

WHY HOLINESS IS NECESSARY FOR THEOLOGY: SOME THOMISTIC DISTINCTIONS¹

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IN 1989, THE CARMELITE theologian François-Marie L  thel published a book on what he called “The Theology of the Saints.” The book was the dissertation he had written at Fribourg under the direction of the Dominican Christoph Sch  nborn. Its opening line is a succinct and bold claim regarding the nature of theology: “All saints are theologians, and only saints are theologians.”²

L  thel is one of many modern Catholic theologians who have talked about the importance of integrating theology and holiness.³

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented on 17 October 2009, at the “Thomistic Circles” Conference on “Thomism and the Renewal of Theology.”

² Fran  ois-Marie L  thel, *Conna  tre l’amour du Christ qui surpasse toute connaissance: La th  ologie des saints* (Venasque:   ditions du Carmel, 1989), 3: “Tous les saints sont th  ologiens, seuls les saints sont th  ologiens.”

³ Best known is perhaps Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theology and Sanctity,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209. See also Harvey D. Egan, “Theology and Spirituality,” in Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13-28; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), esp. 237-45 (“Conversions and Breakdowns”); William M. Thompson, *Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987); Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988); Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech, and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); James Keating, ed., *Seminary Theology: Teaching in a Contemplative Way* (Omaha, Neb.: The Institute for Priestly Formation, 2010). Some Thomists have taken up the topic specifically: see, e.g., Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Th  ologie et saintet  ,” *Revue Thomiste* 71 (1971): 205-21; idem, “Theology and Spirituality,” in *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans.

Such efforts are hardly uniform; neither are the various diagnoses they offer regarding the situation that prompts their call. This is perhaps inevitable, given the ambiguity surrounding the terms “theology” and “holiness”: for recent decades have seen the rise of many and varied definitions of “theology,” and “holiness” has no fixed, commonly recognized definition. Moreover, if the task of integration is posed as a question, it admits of two very different types of answer. That is, if we ask, “How are theology and holiness to be integrated?” the answer could focus on the way in which theology fosters the achievement of holiness, or the way in which holiness fosters the achievement of theology.⁴

The present article attempts to contribute some clarity and content to the conversation by delineating various ways in which holiness is necessary for theology as understood in a Thomistic sense. The definition of theology is assumed, based largely on Aquinas’s prologue to his *Scriptum* on the *Sentences* and the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*.⁵ For the sake of a systematic approach I will delineate this definition according to the four

Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 1-21; Fáiñche Ryan, *Formation in Holiness: Thomas Aquinas on “Sacra Doctrina”* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

An echo of the same is found in certain magisterial teaching on the formation of priests, including Vatican II’s *Optatam totius* (a. 16) and John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (a. 53). Both texts quote the famous admonition of St. Bonaventure: let no one think that “mere reading will suffice without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, observation without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, the mirror without divinely inspired wisdom” (*Itinerarium*, pro.4 [Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, Works of Saint Bonaventure 2 (Saint Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1956), 33]). See also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum veritatis*, esp. nn. 8 and 9.

⁴ For a contrast along these lines, see Charles Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure* (New York and Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999), for an example of the former; and Gregory LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom: The Nature of Theology according to St. Bonaventure*, Bibliotheca Seraphico-Cappuccina 76 (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 2005), for an example of the latter.

⁵ The Roman commentary on the *Sentences*, which Leonard Boyle and John F. Boyle date at 1265-66, adds little on these points to the Parisian *Scriptum* and the *Summa Theologiae*. See Thomas Aquinas, *Lectura romana in primum Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, ed. L. E. Boyle and J. F. Boyle, Studies and Texts, 152 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006).

causes of theology: in order, the material cause (what theology is about), the formal cause (how theology goes about its business), the final cause (the perfection of theology), and the efficient cause (who the theologian is).⁶ For each cause, I shall elaborate on what, if anything, holiness has to do with it.

For the moment, I shall leave “holiness” undefined. This may seem to be an odd choice, for Thomists know that Aquinas is distinctive among his contemporaries in actually giving a definition of “holiness”: It is the virtue by which “the human mind applies itself and its acts to God.” It differs from religion (which is part of the virtue of justice) only logically, not really. And in a more general sense, it encompasses all the virtues insofar as they are directed to the divine good.⁷ The discussion of theology and holiness often might be said to take its cue from Aquinas in that “holiness” is often supposed to refer to a virtue or set of virtues—at any rate, qualities of the theologian that are necessary for theology. But “holiness” can reasonably be understood as having a wider ambit. The Christian dispensation is unintelligible without the communion of those who are in Christ: is there not an ecclesiological dimension to holiness—that is, a sense of particular persons being ordained by God to be theologians for the Church?⁸ Again, theology in its sapiential aspect involves a view of the whole, creation and revelation, reproducing “God’s wisdom in our frail minds”: might not holiness be understood as recapitulating that ontological order, manifesting and testifying to this view of the whole?⁹ Moreover, there is the famous saying of Evagrius Ponticus: “If you pray truly,

⁶ Aquinas does not delineate the nature of theology in quite this way, although his distinctions do match up well with the four causes. This particular division is more explicit in Bonaventure (his four questions in the prologue to book 1 of his commentary on the *Sentences*). My choice here reflects my own methodological predilection: to gain insight into Aquinas by asking Bonaventurian questions of him.

⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 81, a. 8; *ibid.*, ad 1.

⁸ Thus one might, inspired by the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 5.3-7) talk about the bishop *as bishop* being a theologian, or the celebration of the Eucharist being the site of theology.

⁹ This is a central theme in Balthasar: “The proportions of revelation should be those of theology” (“Theology and Holiness,” 196).

you will be a theologian.”¹⁰ As we will see, Aquinas himself, in laying out what is necessary for theology to be what it is appeals to things other than human habits that can be seen as pertinent to holiness.

My conclusions will therefore follow the template “holiness is important, or influential, or necessary for theology insofar as holiness encompasses the notion of X.” My concern is with the intrinsic perfection of theology, that is, what is necessary for it to fulfill its nature. If we take holiness to mean purity of life, the question is in what way does theology require purity of life? If we take holiness to mean the practice of pious devotion, the question is in what way does theology require pious devotion? Let the net be cast as wide as we please; we will find many features of Christian life that seem to be relevant to the practice of theology. The question is, does theology *intrinsically* demand any of these things? And to answer this, we need to know what it is that theology demands.

I. HOLINESS AND THE SUBJECT OF THEOLOGY

The material cause of theology is the subject, or “what theology is about.” There are three senses in which one can speak of the subject.¹¹ In one sense, the subject of a science is everything that is considered within that science. This is the subject considered in a material sense, and in theology it encompasses what can rightly be called *res et signa*, *Christus totus*, or the *opera restaurationis*.¹² In another sense, the subject is that which is

¹⁰ Evagrius Ponticus, *De oratione* 60 (PL 79:1180).

¹¹ See I *Sent.*, pro., q. 1, a. 4; *STh* I, q. 1, aa. 3 and 7. For the text of the Parisian *Scriptum*, see Adriano Oliva, *Les débuts de l'enseignement de Thomas d'Aquin et sa conception de la "sacra doctrina," avec l'édition du prologue de son commentaire des Sentences* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2006). Because Oliva's edition does not name the parts of articles, I have kept the standard divisions of the Paris edition edited by Pierre Mandonnet (1929).

¹² For a helpful analysis of the relevant texts in Aquinas, see Willam A. Wallace, O.P., *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology: A Study of Methodology in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1962), 23-35.

Wallace calls this first sense of “subject” the *genus subiectum*: the *genus* of those things that the knower comes to know more and more in the attainment of the science. Aquinas simply speaks of what is “contained” (*Sent.*) or “treated” (*STh*) in the science.

primarily considered—or, as Aquinas puts it in the *Scriptum*, the subject the knowledge of which is “principally intended” in the science. This “intention” signifies not only that thing at which the science aims, but all other things that are, as it were, drawn into the science by their relation to that principal thing. The customary term for this is the *obiectum formale quod*, which blends both material and formal elements.¹³ The subject of theology in this sense is God, for it is the knowledge of God at which we principally aim in theology, and everything else that belongs to the material subject of theology is related to God as its principle and end. This subject is material, in the sense that it is the “that” which is considered, but formal in the sense that it signifies that all things other than God are considered in the science “sub ratione Dei.” Finally, the subject of a science may be said to be that by which one science is distinguished from another. This is the formal consideration of the subject, pure and simple. The same material can be considered by various sciences, as for example both philosophy and theology treat of God. The sciences are distinguished by the formal aspect under which they consider that material, and this is what Aquinas calls the subject in the sense of the “ratio formalis obiecti,” or what is commonly called the *obiectum formale quo*.¹⁴ In theology, this formal subject is the *credibile* (*Sent.*) or *omnia quaecumque sunt divinitus revelabilia* (*STh*).¹⁵

In the *Scriptum*, the *opera restaurationis* is listed as one description of the third sense of the subject listed below, namely, the *obiectum formale quo*. In the *Summa*, it is listed with “the whole Christ” and “things and signs” as one description of the subject in a material sense.

¹³ Wallace calls this the *subiectum attributionis*, that which is considered principally and to which all other things considered will be referred. The subject proper is an extramental reality variously described as that which is principally intended and that of which predications are made.

¹⁴ *STh* I, q. 1, a. 3. Wallace refers to this as the *genus scibilis*: that is, the *genus subiectum* considered under the *ratio formalis* of the science.

¹⁵ A noteworthy difference between the treatments of this point in the *Scriptum* and the *Summa Theologiae* is that what the former encompasses in one question, the latter divides between two. In the *Scriptum*, Aquinas identifies the three senses of “subject” altogether. In question 1 of the *Summa Theologiae*, he distinguishes between the first and third senses in article 3 (which deals with the unity of the discipline), and between the first and second senses in article 7 (which deals with the subject proper). In other words, Aquinas recognizes different

The difference between the material object and the formal object *quo* is easiest to understand. We can see here what distinguishes theology from other disciplines, as well as what they have in common. Metaphysics and theology both treat of God, but they are formally distinct, for metaphysics considers God as the cause of being, while theology considers God as he is revealed. Insofar as theology depends upon revelation, therefore, it requires the reception of revelation in faith.¹⁶ Thus we come to our first conclusion regarding holiness: insofar as holiness encompasses the infused virtue of faith, it is necessary for theology.

A more difficult distinction is between the material object and the formal object *quod*. For the Thomist, the principal subject of theology is God. God is also, as one of the things we talk about in theology, one of the material objects of theology. But when we say that God is the subject we are speaking about the formal aspect of the science. It is not that God is the most important thing we talk about in theology, or that theology says more things about God than about any of the other things that constitute its material object. It is that anything spoken of in theology belongs to theology only by virtue of its relation to God.

A right consideration of the subject means that theology cannot pursue its rightful activity without being oriented to and guided by that subject. This is the meaning of Aquinas's *dictum* that

formal aspects of the subject in the *Scriptum*, but regards them as mutually illuminating ways to identify the subject. In the *Summa Theologiae*, by contrast, he sees these formal aspects as doing essentially different work: namely, assuring the unity of the discipline, and focusing the primary consideration of the discipline.

¹⁶ Torrell comments that no one really thinks that Christian theology is possible without faith, except in a sort of hypothetical way (Torrell, "Théologie et sainteté," 207 and n. 14). One might argue that so long as one considers the material of revelation as if it were true, one is practicing theology—regardless of whether one actually believes that revelation. I would say that this suffices for the definition of an academic discipline—that is, theology so understood could be properly distinguished from other disciplines that treat of the same material (e.g., philosophy, religious studies, history of theology). But it does not suffice for the definition of the science of theology as subalternated to the knowledge of God and the blessed (*STh* I, q. 1, a. 2). Subalternation requires taking as principles the conclusions of a higher science. If the "higher science" of God and the blessed is a fiction, then there is no real subalternation, and the "science" would not actually produce *scientia*. Aquinas would have little interest in a theology so defined.

everything in theology is treated *sub ratione Dei*. Jean-Pierre Torrell has made this a strong theme in his discussion of the nature of theology in Aquinas and the connection between theology and spirituality. As Torrell says, it was a fateful day for theology when theologians began to think that theology was about multiplying the things we say about God, rather than knowing him.¹⁷ Theology is not solely or even principally the deduction of new truths, but rather the relating of all truths to what we know of God as revealed.¹⁸ For example, the philosopher knows that the world is not necessary, that it is entirely dependent upon a cause that transcends it. But when we in faith know the full satisfaction of the divine love among the persons of the Trinity, we see and understand better the utter non-necessity of creation, and we acquire a sense of how creation is related to the love of God for us.¹⁹

Holiness is therefore necessary for theology insofar as one means by “holiness” a right and abiding relationship to God as the subject of theology, and a recognition that the things about which one speaks gain their theological intelligibility from their

¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Torrell, “Le savoir théologique chez saint Thomas,” *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996): 355-96, esp. 381-85.

In broaching this topic, one always has to begin with a terminological clarification. In Scholastic terminology, the subject of a science is the extramental reality that is known in the science, while the object of the science is the knowledge that is the terminus of our intellectual activity. In theology, God is the subject, for he is the reality beyond our minds that we seek to know, and to whom all of our knowledge in theology is ordered; the things we say about God are the object, the immediate *terminus* of our reasoning about him and his revelation. This is almost the reverse of our contemporary terminology, according to which the subject is the knower and the object is the thing outside the knower that is known.

¹⁸ “Through *sacra doctrina*, then, we possess the point of view of God himself, and look over his shoulder, as it were, upon all things” (Mark F. Johnson, “The Sapiential Character of the First Article of the *Summa theologiae*,” in R. James Long, ed., *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, O.P.*, Papers in Medieval Studies 12 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1991), 87-98, at 91. See also Mark F. Johnson, “God’s Knowledge in Our Frail Mind: The Thomistic Model of Theology,” *Angelicum* 76 (1999): 25-46.

¹⁹ For a helpful treatment of this subject, see Francis Martin, “Revelation as Disclosure: Creation,” in *Wisdom and Holiness, Science and Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Matthew L. Lamb*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Naples, Fla.: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 205-47.

relationship to God. A definition of theology that misses these elements falsifies the nature of theology.

It is worth noting a classic dispute regarding the formal object *quod*. In Aquinas's own day, some theologians taught that the subject of theology is not God but rather the whole Christ. Similarly, one occasionally hears today a plea that theology be less theocentric and more Christocentric. It is not difficult to imagine why such an option would seem desirable. To define the subject of theology as God opens the way to considering theology almost entirely as a philosophical discipline. There are many things we can know about God on the basis of philosophy (e.g., his existence, his perfections, his creation), and theology might be drawn to take its measure from these, rather than from the revelation of God, his actual dispensation with respect to us. Moreover, a focus on Christ as the subject of theology makes more apparent how theology is to be Christian, that is, Christocentric.

Aquinas considers the possibility that the whole Christ is the subject of theology. He rejects it, saying that while it is true that "the whole Christ" encompasses the matter of theology, it is not the principal subject. His objection is most telling. Aquinas wants a subject that formally defines the science, not a mere list of the things we talk about in it. To talk about the whole Christ is to talk about divinity, humanity, the source of grace and the life of grace. This is all well and good, but where is the formal unity? How are these things related to each other?²⁰ They are related, of course. The medieval Franciscans who talked about "the whole Christ" were not interested in bits and pieces of the whole Christ, as if one could talk about humanity or creation in separation from the creating God. But this simply proves Aquinas's point. Positing Christ as the subject of theology, producing a Christocentric theology, is possible *if one can show* the principle of order that coalesces the whole Christ into a unity.²¹ For example, St.

²⁰ This is the criticism levied by Henry Donneaud, *Théologie et intelligence de la foi au XIII^{ème} siècle*, Bibliothèque de la Revue Thomiste (Paris: Parole et silence, 2006), 757-58.

²¹ This is precisely why Emile Mersch argued that one can define God as the ultimate object of theology and the whole Christ as the integral object of theology (Emile Mersch, S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co.,

Bonaventure defines the subject of theology as both the whole Christ and God, and it is possible that he would unite these by regarding God as the principle to which the whole Christ is reduced.²² To ask whether Aquinas might accept this formulation is beyond my scope here. But at least such a formulation would highlight precisely the same thing Aquinas does when he speaks of the subject of theology: it points to a simple extramental reality to which everything the theologian wishes to speak about is ordered and to which he must be in right relation in order to fulfill the demands of the science.

II. HOLINESS AND THE MODE OF PROCEEDING IN THEOLOGY

The formal cause of theology has to do with its “mode of proceeding”—that is, how theology goes about its business. Does it proceed by way of authority, or by way of reason? Is its mode exhortative, argumentative, or something else? For the Thomist, theology is both a science and a wisdom, based in revelation, reasoning to conclusions, and judging the principles of all other sciences. Various modes of proceeding are appropriate, depending on what aspect of theology is being considered, especially whether one is considering its reception of its principles or the use that is made of it. In the reception of its principles the mode of theology can be *reuelatiuus* (insofar as the principles are given through God speaking forth through a human instrument), *oratiuus* (the spirit in which the principles are received), *narratiuus signorum* (the signs confirming the authority of the ones who make the principles known), or *metaphoricum, siue symbolicum, uel parabolicum* (insofar as the things revealed are too high for us, and so can be made known only by creaturely similitudes). Again, theology has a threefold purpose: when it is being used for the destruction of error or for the contemplation of truth, its mode is *argumentatiuum*; when it is being used for moral instruction, its

1951), esp. chap. 3, “Unity in Theology: The Whole Christ.”

²² Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, proe., q. 1. See LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom*, 42-43.

mode can be *preceptiuus, comminatorius et promissiuus*, or *narratiuus exemplorum*.²³

For those who are accustomed to think of Thomistic theology as simply scientific, the above catalogue must broaden the outlook. Indeed, a common objection to a scientific conception of theology—an objection both modern and medieval—is that this mode of proceeding is inadequate to the subject and end of theology. Are not the things of God too high for our sight? And are they not to be believed rather than known? The objections have some merit. One cannot approach theology in an uninvolved way, as one might approach, say, geometry or physics. But this is true for a reason that is intrinsic to the scientific nature of theology. The first principles of theology are not hypothetical postulates. They must be both true and known to be true, by the assent of faith in the theologian, by his attention to the authority of the teacher, by his prayer, etc. Someone who lacks these qualities can practice the science of theology only in a very attenuated way.

When we recognize this aspect of theology we see the key question with respect to holiness and the formal cause of theology: what are the habits that are necessary, or at least important, for theology to be theology?

Faith is obviously a *sine qua non* for theology, for without faith one does not have the first principles from which the science of theology proceeds. Charity is likewise necessary, though not so absolutely as faith. Insofar as there can be faith without charity, so there can be theology without charity. But this is not the norm, nor is it possible for theology to begin without charity—for since the infusion of faith is always accompanied by the infusion of charity, if the latter has never been present, theology is missing its condition *sine qua non*.

²³ In the *Scriptum*, Aquinas addresses the topic of theology as science and as wisdom in I *Sent.*, pro., q. 1, a. 3, qcla. 2 and 3, respectively; and he treats of the various modes of proceeding in I *Sent.*, pro., q. 1, a. 5. In the *Summa*, theology as science is treated in *STh* I, q. 1, a. 2; theology as wisdom in I, q. 1, a. 6; and various modes of proceeding in I, q. 1, aa. 8-10.

Moreover, charity is necessary for theology to achieve its end. It is important to be precise here. The temptation is to make a separation between theology and the theologian, and to say that, while charity is certainly necessary for the theologian—that is, as a Christian who cannot be in communion with God without charity—it is not necessary for theology as such, which is a purely intellectual act of reasoning applied to the things of faith. In fact, for Aquinas at least the distinction is not so neat. He says that “the end of this doctrine [*sacra doctrina*] is the contemplation of the first truth in heaven”²⁴—not the end of the theologian, but the end of the activity of knowing the divine things, that is, the end of theology. To be sure, this is an intellectual end; but without charity, it is impossible for theology to be directed toward that end.²⁵

There are other habits that are intrinsic to the correct “mode of proceeding” in theology as well. There are those moral and intellectual virtues that are a necessary part of any intellectual discipline, notably studiousness (the virtue of moderating the pursuit of knowledge [which is part of the virtue of temperance]) and docility (the virtue of being ready to be taught [which is part of the virtue of prudence]).²⁶ There are also the gifts of the Holy Spirit, most notably the gifts of knowledge and understanding.²⁷

The contribution of these intellectual gifts is not the infusion of special species into the human mind, as if they were a version of prophecy. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are the habits that

²⁴ *I Sent.*, pro., q. 1, a. 3, sol. 1.

²⁵ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., “Chronique de théologie fondamentale,” *Revue Thomiste* 66 (1966): 267. See also below, on the end of theology.

²⁶ See, e.g., Thomas M. MacLellan, “The Moral Virtues and the Speculative Life,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 12 (1956): 175-232. See also *How to Study: Being the Letter of St. Thomas Aquinas to Brother John “De modo studendi,”* trans. and exposition by Victor White, O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1951). The latter is significant not so much for the text, which is generally believed now not to be an authentic work of Aquinas, but for White’s very helpful exposition of the virtue of studiousness.

²⁷ See *STh* I-II, q. 68; II-II, qq. 8-9; John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Dominic Hughes, O.P. (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951), chaps. 3-4; Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), chap. 5, “The Impartings of the Holy Spirit.”

dispose the natural powers of the mind to be moved by the Holy Spirit. Their distinctive quality may be read off of the natural capacity they modify. To appreciate the gifts of knowledge and understanding, therefore, one should begin with the natural virtues of knowledge and understanding.

Knowledge is the virtue that has to do with the conclusions drawn from sure principles. This is the goal of much of our theological activity: discerning what follows from the sure principles of our theology. The gift of knowledge likewise has to do with conclusions: it gives us the capacity to see the implications of and connections between the things of faith insofar as we are moved to do so by the Holy Spirit. In no way does it replace theological reasoning itself, which proceeds in a natural mode and whose conclusions are judged in light of the rigor of the reasoning process. But the gift of knowledge can and should guide theological reasoning, for it is the capacity that allows one to see the conclusions in a divine mode, following the causal chain that leads from anything that can be known of creatures to what is known of God.²⁸ As the gift of knowledge influences theology, theological conclusions are seen to matter—that is, not to be merely the interesting fruit of speculation. For example, in theology one rightly proceeds on the basis of a judgment about the contingency of creation—God would not be less God if he did not create. However, it is also the case that the principle of creation is in some way the procession of the persons within the Trinity.²⁹ Theological reasoning, knowing this principle, tries to discover what one can say about the connection between the procession of the Son and the Spirit and the creation of the world.

²⁸ “Therefore, there is such a thing as a judgment from the motion of the Holy Ghost with an ordered love of God and creatures, which distinguishes between God and creatures through a right estimate of the latter. . . . The gift of knowledge . . . considers divine truths by arising from creatures to God or by making a comparison between God and creatures” (John of St. Thomas, *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, 152-53).

²⁹ *STh* I, q. 45, a. 6, co. and ad 2. For commentary, see Gilles Emery, O.P., “Trinity and Creation: The Trinitarian Principle of the Creation in the Commentaries of Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas on the *Sentences*,” in idem, *Trinity in Aquinas*, trans. Matthew Levering et al. (Ypsilanti, Mich.: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2003), 33-70.

The gift of knowledge gives one a sense for the connection. In the proper order of things, then, the gift of knowledge orders theological reasoning in harmony with what it senses is the case.

As for understanding: the virtue of understanding involves the apprehension of the principles of knowledge. So too by the gift of understanding we have a graced apprehension of the principles of the things of faith. By the virtue of faith we believe that which is revealed; by the gift of understanding we penetrate more deeply the reality of that which is revealed, for a connaturality is established between it and us. The gift of understanding therefore assists theology in two ways: first, it enhances the theologian's adherence to the things revealed; second, it can give the theologian a more expansive grasp of what is revealed. Romanus Cessario comments that we often look to the saints, those who "manifest special clarity in their understanding of the economy of salvation . . . [as] those who model the gift of understanding."³⁰ He gives an example: "think of St. Francis of Assisi and his intuitive grasp that all creation reflects the glory of the Lord." This does not mean that the theologian, by the Holy Spirit through the gift of understanding, receives distinct principles—things that he knows that are other than the things known in faith. The gifts do not grant a new object. But it is possible that because of the gift of understanding the theologian will apprehend the reality of the thing believed in a way that will grant a distinctive guidance to his theology.

The Thomistic teaching on the habits necessary for theology may therefore be summed up as follows. Certain moral and intellectual virtues are important aids to theology, as they are to any speculative discipline. The infused virtues of faith and charity are simply necessary. And the gifts of the Holy Spirit have a formative role; theology is possible without them, but impoverished. Insofar as holiness is associated with any or all of these habits, its role within theology may thereby be distinguished.

³⁰ Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 174.

III. HOLINESS AND THE END OF THEOLOGY

The end of theology might be considered as its purpose. Why do we engage in theology? Many answers could be given, but they will generally be clustered around the same thought: that engaging in theology helps one to achieve the goal of Christian life. This is the sense that often underlies discussions of theology and holiness, or theology and spirituality. The real Christian good is identified with holiness, or spirituality (viz., union with God), and theology is regarded as necessarily governed by this purpose—whether by having precisely the same *telos*, or by materially contributing to the achievement of that *telos*.

The problem with this line of thought is that if theology is defined as a science, it must be judged by the canons of a science. It may be that an intellectual activity is undertaken for the sake of a nonintellectual goal, but such a goal would be extrinsic to the activity, and thus not an essential part of the understanding of the activity. To be more precise, one needs to speak not about the purpose but about the “end” of the activity, that which perfects it in its own right. A science is identified as speculative or practical with respect to its end. Insofar as theology is understood as a speculative science, its end is properly speculative.³¹

Yet it is not enough to say this, for here we run up against the concern expressed by both the Magisterium³² and the Tradition. Common in the tradition was the view of theology as a kind of knowledge that is not purely speculative, for it was supposed to pertain to more than just the speculative intellect. Aquinas himself notes several passages from Scripture that suggest a practical end to theology.³³ And if there was after the time of the High Scholastics a separation between theological knowledge and the spiritual or mystical life of the Christian, there were also attempts to overcome this divide—most famously, in Thomistic circles, in the description of theology as an affective science in the

³¹ I *Sent.*, q. 1, a. 3, qcla. 1; *STh* I, q. 1, aa. 4-5.

³² See above, n. 2.

³³ Jas 1:22 (cited in *STh* I, q. 1, a. 4, obj. 1); Jas 2:26; Ps 110:10 (cited in I *Sent.*, pro., q. 1, a. 3, obj. 1).

seventeenth-century French Thomism of Vincent Contenson, Louis Bail, and Louis Chardon.³⁴

What then can we say about the definition of theology as a speculative science? In what way does Aquinas's understanding on this point satisfy the concern of the Magisterium and of the Tradition for a theology that is not "merely" speculative, but includes the practical and the affective as well?

The first element of the answer is that Aquinas does in fact see a perfection of the human being that is first and foremost speculative: the highest end of man is the contemplation of God. There is no derogation of the practical here. A practical science has to do with human acts. However much these can and must be ordered to the divine things, one has to say that dealing with the divine things themselves is intrinsically a higher, and more final, activity. The speculative is to the practical here as the higher is to the lower: to be sure, the good works of the will are necessary for man to achieve that end, but the end itself supercedes them, and thus it cannot be described as truly practical.

A second element lies in the fact that theology is not separated from the realm of the practical. Aquinas speaks of theology as containing the perfection of all practical knowledge as well as of all speculative knowledge.³⁵ Since the formal object of theology is relation to divine revelation, and since divine revelation pertains not only to human knowledge but also to the perfection of man in virtue, there is no difficulty in saying that the same science perfects all practical as well as all speculative knowledge.

It is not only the encompassing character of divine revelation that guarantees this. Revelation must be received with the human habit of faith, and faith itself consists of both speculative and practical elements—that is, the intellect and the will. Faith lies in the intellect, but because the evidentiary power of the object of faith is not enough to move the intellect to knowledge, the will is

³⁴ See, e.g., Vincent Contenson, *Theologia mentis et cordis*, lib. 1, prae. 1, appendix 2, "Commercium theologiae et pietatis." See also Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *A History of Theology*, trans. Hunter Guthrie, S.J. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), 166-68.

³⁵ *I Sent.*, q. 1, a. 3, qcla. 1, ad 1; *Sth I*, q. 1, a. 4.

always in play as well. Hence the classic definition of belief as “to think with assent,” the will moving the intellect to assent.

Supernatural charity is the most obvious companion to faith in this respect, for it is this that makes faith living, saving faith. And charity of course belongs to the perfection of the will. But charity is not the only volitional component related to faith. In charity faith finds its perfection, but the order of these virtues must be that faith comes first—for the simple reason that it is only in faith that the intellect is so related to God (its object, the one it knows) that the will can be moved to love with charity. Aquinas also recognizes a movement of the will prior to the act of charity that forms part of the act of faith: what the Tradition comes to call the “*pious credulitatis affectus*.” This is not the adhesion of the will to the Beloved; it is rather the recognition, moved by grace, of the goodness and appropriateness of that which one is called to believe, which brings with it both a desire and confidence.³⁶

Recognizing this element of faith we avoid the difficulties associated with a pure speculation in faith. That which is believed in can never be a matter of indifference to the believer, for if it is there is no act of faith, no movement of the will inclining the will to assent. To this extent, theology is properly practical as well as speculative.

A third element has to do with the distinction between a speculative and an affective science. There is an advantage to describing theology as an affective science—that is, a science that is completed in fostering and perfecting our affective relationship to God—in that it accords well with some of the characteristics of theology we have already seen in Aquinas, such as attention to the subject rather than the multiplication of things known about the subject, or the kind of apprehension associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. One could then describe the perfection of theology as something like, as Bonaventure puts it, a pious knowledge of the things that are believed.³⁷ A connection to holiness would be self-evident.

³⁶ See M.-M. Labourdette, O.P., “La vie théologique selon saint Thomas: L’affection dans la foi,” *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 375.

³⁷ Bonaventure, *De septem donis Spiritus sancti* 4.5.

Aquinas does not take this route, nor does he even explicitly consider it.³⁸ For Aquinas, our affections properly speaking do not have the capacity to attain God. I may have joy (*gaudium*, pleasure in the satisfaction of the rational appetite) in knowing God as the source of all Truth. I may so delight in God that I yearn for him more and more. But what is really happening is either that my affection arises from a cognitive or appetitive act, which is able to be directed toward God; or, that my affection prompts my spiritual capacities of knowledge and will to attend to God.³⁹ For Aquinas, there is no special affective capacity that brings theology to its completion. To speak about the perfection of theology is to speak about the kind of act in which theology is completed. To say that it is in an affective act is to mis-locate affection. The confusion arises because we long to see theology as a loving knowledge of God. This is all well and good. But we have to distinguish between love as part of the intellectual appetite, which does importantly direct us to the proper knowledge of God, and love as an affection that arises from our perception of God as our good. The way Aquinas sees it, the knowledge of God inevitably has an appetitive component; but this is not enough to warrant calling theology an affective science.

We must not be deceived by Aquinas's description of theology as a speculative science. It is indeed speculative: it is perfected in knowing rather than in doing or in loving. But doing and loving follow inevitably in its train, and insofar as they are capable of producing acts that direct the speculative intellect they can have a directive influence on theology. What Aquinas excludes is the

³⁸ This may be due in part to a departure from the Augustinian framework (which does, in its notion of wisdom, give some room to an affective dimension of thought) in favor of an Aristotelian framework (which distinguishes simply between the speculative and the practical). See François-Xavier Putallaz, *Figure francescane alla fine del XIII secolo*, trans. Costante Marabelli (Milan: Jaca Book, 1996), 79-81.

³⁹ I may say that the first is a natural joy and the second is a supernatural joy. But what I really mean is that the first is joy in a natural object and the second is joy in a supernatural object. Nothing has transformed the joy itself. This is different from the influence of grace on the intellect and the will. Faith not only allows me to know God, it allows me to know him in a new way. Charity not only allows me to love God; it allows me to love him in a new way. The same cannot be said of the affections. When they follow from our proper orientation to God, they are not transformed affections, but the same affections differently directed.

possibility that a holy, loving affection is in fact a capacity outside of the speculative intellect that is itself capable of apprehending God. One finds such a possibility elsewhere in the Christian tradition, in the doctrine of “the spiritual senses.” Aquinas marks a decisive turn from this doctrine—again, not because he wishes to uproot affection from theology, but because he simply gives it a different place in his anthropology.⁴⁰

Given this description of the kind of speculative science that theology is, there are several things to say about the relationship between theology and holiness, depending on whether one defines holiness in relation to the intellect, the will, or the affections. Holiness is implicated in theology insofar as one can describe the speculative end of theology as itself a holy knowledge. The beatific vision is, after all, beatifying. Furthermore, holiness is necessary for theology insofar as it encompasses the acts of the will that are the necessary concomitants of faith, namely, the *pius credulitatis affectus* and charity. Finally, holiness is related to the end of theology insofar as it connotes either the loving response to God prompted by the theological apprehension of him or, more strongly, that loving quality that directs the attention of the theologian toward God.

IV. HOLINESS AND THE THEOLOGIAN

It remains to speak about holiness and the efficient cause of theology, that is, the theologian. Who is the theologian? Is the saint, as saint, a theologian, as Léthel would have it? What of the bishop—the theologian par excellence in the Dionysian system of hierarchy, of which Aquinas is an heir?⁴¹ Or should one say,

⁴⁰ On this point, see Richard Cross’s essay on Aquinas in Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds., *Spiritual Senses: The Perception of God in the History of Western Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴¹ Brought to prominence again in recent years through the work of Jean-Luc Marion; see “Of the Eucharistic Site of Theology,” in idem, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 139-58.

following an ancient Augustinian motif, that Christ is *the* theologian?⁴²

To be clear, I am not talking here about the habitual qualities the theologian must possess; I have already treated of these under the formal cause of theology, or the “mode of proceeding.” The question is rather whether there is something else about the state of the person that is a definitive element in his being called a theologian.

In the simplest sense, the theologian for Aquinas is the individual who has acquired the *habitus* of theology. Thus Cajetan is certainly a theologian, while Joan of Arc is not (*pace* Léthel). We properly call Avery Dulles a theologian, but we do not extend the term to Blessed Theresa of Calcutta. The state of a particular Christian may demand of him an attention to theology (e.g., the bishop, who must reflect on Sacred Scripture and the articles of faith so as to be able to teach his people),⁴³ but in this view there is nothing about any Christian state that by itself makes the person in that state a theologian.

Such is the view in which theology is understood as the private activity of an individual Christian (i.e., his attempt to move from faith to understanding). But theology may also be considered as part of the teaching role of the Church. This requires some explanation. It is common in Catholic theology to say that it is the work of the Magisterium to define what is revealed, and it is the work of the theologian to draw out the things that follow from revelation, as part of understanding it better. The realm of the Magisterium is that of faith, while the realm of the theologian is theology. On such an account we cannot speak of the Church

⁴² This topic is not dealt with as a distinct question in either the *Scriptum* or the *Summa*.

⁴³ On this responsibility of the bishop in Aquinas’s view, see Michael G. Sirilla, “*Status Perfectionis: The Bishop as Spiritual Perceptor* in Thomas Aquinas’s Commentaries on the Pastoral Epistles” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2009), *passim*; for example, “In correlating the episcopal duties mentioned in Titus 1:9 with Aristotle’s description of the task of the wise, Aquinas portrays the bishop as a ‘philosopher’ in the broadest sense: one who lovingly adheres to his science—a lover of wisdom. The prelate ought to possess the divine science, meditating on the divinely revealed first principles, the articles of faith; but his meditation is for the sake of others, to teach them the truth and to refute the errors of those who oppose sound doctrine” (189-90).

having a magisterial theology. Yet is this the case? On the contrary, the Magisterium has the authority not only to define the deposit of faith, but also to teach definitively regarding those things that are necessary for us to hold the deposit of faith.⁴⁴ At times the Magisterium has made a point of identifying philosophical theses that fall into this category.⁴⁵ Also included could be certain ways of ordering and understanding that deposit, which is a properly theological activity. In this sense, we can speak of a magisterial theology: the definition of elements of theology necessary for holding what we know in faith to be true.⁴⁶ As the Magisterium knows these things, so it is engaged in theology.

Moreover, theology pertains not only to knowing, but in a distinctive way to teaching. One knows the Dominican ideal: “contemplata aliis tradere.” In this life, it is a greater thing to teach what one knows than simply to know it. This is not only the fruit of charity. Aquinas maintains, following Dionysius, that God

⁴⁴ The “secondary object of infallibility”; see Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Mysterium ecclesiae* 3; John Paul II, *Ad tuendam fidem* 3; Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium* 25.

⁴⁵ The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are rife with such pronouncements, most famously the encyclicals *Aeterni patris* (Leo XIII, 1879), *Pascendi* (Pius X, 1907), *Humani generis* (Pius XII, 1950), and *Fides et ratio* (John Paul II, 1998); see also the condemnations related to, e.g., Georg Hermes (1835), Louis Bautain (1840), Augustine Bonnetty (1855), Anton Günther (1857), and Antonio Rosmini-Serbaty (1887); Pius X, *motu proprio* “Doctoris Angelici” (1914); Sacred Congregation of Studies, “Twenty-Four Thomistic Theses” (1914), Pius XI, encyclical *Studiorem ducem* (1923).

⁴⁶ We should not expect the Church to define the work of one theologian as known infallibly to be true. Here John Paul II’s warning in *Fides et ratio* 49 is appropriate: “The Church has no philosophy of her own, nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others”—the same could well be said of theology. But in various pronouncements, such as the naming of a Doctor of the Church (see, e.g., John Paul II, apostolic letter *Divini amoris scientia*) or the mandating of particular studies in seminaries, the Church does give approbation to particular figures. The best candidate for a normative theologian for the Church is certainly Aquinas; see Santiago Ramirez, O.P., “The Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 15 (1952): 1-109. It is too much to say that the Church knows infallibly that the whole of the theological theses or system of Aquinas is true. But the Church’s approbation of Aquinas is such that the theologian must ponder, what are the elements of Aquinas’s thought that cannot be doubted if one is to hold the deposit of faith? (See, e.g., John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* 43-44; see also Gregory F. LaNave, “Bonaventure’s Arguments for the Existence of God and an ‘Independent’ *De Deo uno*,” *The Thomist* 74 [2010]: 62 n. 14.)

ordains that “the gifts of his providence should come to the lowest through intermediaries.”⁴⁷ This includes sacred doctrine. *The* preeminent theologian is therefore the one from whom all theological knowledge begins—namely, Christ. Included in his theological activity is the work of those through whom his teaching comes. This obviously pertains to the Magisterium, for it was given to the apostles and their successors the bishops to pass on, define, and defend the teaching of Christ. Thus the Magisterium as teacher participates in a theological activity.

Moreover, individual theologians may enter the ranks of the intermediaries of sacred doctrine as well, insofar as their theology can be conceived as a part of the divine ordering through which the teaching of Christ is spread to all. As Kevin White comments: “The unwritten *doctrina Christi* [that is, the oral teaching of Christ] . . . is transmitted through the *doctrina Christiana* of which the *Summa Theologiae* is meant to be an exemplary case.”⁴⁸ The Doctors of the Church are the most notable members of this group. But the work of any theologian, insofar as it is attempting this passing on of *doctrina Christiana*, and as it is received and given approbation by the Magisterium, can fall into this category.

Finally, one may wonder if individual saints who are not obviously theologians may be included as well. This is a theme one finds in Hans Urs von Balthasar: the idea that God uses specific saints as a way of communicating a distinctive way of living out the truth of the gospel that is normative for a specific age.⁴⁹ Thus some would speak of the theology of a saint enshrined

⁴⁷ Aquinas, “Rigan montes,” proe. The text is the inaugural lecture for Aquinas’s inception as regent master in Paris. For English translations see *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*, trans. Simon Tugwell, O.P., The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1988), 355-60; also *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. with introduction and notes by Ralph McInerney (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 13-17.

⁴⁸ Kevin White, “Aquinas on Oral Teaching,” *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 528. See also Aquinas, *Lectura Romana*, pro., q. 4, a. 3, where Aquinas calls the articles of faith principles *per se nota* for “this science,” which produce demonstrative arguments, and the writings of the saints *probabiles rationes*, which are the principles of probable arguments.

⁴⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Introduction,” in idem, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, trans. Donald Nichols, Anne Elizabeth Englund, and Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992); cf. Léthel, *Connaître l’amour du Christ*, 31-54.

in his vocation and mission (one thinks of Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, or Therese of Lisieux). Again, the point is that insofar as a person is part of the divine ordering through which the teaching of Christ is transmitted to all, he may be part of a theological activity. Thus is opened the possibility of some theologians being defined as such by their holiness, insofar as holiness encompasses the distinctive gift from God that enables a person to participate in this mission. (Holiness thus understood is associated with *gratia gratis data* rather than *gratia gratum faciens*.)

There is a hint of this same idea in Aquinas's discussion of the "states of perfection." There are two such states: that of the bishop and that of religious. Following Dionysius, Aquinas says that the bishop is in the position of a perfecter, while religious are in the position of being perfected.⁵⁰ Either one can be seen as relevant to theological activity. A religious, because of the form of his life, is singularly equipped with the aids to contemplation that make for a good theologian.⁵¹ A bishop, on the other hand, is in a state in which it is incumbent upon him to practice theology, insofar as this pertains to his perfective pastoral duty.

In summary, although it makes sense to say for St. Thomas that the theologian is the person with acquired theological *habitus*, it also makes sense to say that the person marked by holiness in a distinctive way—whether the bishop, an individual teacher, or a paradigmatic saint—can as such be called a theologian.

CONCLUSION

I have presented a variety of ways in which holiness, depending on how one defines it, can be seen as intrinsic to theology. I will close simply by emphasizing the following point. One can conceive, on Thomistic grounds, of a theologian who is both a genuine, even a fine theologian, while he is also a wretched Christian. But this does not mean that theology should be regarded as an intellectual activity that has nothing to do with

⁵⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 184, a. 7.

⁵¹ See, e.g., *STh* II-II, q. 188, a. 5.

holiness, or that has only an extrinsic relationship thereto. The question is, as I stated at the beginning, how is holiness intrinsic to theology? How is it impossible for theology to be what it is truly meant to be in isolation from holiness? St. Thomas gives us much to think about here. Foremost in his consideration are perhaps the habits necessary for the theologian, which would accord well with his attention to holiness as a virtue. But his carefully delineated treatment of the various elements of theology, with his explicit and implicit teaching on the kind of knowledge theology is, the role of the will in theology, the connection of theology with different states of Christian life, etc., open up a wide field for exploration. To recover this is to recover the integrity of Christian thought and life, and the most robust sense of the nature of theology.