce them without order and foresight, nor conceive them suddenly, but by His eternal foreknowledge" (trans. Marcus Dods in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 1st series, vol. 2 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994]).

It is to my mind quite interesting to talk about "arriving at a knowledge of God" from the "incomprehensibility of truth" (*ex incomprehensibilitate veritatis*). One generally expects to arrive at "cognition" from having attained "comprehension." And yet, we might describe this manner of arriving at a "contemplation" of God as something akin to the famous "way of negation" described in Pseudo-Dionysius's treatise on the *Divine Names*, whereby the human mind proceeds by way of negating the affirmations one made previously in the "way of affirmation." We say "God is *not* good" or "God is *not* just," by which we mean that God is not "good" in the way *I* comprehend goodness or justice. No—God's goodness and justice is still infinitely beyond what my limited, finite mind can grasp. There are undoubtedly good reasons that Thomas did not include this argument as one of the five "proofs" for the existence of God in the *Summa*. But as a mode of "contemplation" and as a way of approaching God's greatness by way of negation, it has an invaluable role to play.

Mnemonic Devices and Dilation: Two Benefits of the *Sermo Modernus* Style

Two further observations are in order at this point about the benefits of using the *sermo modernus* style in a prologue such as this. The first has to do with the use of the style as a mnemonic device to help the listener remember the content of the prologue. Although I have often had trouble keeping track of which of the "five ways" is which—something Thomists are never supposed to admit in public—I have much less trouble remembering the four ways Thomas describes here in this prologue when I recall the four parts of the opening *thema* verse: "I saw the Lord" (authority of governance), "seated" (eternity), on a throne "high" (dignity) and "lofty" (above all the knowledge of the created intellect). Remembering the arguments in this way is like remembering the five lines on the treble clef in music by recalling the phrase "Every good boy does fine" (E, G, B, D, F) or remembering the five phases of cell division in mitosis (Interphase, Prophase, Metaphase, Anaphase, and Telophase) by recalling the phrase "I Propose Men Are Toads." If I had been a bit smarter as an undergraduate, perhaps I would have made up one of these ingenious little mnemonic devices to help me remember each of the "five ways" in the *Summa*. Unfortunately, I never did. Fortunately, here, Thomas has done it for us.

The second observation has to do with Thomas's amazing claim that all the complicated and philosophically sophisticated ways of coming to know God described above—from the governance of the world; from the necessity of having an eternal first cause; from the participation of all that exists in some first cause whose essence it is to exist; and from the infinite character of the First Truth— are present and passed on to us in John's Gospel.[23] Most of us do not take the Gospels to be a source of sophisticated philosophical reasoning. Thomas, quite clearly, did. But what on earth could he be talking about in claiming that all these sophisticated philosophical approaches to God can be found in the Gospel of John?

A complete answer to this question would require an analysis of the entire commentary, which would be out of place given that our focus is the prologue. And yet, consider: What does one learn even from the opening verses of the Gospel? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Do these words not seem to suggest the Lord's *eternity*? Then we read: "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." Do these words not suggest His *dignity* as the cause of the whole of existence? "He came to his own." According to Thomas, because the whole world here is being called "his own" (*quia totus mundus est suus proprius*), we can understand these words to refer to God's *authority of governing*. And finally, "No one has ever seen God." Do these words not suggest the *incomprehensibility of God*, who is the First Truth and who can be made known only by the "true light, which gives light to everyone"? Such are the lessons Thomas thinks we can (and ought to) learn from these words.

Thus, as Thomas was "unpacking" (by means of *dilatio*) the *thema* verse of his prologue, he was also teaching his students by example to "unpack" the Scriptures and to come to understand the incredible intellectual riches lying hidden beneath the surface simplicity of the text. He would have been showing them that the Scriptures can, in fact, be a fruitful source for philosophical reflection and a wise guide if one learns to read carefully. If any of his students had arrived in his class with the mistaken notion that the Scriptures were "simple" books for "simple people"—that they were "milk" for children, while the books of the philosophers were "meat" for adults—Thom-

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[23] Prologue, 6.

as's remarkable display of erudition in this prologue should have disabused them of such foolishness. I will have more to say on this *protreptic* goal of the prologue below. But for now, it is worth noting that, in four short paragraphs, Thomas managed to sum up layer upon layer of complicated philosophical argumentation, ordering it appropriately with regard to its proper end—namely, the One who is both Subsisting Being Itself and Truth—all of it coordinated to one biblical verse, and in particular, four simple words: the "Lord," "seated," on a throne "high" and "lofty." And *that*, I would suggest, is the work of a master teacher.

John's Contemplation was "Full" and "Perfect"

Having gotten everything he wished out of the phrase "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty" (indeed, more than most of us would have thought possible), Thomas then moves on to the next phrase in his *thema* verse, "and the whole house was full of his majesty," unpacking (that is, "dilating") it more modestly, at much shorter length than he did the first. The dominant image here, as we mentioned above, is that of *fullness*. John's contemplation was *full*, says Thomas, in the sense that it extended to all things. Contemplation is *full* "when someone is able to consider all the effects of a cause." Thus John, having been raised up to the contemplation of the divine Word when he says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," immediately adds that the power of the Word extends to all things, saying: "Through him all things came into being." Thus John's contemplation was *full*, which is suggested by the phrase "and the whole house was *full* of his majesty":

> And so after the prophet [in the text from Isaiah 6:1] had said, "I saw the Lord seated," he added something about his power, "and the whole house was full of his majesty," that is, the whole fullness of things and of the universe is from the majesty and power of God, through whom all things were made, and by whose light all the men coming into this world are enlightened.[24]

With this, we arrive finally at the last of the three phrases that makes up the opening *thema* verse, Isaiah 6:1: "and the things that were under him completely filled [*replebant*] the temple." As the reader may recall, Thomas associates the Latin word *replebant* (to fill up completely) with the idea of completion or perfection, saying that:

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[24] Prologue, 7.

"The contemplation of John was also perfect" (*perfecta*), since he was "led and raised to the height of the thing contemplated [*perducitur et elevatur ad altitudinem rei contemplatae*]."[25]

What Thomas has in mind here might surprise the reader. We might have imagined that the "highest," "most perfect" sort of contemplation would involve a mystical vision of the divine essence. But this is not what Thomas has in mind. Rather, the contemplation that is "perfect" is a vision of that by which humankind is *made perfect*. Thus, after John teaches us that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is God, raised above all things ("high") and that all thing were made through him, and without him, nothing was made ("full"), he tells us how we are sanctified by the grace he pours into us, saying: "Of his fullness we have all received—indeed, grace upon grace" (John 1:16). "The things under him," says Thomas—that is, the sacraments of his humanity—"filled the temple"—that is, the faithful, who are the holy temple of God (1 Cor 3:17)—insofar as "through the sacraments of his humanity all the faithful of Christ receive from the fullness of his grace." Thus, God's love is a "perfect" love precisely because it "perfects" that which He loves. When we accept this love, it does not leave us in our sin. It is a "complete" love that does not fall short, even when we do, because it completes us by sanctifying us and bringing us to the fullness of our end.[26] For Thomas, it was precisely

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[25] Prologue, 8.

[26] On this, consider the following comment by Fr. Louis Bouyer from his wonderful book *The Meaning of Sacred Scripture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 66–67: "God does not wait until man has ceased to be unjust in order to love him, He loves him already in his unjustness. . . . At the same time, this does not include . . . any break with the demands [of justice] once proclaimed by Amos. However paradoxical this seems, it is here, on the contrary, that we find the unhoped-for way in which to satisfy them. If God does not wait for us to be just in order to love us, it is because His love is, precisely, the only force that can make us just. If the love of God is unmerited, it is because He is the creator. And His creative power is such that He can make a just man out of the most guilty. . . . At the same time as the love of God reveals itself as the great, the unique power which is truly creative, the supreme creation of God is discovered to be this new heart which God wishes to place in man." In a similar vein, Pope Benedict XVI makes this comment in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), §10: "We have seen that God's *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. Hosea above all shows us that this *agape* dimension of God's love for man goes far beyond the aspect of gratuity. Israel has committed 'adultery' and has broken the covenant; God should judge and repudiate her.

because John saw how God's love perfects us that we can say John's contemplation was "perfect."

And with this, Thomas has finished "unpacking" the three sorts of "contemplation" he set out to associate with the three phrases in Isaiah 6:1: John's contemplation was "high" ("I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty"), "full" ("and the whole earth was full of his majesty"), and "perfect" ("and the things that were under him completely filled the temple"). He had a great deal more to say about the first phrase ("I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty") than he did about the other two, associating in that case nearly every word in the phrase with a separate topic, but that is simply the way these associations work. Unlike scriptural commentaries, where each verse merits roughly equal treatment, here, when the phrase has served its mnemonic purpose, and only then, does he move on.

The Threefold Division of the Sciences

And yet, having finished his "unpacking" of Isaiah 6:1 in terms of the three sorts of contemplation we find in John's Gospel, Thomas is still not done with the verse. For he is now going to associate each of these three types of "contemplation" with one of the three divisions among the sciences common in St. Thomas's day: moral science, natural science, and metaphysics. "We should note, however, that these three characteristics of contemplation belong to the different sciences in different ways," says Thomas:

> The perfection of contemplation is found in Moral Science, which is concerned with the ultimate end. The fullness of contemplation is possessed by Natural Science, which considers things as proceeding from God. Among the physical [natural] sciences, the height of contemplation is found in Metaphysics. But the Gospel of John contains all together what the above sciences have in a divided way, and so it is most perfect.[27]

This particular division between ethics, natural science, and meta-

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It is precisely at this point that God is revealed to be God and not man: 'How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! . . . My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst' (Hos 11:8–9). God's passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love."

[27] Prologue, 9.

physics dates back to the early Greek Stoics, and though it is not one Thomas uses everywhere (the division between mathematics, natural philosophy [or physics], and metaphysics is more well-known from Thomas's *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*, q. 5), still the Stoic division was well-known among his contemporaries and served his purposes here.[28]

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[28] Zeno (ca. 335–263 BC), founder of the Stoic school in Athens, insisted that the didactic order that ought to be observed when teaching students was to be: logic first, then ethics, and finally physics. Cleanthes (ca. 330/331–232/231 BC), the second head of the Stoic school in Athens, expanded the list, pairing dialectic and rhetoric, then ethics and politics, and finally physics and theology. Chrysippus (ca. 279–206 BC), third head of the school, sometimes called "The Second Father of Stoicism," was even more concerned that theology serve as both the source and the summit of the Stoic course of studies. Plutarch quotes him and describes his view in *De Stoicorum repugnantiis*, 9 (1035a) thus: "Chrysippus is of the opinion, that young students should first learn logic, secondly, ethics, and after these, physics, and likewise in this to meddle last of all with the disputes concerning the Gods. Now these things having been often said by him, it will suffice to set down what is found in his *Fourth Book of Lives*, being thus word for word: 'First then, it seems to me, according as it has been rightly said by the ancients, that there are three kinds of philosophical speculations, logical, ethical, and physical, and that of these, the logical ought to be placed first, the ethical second, and the physical third, and that of the physical, the discourse concerning the Gods ought to be the last; wherefore also the traditions concerning this have been styled Τελεταί, or the *Endings.*' But that very discourse concerning the Gods, which he says ought to be placed the last, he usually places first and sets before every moral question. For he is seen not to say any thing either concerning the ends, or concerning justice, or concerning good and evil, or concerning marriage and the education of children, or concerning the law and the commonwealth; but, as those who propose decrees to states set before them the words *To Good Fortune*, so he also premises something of Jupiter, Fate, Providence, and of the world's being one and finite and maintained by one power. None of which any one can be persuaded to believe, who has not penetrated deeply into the discourses of natural philosophy. Hear what he says of this in his *Third Book of the Gods*: 'For there is not to be found any other beginning or any other generation of Justice, but what is from Jupiter and common Nature. From thence must every such thing have its beginning, if we will say anything concerning good and evil.' And again, in his *Natural Positions* he says: 'For one cannot otherwise or more properly come to the discourse of good and evil, to the virtues, or to felicity, than from common Nature and the administration of the world'" (*Plutarch's Morals*, *translated from the Greek by several hands, corrected and revised by William W. Goodwin, with an introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson,* 5 volumes [Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1878], vol. 4). It is not entirely clear from what source Thomas knew this particular division. He repeats this threefold hierarchy—

Recall what Thomas said above about John's contemplation being "high," "full," and "perfect": "high," in the sense that it arrives at the knowledge of God; "full," in the sense that he tells us that the power of the Word extends to all things; and "perfect," in the sense that, by God's grace, we are lifted up to Him and thus brought to our final end. In this next section of the prologue, each of these three sorts of "contemplation" is coordinated with the threefold Stoic division of the sciences. What happens in natural science? Thomas's answer John's Gospel provides (because his contemplation is "full" enough to see that the power of the Word extends to all things) is that the study of nature is, ultimately, a reflection on how God works in and through creation. What is the principle metaphysics seeks? John's Gospel shows us (because his contemplation is "high" enough to arrive at the knowledge of God) that the goal of metaphysics ultimately must be Subsisting Being Itself (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*), the Source of All Being. What is the ultimate goal of moral science? John's Gospel shows us (because his contemplation is "perfect") that our minds and hearts must be perfected so as to bring us to the Beatific Vision.

Or to state the matter more concisely, we might simply say this: How is the study of natural science perfected? By realizing that what it studies is God's work. How is metaphysics perfected? By realizing that it is a foretaste of the vision of Subsisting Being Itself. How is moral science perfected? By grace and the reception of Christ's sacraments.

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similarly without attribution—in his *Commentary on Boethius' De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 1, obj. 10: "the ancients are said to have observed the following order in learning the sciences: first logic, then mathematics, then natural science, after that moral science, and finally . . . divine science" (trans. Armand Maurer, in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Division and Methods of the Sciences: Questions V and VI of His Commentary on the* De Trinitate *of Boethius* [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Study, 1963]). Thomas has taken the liberty here in his prologue to the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* of leaving aside the first two—logic and mathematics, which are presumably *not* covered in the Gospel (a claim that is not entirely uncontroversial, one would think)—and of eliding "divine science" and "metaphysics." This identification of the two was not uncommon among Aristotelians: in some places, Thomas will distinguish them carefully; in other circumstances, he will not. Thomas's basic point, however—and the one most likely to be controversial—is this: In the Gospel of John, one will find instruction in those things traditionally considered "highest" in the order of pedagogy set forth by the philosophers: natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and metaphysics.

We might think of Thomas's point here in terms of Bonaventure's *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology.*[29] Bonaventure's "reduction" does not involve "lessening" the arts and sciences so that theology can become preeminent, nor does it involve a violation of the methods proper to each of the various disciplines. What it involves, rather, is showing how each of the disciplines has its proper end and goal revealed to it by theology. So too here, in his prologue, Thomas suggests that "what the above sciences have in a divided way" the Gospel of John "contains all together," and so is "most perfect." By this, he does not mean that we can learn natural science, metaphysics, and ethics simply from reading the Gospel. But what we can learn from the Gospel is the proper place of each within the didactic order that leads us to the highest truth and our ultimate end.

In the modern world, we tend to think of each discipline as having its own autonomous laws and boundaries. However, given the damage that can often result from the practices of certain politicians and businessmen and doctors, we may subsequently decide that the practitioners of the sciences of politics, business, or medicine should get a little training in what we call "ethics." But what that often does is simply to introduce extraneously a different set of goals and principles into the usual considerations of the discipline. If business is about maximization of profit, then the "other-regarding" concerns of ethics will often enough seem not only extraneous to the discipline, but downright annoying. If politics is the science of gaining and wielding power, then the ethical concerns of those who think others should be treated as rational agents of equal dignity with oneself will likely seem utterly naive: pleasant enough for the Sunday homiletics of priests or the musings of academic moralists, but not anything for serious politicians.

In the medieval view represented by Bonaventure's *reductio* and Thomas's prologue, however, each discipline is understood as pointing the way toward the Creator. The old medieval adage that "grace does not violate nature but perfects it" applies here as well. Recognizing that all the arts and sciences find their ultimate source and summit in God will, on this understanding, not violate the order of the sciences, but rather perfect them. Unlike modern "reductions" of the human person to, say, pure biology or pure physical causality,

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[29] Cf. Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of Arts to Theology*, trans. Zachary Hayes, Works of St. Bonaventure 1 (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, 1996).

which often end up negating a great deal of human experience (say the value of love or aesthetic experience or free will), the kind of "reduction" that Bonaventure and Aquinas have in mind does not *negate* the importance of the other disciplines. Rather, it reveals how important they are by showing how they can be understood as a foretaste of our eternal beatitude and an important means to that end.

Settling in Advance on the Terms for Interpreting the Gospel: John's Prologue and Thomas's

It is worth noting that Thomas's prologue to the Gospel of John is meant to achieve many of the same goals traditionally associated with John's own prologue to his Gospel. Reading the Gospel of John in light of its prologue—and thus, by extension, reading Thomas's prologue—means reading the Gospel not merely as the story of a wise and interesting first-century-AD prophet, but as the story the incarnate Word responsible for the *being* of all that exists.

Consider, for example, Thomas's claim in his Prologue that what the sciences of natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics have "in a divided way" the Gospel of John "contains all together," and so is "most perfect." What makes a comment like this possible is precisely the Christocentric perspective from which Thomas approaches all the books of Sacred Scripture. There is a natural and understandable tendency to think of a "Christocentric" reading of Scripture purely in terms of interpreting events and characters of the Old Testament as "types" or "figures" of Christ. This is certainly one sort of "Christocentric" reading. But I would argue that there is another sort in the New Testament. John's recalling of Jesus's life is "Christocentric" for the obvious reason that he is writing precisely to proclaim Jesus as "the Christ." But more than that, what John *understands* by proclaiming Jesus to be "the Christ" is something radical and fundamentally "incarnational." To be "the Christ" means that Jesus is not only the long-awaited Messiah, although He is that as well; it means, more radically, that He unites in himself both divinity and humanity and, through his humanity, is united to all of creation.

Pope John Paul II states the truth of the matter nicely in his encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* when he says: "The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is 'flesh': the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic

dimension."[30] We find the same notion again in Cardinal Avery Dulles's extraordinary book *The Catholicity of the Church*, in which he says: "The Word of God, in assuming a full human existence, entered into a kind of union with the [entire] cosmos."[31]

Thomas's Prologue extends this insight and applies it to the debates of his own time, clarifying for his readers why the Gospel can, and indeed must, be taken as seriously by philosophers as by the uneducated. The paradoxical claim is that the Supreme Cause of the being of everything that exists, the ultimate end of the contemplative searches of Plato and Aristotle and most of the greatest philosophers of the ancient world—this Supreme Cause of being is "revealed in" the words and deeds of this particular man from Galilee. He is not merely a "religious" figure, not merely a "mythic" figure, nor merely "the god of the philosophers," but the Word made flesh, God incarnate.

This is the Person to whom Thomas is introducing his readers. This is the person with whom his readers must become acquainted as they read John's Gospel. Without this perspective, what are his readers left with? Without the reality of "the Word made flesh," the Gospel is a very different story. It is either the picture of a man pretending to be god-like—a great prophet, perhaps, but one who might rightly be charged with some serious delusions of grandeur—or of a god merely *pretending* to be a man: pretending to be hungry, pretending to be thirsty, pretending to cry at the death of a friend, pretending to suffer and die on a cross, when in reality, as God, he can really suffer none of those things. Without "the Word made flesh," the deeds recounted in the Gospel of John are not, as Cardinal Dulles suggests, "outward manifestations of the inner mystery" of Christ's being; they would be, rather, merely an outward show, an illusion, something to entertain the crowds perhaps, but not the fit object of study for scholars, whether modern or medieval. If Jesus were not the Word who was in the beginning and without whom nothing that came into being exists, if He were not the Way, Truth, and the Life, then neither Thomas nor anyone else could say of His story that, in it, natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics find their source and crown.

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[30] *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986), §50.

[31] Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 54.

The Four Aristotelian Causes

In my introductory paragraphs above, I suggested that the expectations Thomas's audience brought to reading a prologue were very different from our current expectations. We tend to expect the writers of prologues to provide biographical, historical, intellectual and/or literary background. These were not, however, the expectations of Thomas's medieval audience.

The first difference we have noted is that Thomas's audience understood how the processes of *divisio* and *dilatio* used in the medieval *sermo modernus* worked and they were not averse to reading a prologue written in this style. We know this to be true not only because Thomas's prologue to John's Gospel was written this way but also because nearly all of his other prologues were written this way as well. We find the practice, for example, in the prologue to each book of his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (1252–1256), in the preface to his treatise *Contra Impugnantes* (1256), and in the prologues to his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate* (1257–1258) and *De Hebdomadibus* (written sometime after the *De Trinitate*), and there is even a small vestige of it remaining in the prologue to his *Summa contra gentiles* (1259). His audience was used to hearing such sermons—it was an efficient way of delivering a good amount of information in an ordered, memorable format—so they clearly did not find this an odd way of introducing a text.

Another commonplace among Thomas's audience of students at the University of Paris would have been knowledge of the four "causes" of Aristotelian natural philosophy: the formal cause, which tells us *what* a thing is; the material cause, which tells us *out of what* the thing has come; the efficient or moving cause, which tells us *from whence* a thing comes (in the sense of what caused the change that brought it into existence); and the final cause, which tells us *to what end or purpose* the thing is directed. Thomas had organized the prologue to his commentary on the Psalms entirely around these four causes.[32] But in other prologues, he had sometimes identified only one or two of the four—as in, for example, his prologue to the commentary on Ephesians, in which he mentions only the efficient cause (Paul), or in his prologues to the commentaries on Colossians and First Corinthians, where he mentions only the *materia* (the subject matter) of the

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[32] For a good treatment, see Alistair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), 75f.

text. Here, in his prologue to the commentary on the Gospel of John, Thomas touches upon all four of the Aristotelian causes, but each of them only relatively briefly.

Thomas begins this final section of the Prologue with the "matter" (the *materia*) of the Gospel of John, concerning which he professes that, "while the other Evangelists treat principally of the mysteries of the humanity of Christ, John, especially and above all, makes known the divinity of Christ in his Gospel," although "he does not ignore the mysteries of his humanity" either.[33]

From this statement, we can understand why modern translators tend to translate *materia* in this context as "subject-matter." And yet, it is important to note that *materia* in Latin has connotations missing in the English term "subject-matter." The *materia*—the "subject-matter" of the text—must still be given form. The author (the efficient cause) must still give his topic a particular shape, size, and order by means of the words he uses and how he makes use of them.

So too here, after identifying the "subject-matter" of the text (the underlying *materia*), Thomas goes on to identify the *form* of the text—that is, "the order of the Gospel" (*ordo istius Evangelii*). To get his point across most effectively, Thomas finds that he can return once again to his opening *thema* verse, Isaiah 6:1: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty, and the whole house was full of his majesty, and the things that were under him filled the temple." The order of the Gospel is suggested by this verse, says Thomas:

> John first shows us *the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne*, when he says, "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). He shows secondly how *the house was full of his majesty*, when he says, "through him all things came into being" (John 1:3). Thirdly, John shows how the *things that were under him filled the temple*, when he says, "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14).

Thomas's comment here on the "order of the Gospel" corresponds nicely to his discussion above, where he suggested that John's contemplation was "high" because it arrived at the height of the Godhead Itself ("the Word," who was "in the beginning"; John 1:1), "full" because John possessed a vision of how God's power filled the entire world ("through Him all things came into being"; John 1:3), and

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[33] Prologue, 10.

"perfect" because it was of that which "sanctified" and "perfected" man (by "the Word" being "made flesh"; John 1:14).

The "order" Thomas identifies here in his prologue also corresponds with what we find later in the body of his commentary. If we turn to chapter 1, lectio 1, section (Marietti no.) 23 of the commentary [hereafter, *In Ioh.*], we find Thomas repeating his claim that the basic "subject-matter" of John's Gospel is "principally to show the divinity of the Incarnate Word." So what is the *order* by which John proceeds to show this? Thomas proposes that the Gospel can be divided into two main parts: in the first, John "declares (*insinuat*) the divinity of Christ"; in the second, he "shows it by the things Christ did in the flesh." Where does the "first part" (where John "declares" the divinity of Christ) end and the second part (where he "shows it by the things Christ did the flesh") begin? Thomas's answer is that the second part of the Gospel begins at John 2:1, with the words "and on the third day there was a wedding at Cana." And indeed, if we glance ahead at Thomas's comments on John 2:1, we find: "Above, the Evangelist showed the dignity of the incarnate Word. . . . Now he begins to relate the effects and actions by which the divinity of the incarnate Word was made known to the world" (*In Ioh.* 2, lec.1, Marietti no. 335). First, says Thomas, John "tells the things Christ did while living in the world that show his divinity." Second, "he tells how Christ showed his divinity while dying; and this from chapter twelve on." And if we once again glance ahead, this time to Thomas's comments at the beginning of his first lecture on chapter 12 (*In Ioh.* 12, lec. 1, Marietti no. 1589), we find this: "So far the Evangelist has been showing the power of Christ's divinity by what he did and taught during his public life. Now he begins to show the power of his divinity as manifested in his passion and death."

What, then, is the "order" of topics in John's Gospel? As Thomas suggests earlier in his prologue, John's contemplation was "high," "full, and "perfect." It was "high" in that the Gospel begins with a vision of the divinity of Christ, the Word of God made flesh. It was "full" because the Gospel then quickly moves on to show how the Lord's power filled the entire world: how Christ manifested His divinity by showing forth his divine power over the natural world (e.g., the miracle at Cana, walking on water, healing of the sick, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, raising Lazarus from the dead) and by the authority of His teaching. And finally, John's vision was "perfect" because the Gospel concludes by showing how Christ

manifest His divinity in and through His death and resurrection—the sacrifice by means of which our salvation is won and we are "perfected."

Once Thomas has thus clarified the *form* of the Gospel, the *end* or *purpose* becomes clear. "The end of this Gospel" (*finis huius Evangelii*), says Thomas, "is that the faithful become the temple of God and become filled (*repleantur*) with the majesty of God," which Thomas's students can more easily remember from the opening *thema* verse, which ends: "I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the whole house was full of his majesty, *and the things that were under him filled* [*replebant*] *the temple*" [emphasis added]. By "seeing the Lord" as John saw the Lord, with a contemplation that is "high," "full," and "perfect," we are made into "the temple of God" built of living stones, the Body of Christ, and are "filled up to completion with" or "perfected by" (*repleantur*) the majesty of God.[34]

Thomas understands, as the early Christians did, that Jesus is not proclaimed the Christ *in spite of* his death on the Cross, but precisely *because of* his death on the Cross and resurrection from the dead. It is by this last act, in fact, that the Word reveals itself most fully as the perfect Love that conquers both sin and death. This is "perfect" love both in the sense that it is complete and in the sense that it is perfecting. Not only is His sacrificial death and his resurrection from the dead the means by which Christ *reveals* God's will to reconcile man to Himself; it is also the means by which He *brings it about*.

Hence Thomas's message to his philosophically trained students is this: it is not unimportant *philosophically* that Christ revealed God's eternal Word-made-present not merely by showing how God's power filled the entire world (say, for example, in his miracles) but also in and through His passion and death on the Cross. Unlike, say, Plato, Christ lives. Plato, now dead, has no more power to speak to his students. At best, his soul is united with the eternal Forms, a realm to which he can now give us no more reliable access than he did during his life. We can read the road map he left behind, but he can no longer in person guide our steps along the intellectual ascent to the realities at the top of the Divided Line described in book 6 of the *Republic*. Christ, by contrast, lives and is seated at the right hand of the Father, from whence He sends God's own Holy Spirit to both

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[34] On this, cf. 1 Cor 3:16 ("Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?") and 1 Pet 2:5 ("And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple").

enlighten our intellects and help discipline our will and our appetites: a living Spirit Plato neither claimed to possess or be able to send to his students after his death. With his death, Plato's role as "teacher" is over; only his texts remain. With Christ's death, his role was just beginning; in and through the text of Scripture we have access to the living Word of God and his sanctifying Spirit. Or to put the matter more accurately, it is in and through the Sacred Scriptures that, if we let them, the living Word of God and his sanctifying Spirit can gain access to us.

The Author and His Authority

Thus far, we have considered three of the four Aristotelian causes: the material, formal, and final causes of the Gospel. And so Thomas sums up at the end of section 10 of the prologue saying: "The matter of this Gospel, the knowledge of the divinity of the Word, is clear, as well as its order and end." What remains to be examined is the efficient cause, which, in the case of a book, would be its author. And so, in section 11, the final section of the prologue, Thomas says that his final task is to describe "the condition of the author" (*conditio auctoris*)—and this in four ways: as to his name, his virtue, his symbol, and his privilege. It would have been convenient if Thomas had managed to map each of these topics onto his opening *thema* verse. But there are limits to what even an imaginative genius such as Thomas can do with one set of words. In his sermons, he is at times able to get his verbal mnemonics to do double, even triple, duty. In this prologue, Thomas has already managed to get quite a lot out of his little verse from Isaiah 6:1. So, instead of trying to wring more blood out of that particular turnip, he finds another set of mnemonic images to help his readers remember the details he wants to get across about the author of the Gospel, St. John the Evangelist.

Understanding this final section on the "condition of the author" can be a bit tricky, however, because it depends on some elements not plainly in view to the contemporary reader. In medieval editions of the text, Thomas's prologue would have been printed beneath Jerome's prologue, along with a short commentary by Thomas on Jerome's prologue. It was a common practice of the day to start any biblical commentary with one of Jerome's prologues—a clear testament to Jerome's abiding impact as a biblical authority throughout this period. Unfortunately, Jerome's prologue and Thomas's commentary on that prologue are not included in most contemporary

printed editions of the *Commentary*.[35] This is unfortunate because leaving out Jerome's prologue may leave the reader wondering what Thomas is talking about in his own prologue.

So, for example, with regard to the name of the author, Thomas tells us in his prologue that "John" is interpreted as "in whom is grace," since "the secrets of the divinity cannot be seen except by those who have the grace of God within themselves." What is Thomas's source for this analysis of the name "John" as one "in whom is grace"? One source is the famous Alcuin of York, whom Thomas cites in the *Catena aurea* in a comment on John 1:6–8. Another is the Venerable Bede, whom Thomas quotes giving this same interpretation of the name "John" in the *Catena aurea* at Luke 1:11–14.

If we move on from these references and look at Thomas's commentary on Jerome's prologue, we find him making the same point: "For he [that is, Jerome] describes the author from his name, saying, 'This is John,' in whom there is grace—1 Cor 15:10: 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'" The biblical reference here is odd, however, given that the single verse from 1 Corinthians 15:10 stating "by the grace of God I am what I am" could scarcely be considered sufficient evidence for the claim that the name "John" means "in whom there is grace," especially since the First Letter to the Corinthians was written by Paul, not John.

Let me suggest that the verse from 1 Corinthians 15:10 is not intended to prove the philological point about the meaning of John's name; rather it advances the theological argument. That is to say, Thomas has read in other sources—namely, Bede and Alcuin—that the name "John" means "in whom there is grace."[36] The *theological*

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[35] It is missing, for example, from the 1980 Magi Press volume containing Weisheipl's translation. One can find an English translation of Jerome's prologue with Thomas's commentary on it done by Fr. Joseph Kenny, O.P. at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm#02 (accessed July 28, 2017). These have been placed *below* the prologue we are discussing in this article, an arrangement that makes less sense when it becomes clear that one needs information from Jerome's prologue to understand Thomas's.

[36] Thomas and his medieval sources may be entirely correct about this derivation of the name "John," as it turns out. Some modern commentators suggest that the name "John" (in English), which is derived from the Latin *Ioannes*, which is in turn a form of the Greek *Iōánnēs* (Ἰωάννης), might be a form of the Hebrew name Yôḥanan (יוֹחָנָן), which means "Graced by Yahweh." It would not have been at all uncommon in the ancient Jewish world, of course, to have had a symbolic name of this sort.

point—that is to say, the theological *significance* of this detail about John's name—is that John knows what he knows about God through God's gracious gifts, not through His own merit or unaided efforts. John knows what he knows, in other words (his contemplation is "high," "full," and "perfect") because these things were revealed to him by God.

Of the four topics Thomas set about to discuss with regard to the "condition of the author"—name, virtue, symbol, and privilege—we have treated the first, John's name. But as we have seen, the point is not merely to give the author's name; the point is to describe, as Thomas says, "the condition of the author" (*conditio auctoris*). Those who understand the resonances that accompany the medieval use of the word *auctor* and its related close cousin *auctoritas* (from whence we get our English word "authority") will know that, in this context, describing the "condition of the author" has nothing to do with describing the psychological or biographical background of the author. It has to do rather with the nature of the man's authority to speak on the topic at hand. And in this case, his name reveals the nature of his authority: namely, it is by the grace of God that he is what he is.

The same consideration concerning the nature of John's authority underlies Thomas's next comment—about John's *virtue*. "As concerns his virtue," says Thomas, "John *saw the Lord seated*, because he was a virgin; for it is fitting that such persons see the Lord: 'Blessed are the pure in heart' [for they shall see God] (Matt 5:8)." Again, the point here is not a psychological one about John's background; it has to do with John's worthiness, his fittingness, for the task of writing about God. To make his point, Thomas returns one last time to his opening biblical *thema* verse in order to suggest that we can think of the one who says, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty," as *John*, even though the verse itself is uttered by the prophet Isaiah, since John is the one who superlatively has a vision of the Lord that is high, full, and "perfect."

As we discussed above with regard to Thomas's use of biblical epigraphs as prefaces for his sermons, what underlies these cross-textual references is an essentially Christocentric understanding of the text. Although it was admittedly Isaiah who originally uttered the phrase "I saw the Lord seated on a throne high and lofty, and the whole house was full of his majesty," Thomas can use it to describe John because John was the one who most truly "saw the Lord"—indeed, in person—who was able to see clearly how "the whole house

was *full* of his majesty" by hearing his words and seeing his deeds, and who, at the foot of the Cross, saw how God's majesty "filled completely the temple," perfecting all those "living stones" that God is "building up into his spiritual temple" (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). Thus, it was *John* who most truly "saw the Lord," and as the Beatitudes tell us, it is the "pure of heart" that "see the Lord."

The detail about John being a virgin is something Thomas gets from Jerome's prologue, which, as I mentioned above, the reader would not necessarily know unless he or she was reading an edition that reproduced that prologue. "This is John, the Evangelist, one of the disciples of the Lord, a virgin chosen by God," says Jerome in the first sentence of that prologue.

This is an odd reference, however, not so much because we think that John had a wife: there's no mention of one in the Gospels, nor in particular is there any mention of John having a wife when Christ from the Cross gives the care of his own mother to John. The oddity derives from the fact that Jerome also seems to think that it was *John*'s wedding at Cana at which Jesus performed his first miracles, but that Jesus called him away from the wedding "when he wanted to marry." It is unclear where Jerome has gotten this odd little detail.

But again, it is the *theological* point that is the key one in both Jerome's prologue and Thomas's commentary on it: "the Lord, hanging on the cross," says Jerome, "commended his Mother to him [John], so that a virgin might look after the Virgin." Who is the "virgin chosen by God"? Thomas's audience would know that this is Mary. When he quotes St. Jerome describing John the Evangelist as "a virgin chosen by God," they would catch the significance: as the Spirit came to give birth to the Word-made-flesh, so too John, in his own way, gives birth to the Word by "enfleshing" the Word in words—a birth that is made possible only by the work of the Holy Spirit. The point about the wedding at Cana makes more sense in this context. As Mary was to be married to Joseph but was instead married more fully to God, so too John, although he intended to marry at Cana, was instead married more fully to Christ.

With this, we have covered, with regard to the "condition of the author," his name and his virtue, both of which, as we have seen, bear upon the nature and character of his "authority." The final two items on the list—John's "symbol" and his "privilege"—will similarly bear upon the nature and character of that authority. With regard to the first of these, John "is described as to his symbol," says Thomas, for "John is symbolized by an eagle."

It was of course a commonplace by Thomas's day to represent the four Evangelists with the four "living creatures" that surround God's throne in Revelation 4:7 and, earlier, in Ezekiel 1:1–14: a man, an ox (or bull), a lion, and an eagle. John's symbol is the eagle, says Thomas, because he, in a special way among the Evangelists, expresses the divinity of Christ.

> The other three Evangelists, concerned with those things which Christ did in his flesh, are symbolized by animals which walk on the earth, namely, by a man, a bull calf, and a lion. But John flies like an eagle above the cloud of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart. And gazing on the very deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he is equal to the Father, he has striven in this Gospel to confide this above all, to the extent that he believed was sufficient for all.[37]

And finally we come to last of the items that bear upon the nature and character of John's "authority"—namely, his "privilege" (*privilegium*): John is said to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (see John 21:20). "And because secrets are revealed to friends," says Thomas, "Jesus confided his secrets in a special way to that disciple who was specially loved." Thus, it says in Job 36:32 that, "from the savage"—that is, from the proud—"he hides his light"; that is, He (Christ) hides the truth of his divinity. But John, as we know from what Thomas has already said above, was "pure of heart." He was as the bride awaiting the bridegroom: as the Virgin Mary awaiting the Spirit.

There is no "seeing" here without loving, whether it be the Word-made-flesh or the word of God in the Sacred Scriptures. What the proud and arrogant scribes and Pharisees of Jesus's day could not see, John, the simple youth who was loved by Jesus and loved him in return, was able to see. It was not superior human wisdom that revealed the fullness of Christ's divinity to John; it was a receptiveness to Christ's love. John did not demand first that his intellect be satisfied as a precondition to his love of Christ. Rather, he loved first, and only then was his vision made high, full, and perfect.

The question now is: Will his readers approach God's Word with a receptivity similar to that of the author? Will they be savage, proud

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[37] Prologue, 11.

and arrogant—like those from whom God hides His light? Or will they be "pure of heart" like John, the one whom Jesus loved and who loved Jesus in return and, thus, was granted a special contemplative vision of His divinity? I propose that what Thomas is attempting to do in his prologue is to set before his students a clear choice between two distinctly different approaches to the highest Wisdom: one in which they sit in judgment of *it*, and the other in which they allow it to sit in judgment of *them*. On this view, the choice readers make about *how* to read a text will make all the difference in whether they are able to read it *well* and understand what it has to teach.

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Alasdair MacIntyre compares the major presuppositions of what he calls "the encyclopaedic stance" of modern thought—"that truth not only is what it is, independent of standpoint, but can be discovered or confirmed by any adequately intelligent person, no matter what his point of view"—with that of an earlier, classical view of the philosophic craft that held that "a prior commitment was required" on the part of the student.[38] The kind of transformation required, argues Professor MacIntyre, was "that which is involved in making oneself into an apprentice to a craft, the craft in this case of philosophical enquiry."[39] "The philosophy of craft tradition" that characterized premodern philosophy of the sort practiced by Aquinas "presented the mind as inadequate until it had conformed itself to the object which theology presented for its attention."[40] It was essential, therefore, that the enquirer learn first "how to make him or herself into a particular kind of person" before he or she could move forward "towards a knowledge of the truth about his or her good and about *the* good."[41]

May I suggest, then, that the usual modern method of writing a prologue to a text reflects the modern encyclopedic stance toward the philosophical project: that anyone prepared with sufficient background information, no matter his or her point of view or prior ideological commitments, is capable of reading and learning what a text is meant to teach. This is why many modern prologues tend to read like encyclopedia articles.

Communicating relevant background information was not alien to the intentions behind Thomas's prologue, but it was also not his

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38 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 60.

39 Ibid., 61.

40 Ibid., 69.

41 Ibid., 61.

primary aim, and we will misjudge him badly if we think he is attempting to do what a modern prologue does but doing it rather less well. Thomas's prologue was designed to bring about the sort of transformation that MacIntyre describes above—into a particular *kind of person*.[42] It was meant as an exhortation to enter into a practice and a tradition of philosophical enquiry of a certain sort. And it was precisely in this way, therefore, that Thomas's prologue served the purposes of the classic philosophical protreptic.

Classical Protreptic and its Purpose

For those not acquainted with the term, a philosophic "protreptic" was, as the Greek term suggests, an "exhortation" that had "as its explicit aim the winning of a student for philosophy," according to Mark D. Jordan in one of the best articles on the genre.[43] One of the most famous of these was Cicero's *Hortensius*, now lost, which Augustine credits with having won him over for philosophy before he was eventually converted to Christianity. Cicero's *Hortensius* is sometimes said to have been adapted from an earlier work by Aristotle, the *Protrepticus*, which was reportedly one of the most famous and influential books of philosophy in the ancient world. It too, like the *Hortensius*, is now lost.

Sections of larger works could also serve a protreptic function. "This is famously true," for example, argues Professor Jordan, "of the first two chapters of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which borrow textually from his *Protreptikos*." There are also well-known examples of philosophical protreptic in Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*,[44] as well as in

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[42] See ibid., 133: "The concept of having to be a certain sort of person, morally or theologically, in order to read a book aright—with the implication that perhaps if one is not that sort of person, then the book should be withheld from one—is alien to the assumption of liberal modernity that every rational adult should be free to and is able to read every book."

[43] Mark D. Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic and the Problem of Persuasive Genres," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 4, no. 4 (1986): 309.

[44] See, for example, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.2.5–5.4.11, a section that begins (in the English translation of Charles D. Yonge) with this encomium: "O Philosophy, thou guide of life! thou discoverer of virtue and expeller of vices! what had not only I myself, but the whole life of man, been without you? To you it is that we owe the origin of cities; you it was who called together the dispersed race of men into social life; you united them together. . . . You have been the inventress of laws; you have been our instructress in morals and discipline; to you we fly for refuge; from you we implore assistance; and as I formerly submitted to you in a great degree, so now I surrender up myself entirely to you. For one day spent well, and agreeably to your precepts, is preferable to

Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.[45] There are protreptic moments scattered throughout the Platonic dialogues, but the protreptic character stands out perhaps nowhere more prominently than in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, both of which seem especially designed by the nature of give-and-take between the various interlocutors to convince the reader that, to make progress in wisdom, he or she must become a certain kind of enquirer. Even the lives of the various philosophers, such as those preserved by Diogenes Laertius and others, were said in antiquity to have served as invitations to the way of life of the philosophic school.[46]

Nor was the practice of composing protreptic discourses confined to philosophy. There were protreptics to music (Chamealon), medicine (Galen), rhetoric (Themistius), and later, even a protreptic to martyrdom by Origen. Indeed, Basil the Great's famous *Address to*

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an eternity of error. Whose assistance, then, can be of more service to me than yours, when you have bestowed on us tranquillity of life, and removed the fear of death?" (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877).

45 See, for example, *De rerum natura* 2.7–32 which (in the English translation of William Ellery Leonard in *Lucretius: on the Nature of Things* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1921]) contains this exhortation to the Epicurean philosophy of life:

> . . . naught
> There is more goodly than to hold the high
> Serene plateaus, well fortressed by the wise,
> Whence thou may'st look below on other men
> And see them ev'rywhere wand'ring, all dispersed
> In their lone seeking for the road of life;
> Rivals in genius, or emulous in rank,
> Pressing through days and nights with hugest toil
> For summits of power and mastery of the world.
> O wretched minds of men! O blinded hearts!
> In how great perils, in what darks of life
> Are spent the human years, however brief!
> O not to see that nature for herself
> Barks after nothing, save that pain keep off,
> Disjoined from the body, and that mind enjoy
> Delightsome feeling, far from care and fear!
> Therefore we see that our corporeal life
> Needs little, altogether, and only such
> As takes the pain away, and can besides
> Strew underneath some number of delights.

46 See Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic," 314, esp. n40, and Bernard Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

Young Men on Greek Literature was often listed in ancient manuscripts under the heading *logos protreptikos*. Practitioners of nearly every discipline considered it important, it seems, when they were writing texts that might be read by potential students, to compose exhortations to engage in the study of the discipline and to adopt its goals and standards of excellence.

As Professor Jordan's survey of ancient protreptic shows, the character of individual protreptics varied greatly depending upon the views of the philosophical school.[47] And yet we can perhaps discern a pair of common goals among all such protreptic works. The first is suggested by a comment attributed to Philo of Larissa, a second-century-BC member of the Platonic Academy, who is said to have compared the goals of the philosopher and the physician.[48] According to Philo, the physician's first task was to offer therapy for illness and his second was to refute the advice of false counselors; so too with the philosopher, his first task was to show the good of philosophy and his second was to refute accusations, attacks, and malicious assaults against it. As the physician must both treat the causes of illness and aid what produces health, so the philosopher must remove what begets false opinion and shore up healthy thought.[49]

These two were not mutually exclusive, of course. Treating the causes of illness certainly aids in producing health. But, along with keeping the patient away from bad things, optimal health depends upon the physician instilling in the patient a knowledge of and a desire for good things, things conducive to his or her flourishing rather than destructive of it. Or, as MacIntyre reminds us, to become a successful apprentice to a craft tradition, one must learn to distinguish "between what in particular situations it really is good to do and what only seems good to do to this particular apprentice but is not in fact so."[50] One crucial role of the protreptic, therefore, writes

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[47] Jordan argues that protreptic would be difficult if not impossible to define as a "genre in the ordinary poetic sense, that is, as dictating a certain combination of form, diction, and subject-matter," the problem being that "each school's notions about the human good issue[d] in views about how the good [could] be taught, and these views issue[d] in judgments about appropriate modes of composition," and so we find that "different protreptics . . . exhibit different motives in relation to the differently conceived philosophic ends" ("Ancient Philosophic Protreptic," 328–29).

[48] Stobeaus, *Anthology* 2.7.2.

[49] See Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic," 316–17.

[50] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 61.

Professor Jordan, was to compare the claims to knowledge of the other schools or disciplines with those of the true philosopher in such a way as to show that "every other form of knowledge is found lacking."[51]

To engage in the study of the discipline and to adopt its goals and standards of excellence was also, by necessity, an invitation to the way of life. The sort of decision envisioned here is captured nicely by Professor MacIntyre's use of the analogy of apprenticing to a craft. When one chose to become an apprentice, one was not merely choosing to engage in a particular form of *technē*, one was choosing, as well and as importantly, to enter into an entire way of life and to orient one's goals according to the standards of excellence handed down by one's teachers. Thus, as Professor Jordan points out, students—that is, potential future apprentices—had to "be won" at several different levels: "for the love of wisdom generally, for the choice of a particular school, for full commitment to the rigors of an advanced discipline."[52] There was, in other words, what we might describe as an "existential" element to the protreptic exhortation: it was designed to bring about a choice. As Professor Jordan argues:

> Protreptics are just those works that aim to bring about the firm choice of a lived way to wisdom—however different the form of those works and their notions of wisdom might be. . . . Each author confronts a hearer whose choice is the target of many other persuasions. The unity of the philosophic protreptic [as a genre]—and its great rhetorical interest—would seem to lie in this 'exigence,' in the hearer's moment of choice before ways-of-life."[53]

Thomas's Prologue as a Protreptic

With the goals of the classical protreptic in mind, let us consider again what Thomas achieves in the Prologue to his commentary on the Gospel of John. First, he subtly challenges the claims to knowledge of the other philosophical schools, showing that John expresses in a more complete and unified way the truth they sought imperfectly. Is this not the point of going through all those different approaches to the existence of God—in order to show that John's Gospel encompasses all of

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[51] Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic," 321.
[52] Ibid., 309.
[53] Ibid., 310.

them "more perfectly"? So too, is this not the reason Thomas adopts the classic Stoic division of the disciplines—natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics—in order to show how "the Gospel of John contains all together what the above sciences have in a divided way, and so it is most perfect"?

John's contemplation, recall, was "high," "full," and "perfect": it achieved the *height* because it rose to a knowledge of God; it was "full" in that it saw accurately how God's power extended throughout all of creation; and it was "perfect" in that it is this knowledge which brings us to our ultimate goal. Thomas's prologue does what other protreptics set out to do: show the superiority of a certain knowledge as the highest form of wisdom—one that can bring the prospective apprentice, if he or she is willing to enter into the discipline required, to his or her ultimate goal: a life of blessedness, of true human flourishing.

It is important to remember that the students for whom Thomas was writing this prologue would have previously gone through a strict regimen of philosophical study with the members of the Arts Faculty at the University of Paris.[54] Fr. Weisheipl, as a biographer of Thomas, describes the setting:

> The study of the liberal arts and the acquisition of philosophy were functions of the Arts Faculty in the university or *studium*. Approximately eight years were devoted by medieval students to acquiring these tools—roughly equivalent to our four years of high school and four years of college. After the full course had been completed in "the humanities," the young man, generally in his mid-twenties, would begin his study of the Sacred Text, having already heard many sermons in Church and having received much instruction at home.[55]

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[54] In the "Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas" by Gilles Emery at the back of Jean-Pierre Torrell's definitive biography, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Work* (trans. Robert Royal [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), the *Lectura super Ioannem* is dated "with reasonable certainty" to Thomas's second period of teaching at the University of Paris, "probably during the years 1270–1272" (Torrell, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 1:339). Weisheipl's judgment about the dating of the text was the same (Weisheipl, *Commentary*, 9 ["Introduction"]). There is little doubt, therefore, about the audience for these lectures.

[55] Weisheipl, *Commentary*, 6 ("Introduction").

Contemporary professors of theology would immediately recognize the problem and sympathize with the challenge Thomas faces here. Before him would have been students who had spent eight years reading sophisticated and intellectually rigorous philosophical texts. Many of them would have undoubtedly been proud of these accomplishments and their newly acquired abilities in the arts. By the same token, likely the only introduction these same students would have had to the Bible might have been the simple, pious interpretations they had heard from their parents or a local parish priest whose education both theological and otherwise may well have been spotty at best. When such students would have compared the simple, pious stories they knew from the simple, pious preaching they had been accustomed to hearing over the years, they certainly could have been forgiven for having found the biblical texts lacking a certain something in terms of intellectual firepower. [56]

The classic example of a gifted young scholar who was so proud of his abilities in dialectic that it led him to imagine he could dispose of the business of scriptural commentary without much trouble was young Abelard who, in his *Historia calamitatum*, tells the story of how, when he had gone to study at the school of Anselm of Laon, he dismissed the importance of listening to masters lecture on the Scriptures, suggesting that he could do a better job, given his skill in dialectic, after just one night:

> I, who had as yet studied only the sciences, replied that following such lectures seemed to me most useful in so far as the

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[56] In this regard, we might do well to recall Augustine's warning in *Confessions* 3.5.9 about not being fooled by the ostensible simplicity of the Scriptures, as he was when he was younger, preferring the eloquence of Cicero to what he considered to be the childishness of the Christian Scriptures: "I resolved, therefore, to direct my mind to the Holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were. And behold, I saw something not comprehended by the proud, not disclosed to children, something lowly in the hearing, but sublime in the doing, and veiled in mysteries. Yet I was not of the number of those who could enter into it or bend my neck to follow its steps. For then it was quite different from what I now feel. When I then turned toward the Scriptures, they appeared to me to be quite unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully [Cicero]. For my inflated pride was repelled by their style, nor could the sharpness of my wit penetrate their inner meaning. Truly they were of a sort to aid the growth of little ones, but I scorned to be a little one and, swollen with pride, I looked upon myself as fully grown" (trans. Albert Outler, in *The Confessions of St. Augustine* [Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002]).

> salvation of the soul was concerned, but that it appeared quite extraordinary to me that educated persons should not be able to understand the sacred books simply by studying them themselves, together with the glosses thereon, and without the aid of any teacher. Most of those who were present mocked at me, and asked whether I myself could do as I had said, or whether I would dare to undertake it. I answered that if they wished, I was ready to try it. Forthwith they cried out and jeered all the more. 'Well and good,' said they; 'we agree to the test. Pick out and give us an exposition of some doubtful passage in the Scriptures, so that we can put this boast of yours to the proof.' And they all chose that most obscure prophecy of Ezekiel. I accepted the challenge, and invited them to attend a lecture on the very next day.[57]

So too, at the University of Paris during the 1260s and early 1270s—that is to say, precisely the time when Thomas would have been writing this Prologue—"a radical form of Aristotelianism was being developed by certain Masters in the Faculty of Arts at Paris (by now really a faculty of philosophy), such as Siger of Brabant, Boethius of Dacia, and others." So writes John Wippel. "Often if not accurately referred to as Latin Averroism," continues Msgr. Wippel, "this movement was marked by the total dedication of its leaders to the pursuit of the purely philosophical life. At least in some instances, initially they were not particularly concerned if some of their philosophical conclusions happened to be at odds with orthodox Christian belief."[58]

We need not attribute to such students or their teachers in the Arts Faculty a full-fledged doctrine of "double-truth," the view that religion and philosophy can serve as separate sources of knowledge that might arrive at contradictory truths without detriment to either

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[57] Peter Abelard, *Historia Calmitatum*, trans. Henry Adams Bellows (St. Paul, MN: T. A. Boyd, 1922), ch. 3.

[58] John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), xv. The classic study of Siger and his colleagues in the Arts faculty at Paris and their disputes with the likes of Thomas and Bonaventure is Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Thomas Aquinas and Radical Aristotelianism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1980). "Radical Aristotelianism" was the name Van Steenberghen gave to those who favored the wisdom of Aristotle over "sacred doctrine" (*sacra doctrina*).

(a controversial attribution to them of a view they might not have held) to imagine that, for students who had gone through this rigorous course of education in the Arts, it would have been easy for them to mistake their own experiences with the reality of the thing and assume that the Bible was for simple folk, whereas the sort of high-minded, high-level education they were receiving as a student in the Arts was for the more "enlightened." Thomas's challenge in these circumstances would have been to convince such students that the books of the Bible were worthy of their highest, deepest, and fullest intellectual efforts—indeed, that in the pages of this supposedly "simple" book, they would find the very heart of what their previous studies in philosophy had only begun to prepare them for.

On this view, John's Gospel offers the highest form of wisdom and access to the most perfect form of beatitude. Thomas does this by showing how the sort of *contemplatio* that characterizes John's Gospel is superior to, because encompassing of, other modes of philosophical pedagogy.

It is important to note, however, that, in formulating his protreptic on behalf of the wisdom of Sacred Scripture and its exhortation to the necessary disciplines of humility in reading and study this entails, Thomas did not seek to negate the potential pedagogical value of all other approaches to wisdom or all other forms of philosophy. Rather, his vision was broad enough to include the Arts and grant them their proper autonomy within a course of education with *sacra doctrina* at its summit, serving a fundamentally architectonic role with regard to the rest.

We might thus fruitfully compare what Thomas sets out to accomplish in his prologue with something MacIntyre suggests in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* about Thomas's *Summa*: that it was a work of instruction comprehending and integrating into itself "that in the other disciplines which theology needs, and providing also the framework within which the other disciplines have to be understood."[59]

MacIntyre, like Wippel,[60] points us to the intellectual challenges presented especially by the reception of the newly discovered and freshly translated Aristotelian works of natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics. The problem, as MacIntyre identifies it, was that:

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[59] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 131.

[60] See n. 57 above.

> If the physical and metaphysical works [or Aristotle] were assigned to the Faculty of Arts, then teachers in that faculty would be entitled to pronounce independently on matters on which theology had been sovereign and, when the original ban on the teaching of those works by the Faculty of Arts came to be disregarded by the late 1240s, earlier Augustinian fears were confirmed by the growth of Averroist teaching in support of heterodox conclusions concerning the mortality of the soul and the eternity of the world.[61]

Yet, "it was only after Albertus Magnus had set new standards in the presentation of Aristotle's own views," argues MacIntyre, "that the extent to which theology itself might have to become a philosophical discipline became clear."[62] Thomas Aquinas was, of course, Albert's preeminent student in very many ways, but especially in locating a theological framework within which the Aristotelian insights in natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics could be given their proper scope and autonomy and, *precisely in this way*, serve the ends of theology, not by dictating to them, but by engaging them in what Professor MacIntyre describes as "an active dialectical encounter"—one that "both the Averroist insistence on the autonomy of philosophy and the conventional Augustinian theology found no room for."[63] It is for these reasons among others that MacIntyre sees the *Summa* as constituting "an affront to the thirteenth-century Parisian version of those institutional academic boundaries in which both agreements and conflicts [were] conventionally defined."[64]

Whether one agrees fully with MacIntyre's assessment here, especially its characterization of the thirteenth-century challenge Thomas faced in such starkly bipolar terms—Augustinian versus Aristotelian—the undeniable fact remains that Thomas chose to include arguments from natural philosophy and metaphysics in a very explicit way in a *biblical* prologue, not something that would have occurred to, say, Bernard of Clairvaux.[65] Something had clearly

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61 MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 132.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 133.

64 Ibid.

65 There is no need for me to defend Professor MacIntyre's work; its quality speaks for itself. But it might be worth noting that the distinction he is setting out in these chapters, delivered originally as the Gifford Lectures, was meant to be taken as setting forth in broad terms a dialectical-philosophical problem.

changed between Bernard's biblical commentaries and Thomas's. What that something was must be accounted for not only in terms of a different institutional setting (university rather than monastery) but also and primarily in terms of a new set of intellectual challenges—challenges that prompted Thomas to judge the need to preface his commentary on the Gospel of John with a new sort of protreptic appeal to his students that Bernard, as a monk preaching to monks in a monastery, would have felt no need to make.

Thomas's protreptic was designed, I have argued, to exhort students who might have been tempted to make the mistake St. Augustine did before them, failing to see the true profundity and deeper significance of the biblical texts, having first been educated in the works of classical philosophy, and concluding that the Scriptures were "quite unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully"—or, more likely in their case, Aristotle.[66] Thomas's students would not have been the first, nor would they be the last, to imagine that the Scriptures were "of a sort to aid the growth of little ones" but not something for educated readers and, "swollen with pride, looking upon themselves as fully grown," to decide that the Scriptures had nothing serious to offer them.[67]

Thomas suggests, rather—indeed, he shows by means of his display of remarkable skill in the arts of both philosophy and rhetoric (one does not compose a prologue of this complexity without an admirable degree of rhetorical skill)—that the Scriptures contain wisdom worthy of their most strenuous intellectual efforts and that both

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He was not attempting to describe in a detailed way the historical setting of the debates in and around thirteenth-century Paris. To put this another way, it is important to respect the differences between the nature and purposes of a text such as John Wippel's *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (see n. 57) and those of a text like MacIntyre's *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. We should respect those differences in much the same way we have to respect the differences between Etienne Gilson's discussion of Thomas Aquinas's thought in *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* and his discussion of the same in *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*. In a similar vein, I trust the reader will understand that my comparison between Thomas and Bernard is *meant* to be extreme. Admittedly I might have chosen a relatively more obscure figure from earlier in the thirteenth century whose differences from Aquinas would have been more subtle. But there was really no need for such scholarly subtlety here. For our present purposes, I wanted the comparison to be stark and clear.

66 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.5.9; see n. 55 above.

67 Ibid.

philosophy and the arts could serve as appropriate handmaids to this instrument of *sacra doctrina*.

On this view, the goals the pagan philosophers sought after imperfectly are supplied by John's Gospel in a more perfect fashion. Indeed, on this view, having read John's Gospel, one can then return to the writings of the philosophers and comprehend them more excellently because those writings will then be understood finally within their proper context and directed toward their proper end. The philosophical pedagogy of the philosophers (natural philosophy, ethics, metaphysics) is now recast as propadeutic to sacred doctrine, and sacred doctrine becomes the guiding discipline, architectonic with regard to the others.

The philosophical ascent to the First Truth now culminates in sacred doctrine, which is the privileged revelation of the Mind of God Himself. The perfecting Wisdom is the Word made flesh. The key to understanding Nature, Being, and Ethics is found in the Creator's revelation of Himself in Christ. Who better is there to reveal the true nature of things, our proper place within the created world, and how best for humans to flourish than the Creator Himself?

These considerations bring us back to the question I posed above: What should one set out to accomplish in an introduction or prologue? What would be involved in preparing a reader for the task of reading and reading *well*? The contemporary practice is to provide the reader with a detailed scholarly apparatus that provides the historical, biographical, and literary background to the text. Thomas's approach, I have argued, was fundamentally protreptic in nature: it sought to help the reader to understand the value of the text by first understanding what it values and by exhorting the reader to enter into the spirit of the text.

Good teachers know that students will not remember a text unless they take it *seriously*, and they will not take it seriously unless they consider it *important*. The first step in any pedagogical endeavor, then, is to show one's students why a text to be read is important—indeed, *important for one's life*.

Dozens of modern studies on the "affective" dimensions of education suggest that students must "care" about educational material or they will not retain it. The object of knowledge must be "lit up," as it were, by some sort of emotional connectedness. Each thing we come to know must have an emotional resonance that accompanies it or it will cease to be meaningful and its full significance will be lost. Often enough, these discrete bits of information will not even

be retained by the memory unless their overall "significance" is felt. "Signification" has an "affective"—that is to say, an "emotional"—component. Students who are not eager to learn and interested in what is being said will not learn, no matter how much information one tries to force into their eyes or ears. [68]

What ancient and medieval scholars schooled in the arts of rhetoric and philosophical protreptic understood that we in the modern world often forget is that a necessary prerequisite for growth in *wisdom* when reading a text is a preparation of both the mind *and* the heart: a preparation of the soil, as it were, for the seeds to be planted there.

An effective protreptic is one that calls the reader into a deeper engagement with the words of the speaker or the text, calling upon the reader to read as though what is being said might be crucially important for one's *life*. The question we might ask is this: Is this sort of preparation for reading best done by giving the reader pages of historical, biographical, and textual background information?

The issue for those schooled in classical rhetoric and acquainted with the ancient tradition of philosophical protreptic is whether, having read or heard the prologue of the book, I am *more* interested in reading the book, or less? Did I, for example, *stop* reading partway through the prologue or get so bored that I had no desire to read the book at all? That would be a shame and, to my mind, would suggest a poor sort of introduction.

Professor Jordan concludes his article on protreptics with the following admonition: "Protreptics are just those works that aim

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[68] The literature on this dimension of learning is capacious, and this is not the place to go into the details. But for a sample of the discussion and some of the results of research, the reader might glance at, for example: Robert Leamnson, *Thinking About Teaching and Learning: Developing Habits of Learning with First Year College and University Students* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 1999), esp. 11–23 and 33–83; Shawn M. Glynn and Thomas R. Koballa, Jr., "Motivation to Learn College Science," in *Handbook of College Science Teaching* ed. Joel J. Mintzes and William H. Leonard (Arlington, VA: National Science Teachers Association Press, 2006), 25–32. Many of the students who study educational theory are aware of "Bloom's Taxonomy"—that is, Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive dimensions of learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Fewer are aware that this was only the first part of Bloom's project and that he and his colleagues subsequently published another volume they viewed as equally crucial on the "affective" dimension of education: David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin Bloom, and Bertam B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook II: Affective Domain* (New York: David McKay Company, 1964).

to bring about the firm choice of a lived way to wisdom—however different the form of those works and their notions of wisdom might be."[69] "Each author confronts a hearer whose choice is the target of many other persuasions. The unity of the philosophic protreptic [as a genre]—and its great rhetorical interest—would seem to lie in this 'exigence,' in the hearer's moment of choice before ways-of-life."[70] As Jordan also makes clear in his survey, protreptic texts can come in many different forms: stand-alone essays, parts of dialogues, epistles to friends or disciples, and even commentaries on the works of others. It would not be odd, then, given this background, for an author such as Thomas to use a prologue to a biblical commentary as a protreptic to the reading of Scripture, constructed in such a way as to produce a sense of the cognitive importance of the text to be read—as well as the overriding respect with which it should be approached—and serving as a bright guiding light to the students trained in philosophy now coming for the first time to sacred doctrine, expecting them perhaps to be something of an intellectual disappointment.

So too, the goal of Thomas's protreptic was to produce in his young philosophically trained listeners a certain "volitional or cognitive state [or both) at the moment of decision about a way-of-life." "Will you enter into the serious business of reading this text," he asks his listeners, in effect: "Are you open to the Word and to his sanctifying Spirit? Will you let this text *change you* in entirely unforeseen ways, by means of things not dreamt of in your philosophy? The choice now, dear students, is yours. Which path will you set out upon? The one John reveals, which is the way of Christ, the Word made flesh? Or the way of the pagan philosophers, who can teach you much, but bring you only so far and no further. They cannot make you a temple of God, filled with the majesty of God. They will not make you *alter Christus*. Will you choose Christ? Is He the means by which you will make the ascent to the Highest Principle of All Things and to your ultimate blessedness? Or will you opt for another route—a poorer one that will neither reveal the highest principles as clearly nor effect your union with them as surely?"

Thomas's protreptic appeal to his students in this prologue to embrace fully the serious study of Sacred Scripture contains, I would suggest, at least two important lessons for us as we approach our own highly educated university students. The first is that we, like St.

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[69] Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic," 330.

[70] Ibid.

Thomas and Pope St. John Paul II, must never cease to emphasize the notion that there can be no ultimate antagonism between the truths of faith and the truths of reason. They are, rather, complementary ways of the mind rising to the Truth, and the Truth is like the water flowing from above that nourishes the fertile soil of the human mind.[71]

The second, related lesson would be that we must be able to show our students once again, as Thomas did his, that the Scriptures are not merely the cultural artifacts of an outmoded age filled with pleasant stories for children. They are, quite the contrary, texts that have their source in the highest Wisdom that can communicate to those who have a clear mind and a generous spirit the world's most profound truths. And thus they remain, even now, even in our ever-so-sophisticated age of modern philosophy and science, just as they were in Thomas's ever-so-sophisticated age of philosophy and science, the surest guide to human life, human understanding, and human happiness. NOV

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[71] The image of water flowing down from above nourishing the soil was suggested to me by Thomas's use of the same image in his first *principium* address, the address *in aula*, whose *thema* verse was taken from Psalm 103:13: "Rigans montes de superioribus suis de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra [Watering the mountains from places above, the earth is sated with the fruit of your works]." For John Paul II's most developed discussion of the relationship between faith and reason, consult his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* ("On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason").