Towards A Biblical Thomism

Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology

Edited by
Piotr Roszak
Jörgen Vijgen

EUNSA
EDICIONES UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA, S.A.
PAMPLONA

First edition: 2018

Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, S.A. (EUNSA)
Campus Universitario • Universidad de Navarra • 31009 Pamplona • España
+34 948 25 68 50 - Fax: +34 948 25 68 54
eunsa@eunsa.es

ISBN: 978-84-313-3286-0
Depósito legal: NA 1159-2018

This book uses information gathered through the grant "Identity and Tradition. The Patristic Sources of Thomas Aquinas' Thought" (2017-2020) funded from resources of the National Science Center (NCN) in Poland, allotted following the decision no. DEC - 2016/23/B/HS1/02679.

Index:
Karolina Iwan

Portrait:
Krzysztof Skrzypczyk

Printed by Podiprint - Impreso por Podiprint

Table of Contents

Towards A Biblical Thomism
Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology
Edited by Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen

Randall B. Smith

Thomas Aquinas's *Principium* at Paris

The young candidate — some thought too young (including the candidate himself) — sat behind a large podium at the front of the room. To his left in a long line seated in chairs were the junior masters of the university; to his right, the chancellor and all the senior masters. The previous evening had been spent responding to bachelors and masters in a complex series of "disputed questions." But now the presiding master stood and placed on his head a biretta and said aloud: "I place on you the magisterial biretta in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The young candidate had become a master, and after birettas had been distributed to the other masters to place on their own heads, the gathered company sat down to hear the new master deliver his inaugural lecture: the *principium*. It was spring, 1256, and the new master was Friar Thomas d'Aquino, the son of a minor nobleman from Italy, who had grown up in a small castle not too far from the site of the great Benedictine abbey at Monte Cassino, where the newly incepted master had studied as a youth.[1]

Every Regent Master in Theology at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century had to receive his position in an official inception ceremony, usually held in the great hall (the *aula*) of the Bishop of Paris, during which the candidate would deliver a brief sermon that came to be known as the *principium in aula*. Sometime later, usually the next day or on the first day before classes were scheduled to begin, the new Master was also required to deliver a *resumptio* (a "resumption" address), which constituted his first act as a fully-incepted Master.[2] There were clear rules in

[1] For the chronology of Thomas's life and work, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, tr. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

[2] For an invaluable introduction to the inception ceremony and to the entire genre of the medieval *principium* address, see also the dissertation by Nancy Spatz, *Principia: A Study and*

the University's documents about what the subject-matter of these two addresses should be: the *principium in aula* was to contain "a commendation of Scripture and a comparison of Scripture to other fields of study, and the *resumptio* was to set forth a "division and description of the books of the Bible."[3]

Thomas's two inception addresses can be found under several different titles and are sometimes confusingly called Thomas's two *principium* addresses, but they can be more reliably identified by their "incipits": the first words of the biblical verse on which each is based. The first of these, Thomas's *principium in aula* was based on the passage from Psalm 103:13 beginning *Rigans montes de superioribus*; the second, Thomas's *resumptio*, is known by its beginning phrase taken from Baruch 4.1: *Hic est liber mandatorum.*[4]

Edition of Inception Speeches Delivered Before the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris, ca. 1180-1286 (Cornell University Dissertation, 1992), esp. 39-50. All contemporary descriptions of the inception ceremony for the masters at Paris are based ultimately on the early fourteenth century document that can be found in the *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, II, 693-694. See also the description of the inception ceremony in James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1974, 1983), 96-110.

[3] See Spatz, 62. What was common to all these addresses, as Ms. Spatz study shows, was (A) some sort of commendation suggesting that the wisdom provided by the Scriptures was superior to that derived from other sources, and (B) some sort of *divisio* of the text of the Sacred Scriptures. For a nice comparison of the extant *principa in aula*, see Spatz, 130-145; for a similar sort of comparison of the extant *resumptio* addresses, see Spatz, 145-155.

[4] Both are sometimes found under the general heading: *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae*, although this can vary. In the "Brief Catalogue of Authentic Works" at the back of Weisheipl's 1974, 1983 biography *Friar Thomas d'Aquino*, for example, no. 35 on p. 373 reads: "*Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae*: Two *principia* (Paris, April or May 1256)." For an invaluable discussion of the two addresses and their place in the context of the entire inception ceremony, see Weisheipl, 96-110. Specifically on Fr. Weisheipl's claim that the second of the two addresses, *Hic est liber mandatorum*, was also given as part of the inception ceremony, and was *not* from an earlier period when Thomas was a *cursor biblicus*, see 103-104.

The "Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas" by Giles Emery at the back of Fr. Torrell's more recent biography of St. Thomas (published 1993 in French and 1996 in English) contains on p. 338 the entry: "Principium 'Rigans montes de superioribus' and 'Hic est liber mandatorum.'" In the description that follows, Fr. Emery describes these, in agreement with Weisheipl's judgment, as "two *Principia*, i.e., inaugural lectures ... held on the occasion of the *inceptio* of the new *magister in actu regens* in Paris between 3 March and 17 June 1256." On the website corpusthomisticum.org, one will find the first *principium* address under the title "Principium Rigans montes" under the heading "Opuscula theologica," while the second *principium* address, "Hic est liber," is found further down, in the "Opera probabilia Authenticitate" section under "Sermones" with the heading "Principium biblicum," suggesting that the editors of the corpus thomisticum are not yet in agreement with Weisheipl and Torrell's judgment that this was *not* a *principium* address from Thomas's days as a *cursor biblicus*.

Reading these *principia* provide us a valuable clue to how these medieval masters viewed the Scriptures. They also provide us important insights into how medieval theologians were trained and what habits of mind they developed. There is not space here to discuss both of Thomas's inception addresses, so I will confine my comments to the first of the two, his *principium in aula*: the sermon he had to give during the ceremony where he received his biretta and was finally made Regent Master at the University of Paris.

The Circumstances and Origins of Thomas's *Principium*

All new masters at the University of Paris were required at their inception ceremony to engage in a series of disputed questions and deliver two public addresses, which we would describe as "sermons" because of their style, except they weren't delivered in a liturgical context. As the thirteenth century progressed, these *principium* addresses took on a distinctive style — what would later be called the *sermo modernus* ("modern sermon") style of preaching, according to which the preacher would take on opening biblical verse, the *thema*, and divide it usually into three or four parts, and then develop (or "dilate") the sermon based upon those three or four *divisiones.*

The *thema* verse on which the first of Thomas Aquinas's two addresses at his inception was based was the passage from Psalm 103(104):13: *Rigans montes de superioribus suis de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra* ("Watering the mountains from places above them, the earth is sated with the fruit of your works"). Although the manuscripts of Thomas's *principium* address and his *resumptio* were not discovered until the late nineteenth century,[5] scholars had known since Thomas's death the *thema* verse he used at his inception because the story about how Thomas was given it was legendary.

Finally, one will find English translations of both *principia* addresses on Thérèse Bonin's superb web site "Thomas Aquinas in English: A Bibliography"(www.home.duq.edu/~bonin/thomasbibliography.html) under the general heading "Commentaries on Scripture," by clicking on the link "*Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae* (2), Thomas' inaugural lectures," which will take one to an on-line version of Ralph McInerny's English translations of both *principia* which appeared first in: *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, edited and translated with an introduction and notes by Ralph McInerny (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), 5-17. On the linked web site, however, one will find, somewhat oddly, the second of the two *principia* ("Hic est liber") listed first, and the first of them ("Rigans Montes") below it.

[5] The manuscript of two *principia* were discovered together in the late nineteenth century by Pietro Antonio Uccelli in the convent library at Santa Maria Novella in Florence (Florentine MS G. 4. 36) and were first published in 1912.

Thomas and his Dominican confreres faced a great deal of opposition at Paris from the secular masters in the spring of 1256 when Thomas was appointed Regent Master. There is no need to go into great detail about the particularities of the affair here, other than to say that the situation had become increasingly tense from 1250 on, and by1253, the secular masters had forbidden their students to take courses with the regulars (that is, with the Dominican or Franciscan friars) and had even taken the radical step of attempting to excommunicate them. It was only due to the forceful intervention of Pope Alexander IV that the excommunication against the Dominicans was lifted and the order given that they be admitted straightaway to the faculty. Thomas was the one chosen to take the chair designated for the Dominicans, even though he was not yet the required age, being only thirty-one or thirty-two while the University statutes stipulated masters not incept before age thirty-five.[6]

"Thomas was terribly upset," Fr. Weisheipl tells us in his biography of St. Thomas, basing his judgment on several contemporaneous sources. At first the young friar "tried to excuse himself on the grounds of insufficient age and learning," but his efforts were for naught. "Since obedience left him no escape," writes Fr. Weisheipl, "he had recourse as usual to prayer."[7] What happened next is attested to by an equally large number of contemporary sources.[8] "With tears," writes Thomas's medieval biographer Bernardo Gui, Thomas begged "for inspiration as to the theme he should choose for his inaugural lecture." Afterward he fell asleep and seems to have had a very clear dream, in which, according to Benardo Gui:

> He seemed to see an old man, white haired and clothed in the Dominican habit, who came and said to him: "Brother Thomas, why are you praying and weeping?" "Because," answered Thomas, "they are making me take the degree of master, and I do not think I am fully competent. Moreover, I cannot think what theme to take for my inaugural lecture." To this the old man replied: "do not fear: God will help you to bear the burden of being a master. And as for the lecture, take this text, "Thou waterst the hills from thy upper rooms: the earth shall be filled with the fruit of thy works" [*Rigans montes de suprioribus suis de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra*]. Then he vanished, and Thomas awoke and thanked God for having so quickly come to his aid.[9]

[6] The whole affair is described succinctly by Torrell, 50-1 and by Weisheipl at more length, 79-83.

[7] Weisheipl, 96.

[8] Cf. K. Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 69. "The story has been transmitted by three different sources," Fr. Torrell tells us in his biography of St. Thomas, "all of which lead back to Thomas himself." See Torrell, 51.

[9] Quoted from Weisheipl, 96.

Among those attesting to the authenticity of the story — at least as far as it originating with Thomas himself — was Peter of Montesangiovanni, a monk at the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova where Thomas fell ill and died on his way to the Council of Lyons, who testified under oath during Thomas's canonization hearing that he heard Thomas tell this story to the then-prior of Fossanova at the request of his *socius*, Reginald, several days before his death. Jean-Pierre Torrell mentions in his biography of Aquinas that,

> According to the testimony of Peter of Montesangiovanni, a monk of Fossanova, at [Thomas's] canonization process, Thomas himself told this story to the prior of Fossanova in the presence and at the request of Reginald, several days before his death. Peter of Caputio, another witness at the process in Naples, reported that he had learned this fact when he was in the priory of Saint-Jacques, during the reading that was done to the friars at times of bleeding. He adds that all the friars in Paris were convinced that the *frater antiquus* who appeared had been none other than Saint Dominic himself. Except for this last detail, where the hagiographical process seems to be at work, the different stories agree, and historians have every reason to believe that we have here a personal confidence that goes back to Thomas himself.[10]

Modern readers may remain skeptical about whether the source of the verse was St. Dominic — St. Thomas never identified the man — but it is noteworthy that Thomas doesn't get from the man in the dream what his subject matter should be or what points he should make. What comes to Thomas in the dream is simply the mnemonic text — the *thema* verse — that will serve as a structuring device for everything else that follows.

In his own way, Thomas experienced in a very dramatic way the truth of the promise Christ made when he told his disciples not to be anxious about what they should say when they were brought before the authorities, "for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:12; cf. Mark 13:11; Matthew 10:19). People sometimes imagine that this process would be something like a divine dictation: that God would whisper in our ears the words exactly as we are meant to say, like Cyrano whispering to young Christian what he is to say to Roxanne standing at her window. Thomas's experience was different. The first step was to remember the words God had *already given* in the Scriptures. The key was to call to mind *just the right set of words* for the occasion. Once Thomas had the right key words, he could proceed from there, and the Spirit would teach him what to say, as if God's promise had been: "Don't worry what you are to say, Brother Thomas; I'll

[10] Torrell, 51.

give you the right biblical verse to prompt you, and from those words, you'll be able to derive a clear set of points that will impress that unruly and unforgiving audience of university officials."

As I pointed out above, University statutes stipulated that the *principium* address be "brief" and "quickly terminated." Thomas's *principium* was both. What is fascinating for our purposes is how much he was able to compress into a small space by means of the *sermo modernus* style and its method of using a biblical verse as a mnemonic structuring device.

Water from the Mountains: Teaching through Intermediaries

Thomas begins, as he does in all his sermons, with a Bible verse — in this case from Psalm 103:13 (in the Latin Vulgate, Ps. 104): "Watering the mountains from places above them, the earth is sated with the fruit of your works" (*Rigans montes de superioribus suis de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra*).[11] The rest of this Psalm

[11] I have translated the Latin text more literally here than does Fr. Weisheipl in his English translation of the account of the vision given by Bernardo Gui, quoted above. In his translation, Fr. Weisheipl uses the standard King James version of the Psalm verse that reads: "Thou waterst the hills from thy upper rooms: the earth shall be filled with the fruit of thy works." This is actually a more felicitous, if not quite as literal, translation.

The context makes it clear that God is the one doing the "watering" from above," and since it is not at all uncommon for translators to render a Latin present participle with a simple present verb, the result is we get "Thou waterest the hills" instead of "Watering the mountains." (I'm not so favorable to translating *montes* with "hills," however, given that image of "height" is necessary to the sense of what Thomas is trying to communicate.)

I have also chosen to render the Latin *de superioribus suis* with the phrase "from places above them" (that is to say, from places above the mountains), even though "from thy upper rooms" is more poetic. It is important in what follows for the reader to understand that the water comes from a place *far above* the mountains. The mountains, on this view, *mediate* the rain water between the heavens and the dry plains below — plains that rarely get any direct rain.

Once the translator made the decision to go with the second person singular verb "*Thou* waterest" instead of the present participle "watering," then he was forced to render the third-person plural *suis* in the phrase "*de superioribus suis*" as "thy" (second person singular), suggesting (quite rightly, in fact) that they are *God's* upper rooms. But what they Latin says literally is that they are "their" (that is, the mountain's) upper places — or as I have rendered it: "the places above them."

In the remainder of this chapter, I will be quoting from the English translation done by Ralph McInerny, revised and edited by Joseph Kenny, found on-line at: http://www.scottmsullivan.com/AquinasWorks/Principium.htm#2. The Latin texts have also been taken from here.

to this point is a praise of God as the creator of all things in terms reminiscent of the Genesis creation account. There is nothing on a surface reading of this text that would suggest it as ideal for the purposes for which Thomas used it: that is, as a passage in praise of Sacred Scripture.

Thomas's interpretive approach to his biblical *thema* verse is achieved by prefacing his comments with a statement from Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* 5 which declares that "It is the most sacred law of the divinity that things in the middle should be led to his most divine light by first things" (*per prima media adducantur ad sui divinissimam lucem*). Reversing the order, Thomas then states the principle this way: "The King and Lord of the heavens set down this law from all eternity that the gifts of his Providence should come to the lower through intermediaries."[12] There are, from the very outset, two directions in view here: one that comes down from heaven through intermediaries, the other that leads above from below through intermediaries, both of which are under the direction of –indeed, directed by "the most sacred law of"– divine providence.

By choosing this text from Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas reminds his listeners that God comes to us through regularly through *intermediaries* and not always by direct divine inspiration. What are the sacraments, the Church, and the Bible, indeed creation itself, other than *intermediaries* that mediate divine wisdom to us so we may be led, step by step, back to God? They are intermediaries as was also the flesh of the Son of God incarnate. We come to know the incarnate God first *through the senses*. Thomas moves directly from Dionyius's statement on intermediaries to a quote from Augustine's *De Trinitate* to bear witness to the idea that there is in nature a hierarchy of moving principles, all of them meant to coming under the guidance and direction of the divine wisdom.

Mining the metaphorical potential of his *thema* verse, Thomas draws an analogy between the physical and spiritual realms; just as the mountains are watered from above and send forth streams to water the valley below, so God sends forth his grace to masters so that they may teach His wisdom to their students.

> It is plain to the senses that from the highest clouds rain flows forth by which the mountains and rivers are refreshed and send themselves forth so that the satiated earth can bear fruit. Similarly, from the heights of divine wisdom the minds of the learned, represented by the mountains, are watered, by whose ministry the light of divine wisdom reached to the minds of those who listen.[13]

[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Rigans Montes*, proemium.

[13] *Rigans Montes*, proemium.

An Implicitly Incarnational Approach to Teaching and Learning

Setting his *principium* in this context allowed Thomas, in a sermon stipulated by regulation to be in praise of sacred Scripture, to address not only the dignity of the Scriptures, but also the dignity with which the teachers and students of sacred doctrine were supposed to be imbued. Just as the rains come forth from above and water the mountains, and the streams flow downward into the rivers so the earth can be irrigated and made to bear fruit, so too divine wisdom comes down first to the "learned" — the Latin has *mentes doctorum*, "minds of the doctors," or "teachers" in the proper sense of *doctores*, which comes from the Latin *doceo*, "to teach" — and from them it flows down to the students. The rain that waters these mountains is the sacred teaching of the Scriptures. The teachers who have been refreshed by these sacred waters are then in turn to pour forth this wisdom on their students, as the mountains pour forth water onto the plains, irrigating them so they might bear much spiritual fruit.

Using this image, Thomas reminds his audience that we come to know God through intermediaries: teachers and the created things in the world. Students do not learn directly from God, nor are they always able to learn from the Scriptures on their own without being taught to read and interpret the word-signs correctly. If students of the Scriptures are to be enabled to read and interpret these word-signs correctly, they must first come to a greater understanding of the things in the world from which our minds ascends by stages, beginning with our senses, to a progressively fuller knowledge of the Creator. Indeed, the nature of the *principium* itself suggests the practice. From our knowledge about physical things — in this case mountains, flowing water, plains, and fruit-bearing plants — we come to know (under Thomas's tutelage as teacher) some important lessons about how we come to know about God.

There is an implicit incarnational mentality underlying Thomas's *principium*. The classic statement of the relationship between "signs" and "things" is found in Augustine's *De Doctrina christiana*, who suggests that we know signs (and words for Augustine are a type of sign) by knowing the things these signs represent.[14] And yet we also learn from words. From the inspired words of Sacred Scripture, for example, we learn about the Word made flesh who teaches us in and through His incarnation that the created realities of this world are "signs" that point us to the uncreated Word through whom "all things were made" and without whom "nothing was made that has been made (Jn 1:3). As we'll see shortly, this "incarnational" approach allows

[14] See Augustine *De doctrina christiana*, esp. bk 1.

Thomas later on in his *principium* to set as the paradigmatic model for both masters and students the simultaneous "dignity" and "humility" of Christ.

Using this same image of the mountains being watered from above, Thomas can remind the masters in his audience where the source of all true wisdom lies: in God as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word (Christ), and as we come to know him in his word (the Sacred Scriptures). Wisdom, he reminds them, is from above, not first and foremost from masters. Masters are called, like St. Paul, to "pass on what they themselves received" (1 Corinthians 15:3), not to imagine that they are supposed to set forth their own doctrines or pretend to possess their own wisdom. What this role as an *intermediary*, not an ultimate source, of divine wisdom requires of them is that they live the noblest form of life, freeing themselves from all their "base" desires for status and prestige, as did Christ, the teacher who was both one with God, and yet emptied himself of His divinity to take on our humanity.

A Sacramental Metaphysics of Teaching

Fr. Simon Tugwell suggests that Thomas has in mind a related philosophical theme. As Tugwell notes, Thomas wrote the short work *On Being and Essence* during the years before he graduated as a master, probably while he was working on his commentary on the first book of Peter Lomabard's *Sentences*.[15] This work, says Tugwell, helped solidify Thomas's deep lifelong conviction "that there can never be any separation between God and his creatures."

> The idea that God somehow "withdraws" in order to give his creatures space to be could never begin to make sense to Thomas; if God withdrew then being is the last thing any creature could achieve. The freedom and inner consistency of creatures is not something that has to be defended against divine interference; it is precisely the gift that is made by the divine presence. The fact that things exist and act in their own right is the most telling indication that God is existing and acting in them.[16]

Fr. Tugwell rightly sees that, for Thomas, human teaching should be seen as "one aspect of the more general and extremely important question of whether secondary causes of any kind exercise any authentic causality."[17]

[15] Simon Tugwell, "Aquinas: Introduction," in *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 214.

[16] Tugwell, 215.

[17] Tugwell, 268-69.

Do teachers really teach? Or does only God teach? Christ warns in Matthew 23:10 that none was to call himself "teacher" (*magister* in the Latin Vulgate): *nec vocemini magistri quia magister vester unus est Christus* ("nor shall you be called teachers because one is your teacher, Christ"). So what did Thomas think he would be doing as an incepted *magister* or "teacher"?

Father Tugwell points out that some of Thomas's contemporaries had interpreted St. Augustine's argument in *De Magistro* to imply that no human being strictly-speaking should be called a "teacher." William of Auxerre seems to interpret him this way.[18] Thomas, as we have seen, does not take this approach. He would argue more fully in the following year in his *Disputed Question on Truth* (*De Veritate*), q. 11, a. 1, against Avicenna's notion that, in learning, "intelligible forms flow into our mind from the agent intelligence" (*formae intelligibiles effluent in mentem nostram ab intelligentia agente*), the teacher being there merely as an instrument that prepares the material for the reception of these forms (*omnia inferiora agentia naturalia non sunt nisi sicut praeparantia materiaum ad formae susceptionem*), and against the early Platonic conception, such as can be found in the *Meno*, that teaching is helping the student remember what was already present.[19]

Thomas rejects both positions for the same reason: each rules out the possibility that natural or "secondary" causes — "secondary" to God's "primary" causality — can act as true causes in the world. Thomas rejects the Avicennian position because it rules out any possibility of a chain of causes, since on this view, the first cause, as the "giver of forms," is the only real cause. He rejects the Platonic conception too because a cause that only removes an impediment is also not a cause in the truest sense. For Thomas, any approach to the nature of teaching that diminishes the status of secondary causality in the world, that "attributes to first causes along all effects coming about in inferior things," not only "derogates from the order of universe, which is woven together by the order and connection of causes" (*derogatur ordini universi, qui ordine et connexione causarum contexitur*); worse, it insults God, who "out of the eminence of his goodness not only makes things to be but also to be causes" (*ex eminentia bonitatis suae rebus aliis confert non solum quod sint, sed et quod causae sint.*)

[18] See *Summa Aurea* IV, ed. Jacques Ribaillier (Paris : Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1980-1986), pp. 88, 97, 116. In these passages, however, William is discussing the powers imputed to the baptized, not teachers *per se*. William's approach to the question of human teachers in these passages is similar to one Bonaventure and other Franciscans will champion decades later: the exterior human teacher does nothing without Christ, the interior teacher, illuminating the mind. See, for example, the passage on p. 88: "Sic enim predicatores dant gratiam per verbum predicationis, tamen ipsi non docent proprie loquendo, ut dicit Augustinus, in libro *de magistro*, immo proprie solus Deus. Quod patet, quia, cum aliquis dicit verbum aliquod, nec concedimus nec negamus donec prius consuluerium interiorem magistrum."

[19] Throughout this section, I am quoting the English translation of *De Veritate* 11.1 in: Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn, and Robert W. Schmidt, trans., *Truth*, 3 vols., Library of Living Catholic Thought (Chicago: Regnery, 1952–54; reprint, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).

Saying a teacher does not really teach is, for Thomas, like saying that a physician does not really treat disease or that medicine does not really cure disease.[20] When we deny that the physician treats disease or that medicine cures disease in the belief that only God truly cures, this for Thomas is to deny natural causality and God's power as Creator to make things exist such that they can act as true causes in the world. Thomas would insist that both the medicine and God cured the man, each in its own domain, just as the medicine and the physician cured the man, each in its own way. To assert God's divine causality is not to deny the natural causes we see around us in the world. Quite the contrary; for Thomas, "The fact that things exist and act in their own right is the most telling indication that God exists and is acting in them."[21]

On Thomas's account, things would not exist and would have no causality if it were not for God. To deny things their proper causality is to deny God's power and goodness to impart true causality to them. It is to treat God as if He were jealous of the doctor or the medicine, which would be absurd, since both owe their existence and causality entirely to God. The healing power of the physician and the medicine each plays its own role in God's creative and redemptive plan, a plan revealed most fully in the Incarnation. What God reveals through Christ in the Incarnation is the truth of creation — the truth that all of creation is created through God's Word and is thus an expression, an embodiment, and an instrument of God's creative and redemptive love. This is a sacramental notion of creation in which things in the world, including human persons, are meant to see themselves as instruments of God's grace because, in fact, that is what they were created to be.

A Real Relationship between Teacher and Students: The Duties of Teaching and Learning

On this view, physicians, teachers, and all others should understand themselves not as parallel entities having no causal connection with others — a view akin to modern "parallelist" forms of body-soul dualism, such as that of Leibniz, according

[20] This analogy is suggested by Thomas himself through his *responsio* in *De Ver.* 11.1: e.g., "as the physician in healing is the minister of nature which principally acts by aiding nature and providing medicine which nature uses as instruments in healing."

[21] Tugwell, 215.

to which the body and soul do not influence one another, they merely act *as if* they were interacting because they both operate according to a pre-established harmony set in place by God.[22] If this were true, then the physician acts and I am cured, not because the physician acted with knowledge and skill, but only because God chose to cure me while, quite separately, the physician was acting. If this were true, the physician would not have been a true cause; his was merely a parallel action. Thomas's view suggests a true causal interaction. Teachers don't merely perform an act while God is teaching. Thomas's view insists that there be a personal connection between teacher and student, not one which is merely extrinsic.

And yet on Thomas's view, neither the physician nor the teacher should see him- or herself as the *sole* cause of the healing or the teaching. Both physicians and teachers are creatures with capacities given to them by God, creatures called upon to deal intelligently with other creatures created by God, all of which operate according to their intrinsic natures just as we humans do. A physician cannot merely cure by an act of will, nor can a teacher simply place ideas into the student's head like he was placing a bird in a cage. The teacher and student should both see themselves as cooperators with God, not as either replaced by God or replacements for God. Just as a physician must operate in accord with the created laws of physics and human biology in order to heal the patient, so too a teacher must act in accord with the created nature of the human mind in order to teach.

How do human beings learn? How do they arrive at the truth? And what does it tell us about teaching? Thomas holds that "certain seeds of the sciences preexist in us" (*praeexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina*). These are "the first concepts of understanding, which by the light of the agent intellect are immediately known through the species abstracted from sensible things." These "first concepts of understanding" include things like the notions of being and the one, which the intellect grasps immediately.[23] According to Thomas, "When, therefore, the mind is led from these general notions to actual knowledge of the particular things, which it knew previously in general and, as it were, potentially, then one is said to acquire knowledge."[24]

[22] For a brief introduction, the reader might consult the article on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy by Mark Kulstad and Laurence Carlin, "Leibniz's Philosophy of Mind," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition).

[23] *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1 resp.: "primae conceptiones intellectus … sicut ratio entis, et unius, et huiusmodi, quae statim intellectus apprehendit."

[24] Ibid.: "quando ergo ex istis universalibus cognitionibus mens educitur ut actu cognoscat particularia, quae prius in universali et quasi in potentia cognoscebantur, tunc aliquis dicitur scientiam acquirere."

This can sometimes be done by the student alone — we learn many things by ourselves — but it can also be aided by a teacher who helps show the student the proper path such discursive reasoning should take. One man is said to teach another, says Thomas, when he shows the student the course of reasoning (*decursum rationis*) that he himself followed. The student, attending to what has been proposed, comes to knowledge of what he previously did not know.[25] Although knowledge pre-exists in us potentially, in "seeds" as it were, what is in us potentially must be "brought to actuality from this state of potency through a proximate external agent, and not through the first agent alone."[26] This is not to deny the role of the first cause it merely affirms that the agency of the first cause does not preclude the role of another, proximate agent that helps the intellect to learn. "Therefore, says Thomas, "just as the doctor is said to heal the patient through the activity of nature, so a man is said to cause knowledge in another through the activity of the learner's own natural reason, and this is teaching."[27]

The human mind too is a true cause. Human thinking, real discursive reasoning, not mere illumination without ratiocination, is a reality.[28] Thomas is clear in *De Veritate* that the natural light of reason is from God, and *in this sense*, we owe all to God. Be what we also owe to God is the realization that we are made capable of thinking on our own. On Thomas's account, this is what a good teacher helps a student learn to do. Students can and often learn to do this on their own. But the teacher can be an example and guide. And yet, the student can also check the teacher by working through the arguments for him- or herself. As Thomas argues in *Quodlibet* 3, q. 4, a. 2, students are not excused from error when they submissively follow the false opinions of their teachers.

The teacher cannot (and should not try to) replace the student's own mind, any more than God simply replaces any learner's mind. The student and teacher must be in a cooperative relationship: the student cooperating with the teacher as guide, and the teacher cooperating with God's Truth, the divine light, as it has been revealed in and through (a) creation, (b) the Word made flesh, and/or (c) God's Scriptural

[25] Ibid.: "unus alium dicitur docere quod istum decursum rationis, quem in se facit ratione naturali, alteri exponit per signa et sic ratio naturalis discipuli, per huiusmodi sibi proposita, sicut per quaedam instrumenta, pervenit in cognitionem ignotorum."

[26] Ibid.: "formae enim naturales praeexistunt quidem in materia, non in actu, ut alii dicebant, sed in potentia solum, de qua in actum reducuntur per agens extrinsecum proximum, non solum per agens primum."

[27] Ibid.: "sicut igitur medicus dicitur causare sanitatem in infirmo natura operante, ita etiam homo dicitur causare scientiam in alio operatione rationis naturalis illius: et hoc est docere."

[28] I am not referring to anyone specifically with this comment. Bonaventure's position, for example, is more complex.

word. These three for Thomas would not be mutually exclusive, but rather mutually inclusive and reinforcing.

Thomas's view is both contemplative and active, with action directed by a vision of the world that is fundamentally contemplative and receptive. Our task is to attend to the order of the created, natural realm closely and carefully and then act as best we can in harmony with the order instilled in it and us by the Creator.

What duties follow for a teacher given such a view? The first is that teachers should make good arguments. The second is that they ought to live a holy life. Both are essential.

Consider again the analogy of the teacher and the physician. The physician cannot simply stand aside and let God cure; he or she must know the principles of human biology and anatomy and know how to apply them to the particular matters of healing. And yet the physician must also recognize that he or she is not the ultimate lord of nature to command as he or she wills; that there are domains beyond his or her control; but that he or she can foster cures when he or she understands and acts in accord with the given natures of things as God has created them. Often enough, however, they happen in ways that simply exceed the abilities, the effective causality, of the physician's knowledge and craft. The physician should be thankful (a) for the knowledge and ability he or she has been given, and (b) for the good he or she can do. These two dimensions — reliable knowledge of the craft and the wisdom to use it rightly — are both essential to a good physician.

What is called for is constant training in the application of principles to particulars and constant prayer that one might be guided in learning and in the proper use of one's craft. Prayer without pursuing knowledge can be disastrous and is an insult to the universe and to God as Creator. Learning without prayer can be disastrous in a different way; it can lead to overweening pride in one's ability to control nature rather than to learn from it — a pride that can lead to a refusal to work with and for others rather than merely operate on them as another species of "thing" subject to one's putative control.

So too with teachers: Teacher must learn to make good arguments — learn to see the relationship between principles and conclusions — in order to guide their students. Personal holiness is not enough. The discussion of this section should suggest the importance Thomas attached to getting the metaphysical principles right. Getting them wrong can lead even very holy people to make serious mistakes, such as not taking their sick child to the doctor in the mistaken belief that it would demean God's power not to let God cure their child, as if God and human doctors and natural medicines were in competition rather than in providential cooperation as Creator and creature, primary and secondary causes.

And yet good teachers must also understand that they do not teach *their own* truth, but God's. The teacher has no business trying to make disciples for himself, for it is not *his* truth he shares. Teachers, like the mountain, reflect light from above. On their own, without the reflected light of the sun, they bring darkness and shadows.[29]

Masters, insists Thomas, must excel in both intellect and holiness; not merely in intellect alone (consider the example of Abelard) or holiness alone (as those pious persons untrained in the metaphysics of secondary causality might have done were they to deny the natural causality of doctors and medicine). Thomas stresses that students must be able to *look up to* their teachers, making in this way a fruitful use of the "mountain" imagery supplied by the biblical *thema* verse he received in a dream the night before his inception,

And yet students also have obligations: they are called upon to cooperate and become like the master in their dedication to both holiness and learning. The student must learn to "look up" and receive the life-giving rains from above: both by praying for wisdom and guidance, but also through study, learning to use the reason God has given them correctly. In their teachers, students should see an embodiment of their own vocation to become *like the mountains*, defending the faith as the mountains protect the land from invaders, and eager to transfer the wisdom they have been given as a gift from above, never portraying themselves arrogantly as the source of the truth they teach, nor seeking disciples of their own. Their goal is to learn to teach others as they have been taught. They must learn as well that what the teacher does is not inconsequential — they can have a real effect on their students — but they must learn as well that as much as they water, God alone gives the growth.

In his essay on Thomas's *principium*, Fr. Tugwell insists on two fundamental points. The first is that, "in line with the Dionysian principle with which he begins his lecture, Thomas always insists that God's providence does disposes things in such a way that creatures do have a real effect on one another."[30] The second: "Thomas, conscious of the high role of the teacher as an instrument of divine providence, says … it is only by God's gift that anyone could be adequate for the task, so he needs to ask God to make him adequate."[31]

With Fr. Tugwell's inspiration, I have introduced material here from Thomas's more developed reflections in *De Veritate*. Since this disputed question was finished

[29] The attentive reader will note that I have changed Thomas's image slightly while retaining his central Pseudo-Dionysian idea of mediation. Thomas pictures the mountains as a medium that transfers rain. I have suggested an image in which the mountains reflect light. In both cases, they can only provide what they have gotten from above.

[30] Tugwell, 268-69.

[31] Tugwell, 269.

within the first several years after Thomas's inception, we can imagine that these thoughts were not far from his mind.[32]

The *Divisio* and *Dilatatio*

After stating the *thema* of the sermon — "Watering the mountains from places above them, the earth is sated with the fruit of your works" (*Rigans montes de superioribus suis de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra*) — the next task for any medieval preacher would be to make an appropriate *divisio* of the *thema* in order to establish the basic structure of his sermon and then to develop or "dilate" each of the parts. Common ways of dividing the *thema* would have included a twofold *divisio* (e.g., Watering the mountains from the places above them / the earth is sated with the fruit of your works), a threefold *divisio* (e.g., Watering the mountains / from the places above them / the earth is sated with the fruit of your works), or a fourfold *divisio* (e.g., Watering the mountains / from the places above them / the earth is sated / with the fruit of your works).

Thomas begins not with the *divisio,* but by identifying the four subjects he wishes to correlate with his opening biblical verse: the *height* of the spiritual doctrine to be taught; the *dignity* that should exist in those who teach this spiritual doctrine; the *condition* or qualities required of the listeners; and the *manner of communicating* this spiritual doctrine.

Thomas's usual practice in his later Sunday sermons would be to take up topics in the order they appeared in the opening *thema* verse. From those examples, we might have expected Thomas to coordinate his opening fourfold division — height, dignity, condition, and order — with the four parts of the opening biblical verse in, say, this manner: (1) *watering the mountains* (the "height" of the doctrine suggested by the word "mountains"); (2) *from the places above them* (the "dignity" of the teachers suggested by the words "places above"), (3) *the earth is sated* (the "condition" of the students suggested by the lowliness of the earth), and (4) *with the fruit of your works* (the order or manner of communicating suggested by either "fruit or "works"). This, as I have said, would have been a reasonable-enough expectation given knowledge of Thomas's customary practice in his later Sunday sermons.[33] And indeed, this approach likely would have worked perfectly well. But this is not what Thomas does.

[32] On the dating, see the "Brief Catalogue" in Torrell, 334.

[33] I do not mean to suggest that Thomas *never* reversed the strict ordering of the parts of his opening *thema* verse, only that it is rare. See the analytical outlines of each of Thomas's sermons at the back of *Reading the Sermons of Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide.*

Rather, Thomas allows himself more freedom to range back and forth among the images as needed, so that the first topic, the *height* of the spiritual doctrine, is suggested not by the word "mountains" (*montes*), which is earlier in the sentence, but by the words "from the places above" (*de superioribus suis*), which appear later. The dignity of those who teach, which is the second topic, is suggested by the word "mountains" (*montes*), which appears earlier in the sentence. The reason for the transposition likely had to do with Thomas's desire to draw a picture in which, although the masters have (or are supposed to have) a certain height, they must still understand that they would be "desiccated" and "dry" if they did not receive watering from above themselves. They are, on this view, not the *source* of the water that flows down from them, merely the conduit through which that water is meant to flow.

After the *height* of the spiritual doctrine to be taught (associated with the word *superioribus*) and the *dignity* that should exist in those who teach this spiritual doctrine (associated with the word *montes*), the third topic is the *condition* or qualities required of the listeners, which Thomas associates with the word *terra* ("earth"). And finally, at the end of his address, Thomas touches upon various issues related to the *manner of communicating* the spiritual doctrine, which he associates, interestingly, with the order of the words in the Psalm verse, which was an uncharacteristic approach to "dilating" the content of a sermon.

Thomas treats three points within each *divisio*, so that the overall structure may be outlined as follows:

A) Height of Spiritual Doctrine ("from the places above") — due to:
   1. Origin (from above)
   2. Subtlety of Matter (beyond human comprehension)
   3. Sublimity of the End (life eternal in heaven)

B) Dignity Required of Teachers ("mountains")
   1. Keep their minds set on things above (so that they may *preach*)
   2. Be illuminated by the sun's rays first (so that they can *teach*)
   3. Defend the faith from errors as the mountains protect from enemies (in *disputation*).

C) Condition Required of Listeners ("the earth is sated with fruit")
   1. Lowliness of humility
   2. Stable and firm in rectitude
   3. Fruitful in listening

D) Manner of Communicating (relationship between "places above" and "mountains")
   1. The order of communicating
      (a) Masters should not teach everything they know

(b) The minds of the doctors cannot possess all of divine wisdom; nor can the students

2. God possesses this wisdom by nature, humans only by participation
3. God communicates this wisdom by his own power, masters only as ministers

In what follows, we will consider each of these in the order Thomas treats them.

Height

We begin with "height."[34] Recall that "height" is not associated with the masters, but with the doctrine they are called upon to teach. The "height" of the spiritual teaching the masters are responsible for passing on to their students is suggested by the words *de superioribus* ("from the places above") in the opening *thema* verse. The "height" of the teaching is due to three things, says Thomas: First, because of its origins, for it is "from above" (*sursum*). Second, because of the "subtlety of its matter" (*ex subtilitate materiae*), because it concerns matters "so high" that they are beyond the comprehension of human beings.

We might also imagine Thomas wants his audience to think of the "subtlety" of the clouds or of the ethereal spheres on which the stars and planets were fixed. There are some things, says Thomas, that all know, such as the existence of God; other things, however, are higher (*altiora*) and require the wisdom of the wise. Still others are so high (*altissima*) that they entirely transcend the grasp of human reason, but these have been made known by the Holy Spirit through the text of Sacred Scripture.

The "height" of the spiritual teaching is also due, says Thomas, to "the sublimity of the end" (*ex finis sublimitate*), for the end is the highest, namely life eternal in heaven with Christ at God's right hand. Thus if we were to ask of masters what should be their end, their ultimate goal — prestige? distinction among their colleagues? a devoted following of disciples? — according to Thomas, their goal should be no less than the salvation of souls. Such is Thomas's exalted sense of the vocation of the teacher. Note in all this how Thomas is progressively drawing the eye of the mind upward, from the sky above the mountains, to the spheres above the sky, and finally to the outermost sphere, the empyrean or uppermost heaven.

[34] "Height" is the subject of *Rigans montes*, section 1 (hereafter *Rigans montes*, 1).

Dignity

We should not fail to appreciate the wonderful transition between the last Scripture passage on the "height" of the spiritual doctrine and the next section on the "dignity" the masters are called to possess — a *dignity* he associates with the word "mountains" (*montes*). He ends the first section on the "height" of spiritual doctrine with the passage from Colossians 3:1-2: "Therefore, if you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things of earth." He begins his next section on the responsibility of the masters saying: "Thus the holy teachers by despising earthly things cleave to heavenly things alone," just as the mountains rise above the earth and are "neighbors" (*vicini*) of the heavens.[35] His point is this: Because the masters are called upon to help their students get to heaven, so too they must have their sights set on heavenly things. The "dignity" of the masters must be in accord with the "height" of the spiritual doctrine they are called upon to deliver. They must raise their eyes and their minds to the things above, for if they have their minds focused solely on earthly things — power, prestige, position, or status — they will not gain the waters from above they need to nourish their students below.

The second way the masters should be like mountains is that, just as the mountains are the first to be illuminated by the rays of the sun, so too should masters be the first to be illumined by the light of divine wisdom.

And finally the third way masters should be like mountains is that, just as mountains protect a kingdom from its enemies, so too the masters must defend the faith against errors.

Thomas then associates the three kinds of *dignity* he has just identified (all suggested by the word "mountains") with the three duties of the master: *praedicare*, *legere*, and *disputare*, (to preach, to read, and to dispute).[36] Masters should have their hearts and minds "fixed in highness of life," like the mountains are fixed in the heavens, so they may fittingly *preach*. They should seek to be "illumined" (*illuminati*) by the rays of divine light, so they might fittingly "teach by reading" (*doceant legendo*) — an obvious reference to the way in which medieval masters would often teach by reading and commenting upon a text. And finally, masters should seek to be "armed" (*muniti*) with divine wisdom so they might "refute errors in disputation" (*ut errores confutent disputando*), protecting the faith from errors just as the mountains protect the kingdom from its enemies.

[35] "Dignity" is discussed in *Rigans montes*, 2.

[36] This threefold list can be traced back to a comment by Peter Cantor (d. 1197) in the first chapter of the *Verbum Abbreviatum*.

Condition Required of Students

From here, Thomas moves on in an orderly fashion, as we would expect, to the next words in his mnemonic *thema* verse: the words "the earth is sated" (*satiabitur terra*).[37] The word "earth" here suggests the condition necessary to be a student of this divine doctrine, at least some of whom were likely in attendance when Thomas gave his *principium* address. They would have noticed that, even in a remarkably short address, Thomas was not willing to skip over their responsibilities and obligations.

As the earth is the lowest, so too, says Thomas, the students should be "low" as the earth in humility. As the earth is stable and firm, so the students should be stable and firm with the sense of rectitude, not tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of change. And finally they should be fruitful, as the earth bears fruit. "Therefore *humility* is required of the students with respect to the learning that comes from listening," says Thomas, "*rectitude* of the senses with respect to the judgment of what is heard," and "*fruitfulness* in discovery, by which from a few things heard, the good listener pronounces many things."

In the final section of the *principium*, Thomas does not turn, as his later practice and the canons of the *sermo modernus* style might have led us to expect, to the remaining words in the opening biblical verse from the Psalms, which are "from the fruit of your works" (*de fructu operum tuorum*) but turns instead back to the first two parts of the verse he had already "dilated": "Watering the mountains" (*rigans montes*) and "from the places above them" (*de superioribus suis*).[38] This is the only place I have found in Thomas's extant sermons where he goes back to the beginning of the *thema* verse rather than moving on. Whether this was due to the fact that this was an early example of the art of preaching; whether it had to do with verse's coming in a dream or vision; or whether we simply don't possess sufficient examples of Thomas's sermons to make a suitable comparison; — the fact remains that Thomas does not go on to "the fruit of your works," he goes back to the beginning of the *thema* verse to discuss the last of the four topics he set out initially to cover.

Manner of Communicating

Having dealt with the *height* of the spiritual doctrine, the *dignity* that ought to characterize the masters, and the *condition* that ought to characterize the students,

[37] *Rigans montes*, 3.

[38] *Rigans montes*, 4.

he now turns to the manner in which this spiritual doctrine ought to be communicated, suggested by the relationship between "the mountains" and "the places above them."

First, says Thomas, masters should not try to preach to "the simple" (e.g., their students) everything that they know, by which I take it he means that teachers should not presume to suggest to their students that they, as teachers, have a complete, comprehensive vision of things; because, says Thomas (with greater wisdom than many of us), teachers should realize they cannot grasp everything contained in divine wisdom. They are unable to know how many divine mysteries there are and how many and varied the sources of divine wisdom might be, especially from places other than those they themselves have explored. As a complement to his advice to students to embrace humility, Thomas advises the masters to embrace and exemplify their own brand of humility before the vastness of divine wisdom.

Whereas God has wisdom "naturally" (*per naturam*) — the "upper places" are said to be "his" (*de superioribus **suis***) — masters merely "participate" (*participant*) in that divine wisdom. They share something that does not have its source in them. This is why teachers are said to be, like the mountains in the Psalm verse, "watered from on high." While God communicates wisdom by his own power (*Deus propria virtute sapientiam communicat*) — he by himself is said to water the mountains — masters, says Thomas, do not communicate wisdom "except as ministers" (*non communicant nisi per ministerium*). The water that nourishes the plains and causes them to bear much fruit should be understood to have its source from *above* the mountains, and not from the teachers themselves. "Although no one by himself, of himself, is sufficient for such a ministry," says Thomas, "he can hope to have this sufficiency from God."

> "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor 3:5). Thus "if any of you is wanting in wisdom, let him ask it of God, who gives abundantly to all men ... and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Let us pray Christ will grant it to us. Amen.[39]

[39] *Rigans montes*, 5.

Getting the Most from the Gift: Communicating a Lot in a Short Time

With this "Amen," Thomas finishes with an address delivered "briefly" (*breve*) and "quickly terminated" (*celeriter terminato*) as per University regulation[40] — a little over ten minutes, by my reckoning, if read out loud — and yet remarkably full. In that short space, Thomas managed to: praise the Scriptures due to its *height* ("places above"); exhort the masters to a greater *dignity* ("mountains"); exhort the students to the appropriate *humility* ("earth"), and give advice on the proper manner of communicating the divine teaching: the "places above" do not rain down all their water upon the mountains, and the mountains should not flood the plains beneath them nor pretend they have sucked the heavens dry of all the moisture they have to give. Above all, he continually directed the attention of his listeners *above*, to the divine source of true wisdom, and not merely at himself or at Paris and its various disputes. All in all, we'd have to say it was an inspiring and full ten-minute address, more easily recollected if one can remember its opening *thema*: "Watering the mountains" (masters) / "from his places above" (divine wisdom) / "the earth" (the students) / "is sated with the fruit of your works" (the students are to bear fruit by receiving the divine wisdom that comes from heaven through the mediation of their masters). Such is the mnemonic power of the *sermo modernus* style of preaching.

Thomas got a lot out of the gift he was given in his dream. But he also had resources from his human teachers: those who had taught him grammar, rhetoric, and logic, the Scriptures, the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, and the relationship between primary and secondary causality. He also had the gift of his own creative intellect and profound desire for the truth. All of these, under God's divine providence, allowed him to bring the gift of that dream to fruition. This alone would have been a good, solid example of "height" connected to "humility" for his fellow friars, students, and masters to emulate.

[40] Cf. *Chart. Univ. Paris.* II, 693 (final lines): *statim magister novellus cum benedictione incipit suum breve principium de commendatione de Scripture sacre. Quo celeriter terminato ....*