



AQUINAS IN PROTESTANT BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

EL AQUINATE EN LA HERMENÉUTICA BÍBLICA PROTESTANTE

PIOTR ROSZAK

Nicolaus Copernicus University

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ABSTRACT

St. Thomas Aquinas and his interpretation of Scripture appear frequently in contemporary studies of Protestant theologians. Historically, the reception of his biblical exegesis in the Protestant tradition reveals a common ground, in which the question of understanding Revelation comes first, but also it brings some differences, like the question of the importance of ecclesial authority, expressed in the form of symbols of faith. The final section of this paper will examine references to Aquinas among contemporary Protestant theologians, including both the themes and the evaluation of interpretive mechanisms used by Aquinas.

Keywords: Biblical Thomism, sola Scriptura, Revelation, medieval biblical exegesis.

RESUMEN

Santo Tomás de Aquino y su interpretación de las Escrituras aparecen con frecuencia en los estudios contemporáneos de los teólogos protestantes. Históricamente, la recepción

de su exégesis bíblica en la tradición protestante revela un terreno común, en el que la cuestión de la comprensión de la Revelación ocupa el primer lugar, pero también indica las diferencias, como por ejemplo la cuestión del significado de la autoridad eclesial, expresada en forma de símbolos de fe. La sección final de este artículo examinará las referencias al Aquinate entre los teólogos protestantes contemporáneos, tanto los temas como la evaluación de los mecanismos interpretativos utilizados por el Aquinate.

Palabras clave: tomismo bíblico, *sola Scriptura*, Revelación, exégesis bíblica medieval.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his interpretation of the Letter to the Ephesians, Markus Barth repeatedly precedes his own reading of the words of St. Paul with Aquinas's interpretations, which he considers to be correct¹. Is this a coincidence or a sign of an inconspicuous yet constant presence of Thomas's ideas in the Protestant tradition and a confirmation of the fact that he has also remained the *Doctor Communis* in biblical exegesis? Perhaps the early generations of Protestant theologians retained a greater awareness than the later generations of Catholics would of the fact that the Master of Aquino had been a *magister in Sacra Pagina*, a theologian building his philosophy upon the foundation of Sacred Scripture. Thus, considering the principles of Protestant exegesis and the Protestant understanding of Revelation, are the references to Thomas's views purely decorative or rather truly meaningful to the biblical theologies of the different Protestant movements? Furthermore, have there been any recent changes in that respect in the works of contemporary biblical scholars?

This presentation is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will provide a brief historical overview of the reception of Aquinas as a biblical theologian in the Protestant tradition. Next, I will point to the theological issues that constitute a common ground and to those with respect to which Thomas's views differ from the later Protestant tradition. Finally, in the last part, I will analyse the presence of Aquinas's interpretations in publications by contemporary Protestant exegetes.

1 Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 682.

II. THE FIRST “ENCOUNTERS WITH AQUINAS”: FROM “PREJUDICE” TO “DISENCHANTMENT”

Some recognition of St. Thomas Aquinas’s method of biblical exegesis can already be found in the works of first-generation Protestant thinkers, despite the Reformers’ critical view of the late mediaeval (mainly nominalist) scholasticism and the general tendency—especially in the later period after *Aeterni Patris*—to treat Thomas as a rationalist. During that time, in the course of the disputes with modernism, it was forgotten that Thomas’s great systematic works had been preceded by his commentaries on Scripture, which he had been writing since his time in Cologne at the side of Albertus Magnus and which he would continue to write for the rest of his life—until his last unfinished commentary on the Psalms.

Despite the above recognition, it appears that the first challenge in the sixteenth century was to overcome the anti-scholastic bias, that is, the prejudice which stemmed from the fact that Thomas was associated with scholasticism—a school of thought criticised by the Reformers and generally equated with the ideas expressed in Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* and Gratian’s *Decretals*. As Sytsma notes, «neither Luther or Calvin seem to have had a good firsthand knowledge of Aquinas’s exegesis»². Nevertheless, the two Reformed thinkers identified Thomas with commentaries written after the fourth century, which they generally treated as an attempt to impose the way of thinking typical of a given period on the Pauline texts rather than as a reflection of the Apostle’s ideas. In other words, they maintained that Aquinas’s interpretation of Scripture was eisegetical rather than exegetical. The objections raised by the Reformers, especially by Luther, concerned the alleged “unbiblicality” of certain doctrines promoted by the popes³. Calvin did not cite Aquinas often, either, and his knowledge of the latter’s commentaries may have been indirect—based on other mediaeval exegetical works (in particular those by Nicholas of Lyra).

Other Reformers, on account of their prior exposure to Thomas’s theology, seem to have had a better grasp of his commentaries, as can be seen in the citations from Aquinas in the *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* by Matthias Flacius

2 David S. Sytsma, *Thomas Aquinas and Reformed Biblical Interpretation: The Contribution of William Whitaker*, in Manfred Svensson – David VanDrunen (eds.), *Aquinas Among the Protestants* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2018), 50.

3 Matthew Levering, *Was the Reformation a Mistake? Why Catholic Doctrine Is Not Unbiblical* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2016), 52. Levering addresses nine critical points of disagreement between Protestants and Catholics raised by Luther during his lifetime: Scripture, Mary, the Eucharist, the seven sacraments, monasticism, justification and merit, purgatory, the saints, and the papacy.

(Illyricus) or in the works of Thomas Cranmer, who made express references to notes from Aquinas's commentaries on grace and justification. It has been emphasised that in his doctrine of grace, Thomas correctly interpreted the Holy Bible and made clear the fact that man has been saved by grace, not because of works. This is quite evident in the writings of Girolamo Zanchi, often called a "Calvinist Thomist", who frequently quoted Thomas in his main work (*Opera*), even though the quotations came from systematic works such as the *Summa theologiae* rather than from biblical commentaries. In his study, Sytsma pays particular attention to the *Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura* (1588) by William Whitaker (1548–95), whose views and practice he discusses in detail in his book *Aquinas Among the Protestants*. Nonetheless, Sytsma believes that further connections with Thomas can also be found in other "first-generation" Reformers, demonstrating a certain continuity of the exegetical tradition⁴. These connections can be considered from the perspective of converging or shared formal practices or assumptions as well from the standpoint of theological inspirations.

2.1. THE FORMAL ASPECTS

With regard to the first point of comparison, it is evident that the sixteenth-century Reformers were familiar with Aquinas and followed his approach in pursuing a biblical hermeneutic that underscored the primacy of the literal sense and relied on it in theological argumentation (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 10). Aquinas was generally acknowledged as a representative of that approach, and it is from him that the Reformers seem to have adopted their conviction about the value of the historical sense as a starting point for theological debates. Following the tradition established by his predecessors, including the Victorines, Thomas did not accept two parallel methods of interpretation: for him, it was either literal or spiritual, as if these were two distinct paths from which the traveller must choose one. According to that view, everything begins with the literal sense, which then develops into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses—seen together as the spiritual sense. It is therefore not surprising that Whitaker would emphasise the essential compatibility of Reformed theology with St. Thomas's hermeneutics and that thanks to his *Disputatio* (as noted by Sytsma), this opinion would

4 Sometimes, as A. Giambrone notes, this continuity may manifest itself in going back to the patristic exegesis, as was the case—in his opinion—with Erasmus of Rotterdam, cf. Anthony Giambrone, *Aquinas between Abelard and Erasmus: A Brief Ressourcement of Thomistic Theology of Biblical Translation*, in R. Barron – S. W. Hahn – J. R. A. Merrick (eds.), *Engaging Catholic Doctrine: Essays in Honor of Matthew Levering* (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 146.

become ingrained in the minds of Protestants in the coming decades⁵. For that reason, Thomas was placed among the “sounder scholastics” (*saniiores scholastici*), and his views were treated as being quite close to the hermeneutic positions of Reformation theology.

As for the criticism that the Reformers of that time levelled against Aquinas’s exegesis, it concerned the fact that he had not used original Hebrew and Greek texts and relied on later translations instead. Hence, they believed that on account of his philological shortcomings, Thomas was misled by the Vulgate and thus produced “fantastical nonsense”. It was Whitaker, in particular, who pointed to passages which Aquinas had misunderstood due to his reliance on the Vulgate, such as Romans 13:1b (where the omission of one word led to conclusions being drawn in a general sense rather than with respect to powers or authority), Song of Songs 2:4 or Ephesians 6:13. In general, however, such errors were not common, and even when deficiencies were pointed out, the critics acknowledged that “despite them”, Thomas had correctly conveyed the main ideas of the different texts. This, to a large extent, stemmed from the fact that he was rooted in an ecclesial interpretation that established a hermeneutical framework for each specific text (and also from his sensitivity to the *alia littera*). Besides, this acclaimed accuracy of interpretation had been built upon the effort—as evident in the *notae*—to outline the historical realities and look for etymological explanations. Thomas was not fond of spiritual interpretations such as those for which St. Bernard was famous; in that regard, he was decidedly restrained.

In the above context, an accusation was formulated quite early on that Thomas had perverted the meaning of the Bible by using Aristotelian tools to interpret it, for example by attempting to explain the sense of passion and its necessity to our salvation through philosophical deliberations on the concept of *necessitas*. However, it is important to bear in mind that such use of philosophical tools (including those from Aristotle) was still prevalent in sixteenth-century Reformed theology and that scholars (such as Vermigli) continued to write commentaries on, for example, the Stagirite’s *Ethics*. Even today, Thomas is sometimes accused of going beyond Scripture and contaminating it, and thus of moving away from *sola Scriptura*⁶. For Thomas, however, this was part of a

5 David. S. Sytsma, *Sixteenth-Century Reformed Reception of Aquinas*, in M. Levering – M. Plested (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of The Reception of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 135.

6 Dewey Roberts, *Aquinas Is Not A Safe Guide For Protestants: Reading Aquinas with care and caution*, “The Aquila Report”, <https://theaquilareport.com/aquinas-is-no-safe-guide-for-protestants/>: «First, Aquinas did not believe in Sola Scriptura. The purpose Aquinas had in writing *Summa Theologica* was to combine the theology of the Scripture with the theological systems of the ancient Greek philosophers. There are times he begins his investigation of a theological issue with a quote of Scripture (though more rarely than one would like). More

theological programme through which he interpreted Revelation and its witness through the lens of the best hermeneutics, remembering that the two books—nature and Scripture—cannot contradict each other⁷.

2.2. THE THEMATIC ASPECTS

Besides the fact that Aquinas was quoted as an authority on hermeneutical matters, it can be observed that by reason of his immersion in Pauline theology—as demonstrated, for instance, by his preference for the Letter to the Romans, which he had cited most frequently in such works as the *Summa theologiae*⁸—his views were also taken into account in doctrinal analyses of justification, predestination and the understanding of grace and works⁹. With the resurgence of Protestant studies on scholasticism¹⁰, St. Thomas was restored to favour in the theological debate as someone who had «embraced an Augustinian interpretation of Paul and his emphasis on grace (e.g., Gottschalk, Thomas Bardwardine, Gregory of Rimini)»¹¹. The question of Thomas's Augustinianism has been addressed in Catholic debates, and it has been noted that while St. Augustine is the most frequently cited Church Father in the writings of the theologian from Aquino, Thomas was not simply an Augustinian; instead, he ventured beyond Augustine's ideas by expanding the existing perspective to include Aristotelian themes¹² and offering his own interpretations. Guy Mansini demonstrated the nature of these differences with respect to, for

frequently, he will begin with a quote from Augustine. Yet, on other occasions he will start with a quote from one of the ancient philosophers. For one who believes in *Sola Scriptura*, it was very disconcerting to read such an approach to theological issues. The ancient philosophers are in no wise on the same ground as the inspired authors of Scripture.»

7 For a broader discussion of the metaphysical categories in Aquinas's exegesis and the importance of that exegesis, see Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Andrea Nannini and Marcin Trepczyński. "In principio": The Metaphysical Exegesis of John 1:1 by Albert the Great, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas", *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 2(2022): 41–54.

8 Matthew Levering, *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

9 Franklin T. Harkins, *Docuit Excellentissimae Divinitatis Mysteria: St. Paul in Thomas Aquinas*, in S. Cartwright (ed.), *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 235–263.

10 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2003).

11 Francis B. Cavalli, *Aquinas and Calvin on Predestination: Is There Any Common Ground?* "Reformed Faith and Practice", <https://journal.rts.edu/article/aquinas-and-calvin-on-predestination-is-there-any-common-ground/>.

12 Matthew Levering, *Augustine and Aquinas on the Good Shepherd: The Value of an Exegetical Tradition*, in M. Dauphinas – B. David – M. Levering (eds.), *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 205–242.

instance, the interpretation of John 15:5¹³. While Augustine's interpretations were present in Aquinas's biblical commentaries, and his comments sometimes had a strong influence on Christological interpretations (as in the case of the Psalms), this relationship was not exclusive, since Thomas tended to go further.

Coming back to the thematic inspirations with Aquinas, which are evident in his influence on the first-generation Reformed theologians such as Vermigli, Zanchi, Perkins or Owen, it is worth noting how convergent his interpretations of key Pauline texts regarding predestination are with Calvin's exegesis. Some authors, such as Cavalli, have even noted that «in some respects, Thomas reflects a more faithful reading of Augustine than Calvin since he recognizes the role of merit in the soteric process and leans in the direction of a single predestinarian view. However, Calvin does more justice to Augustine's emphasis on human depravity and the necessity of saving grace to rescue man from destruction»¹⁴. In fact, this does not apply to predestination alone: there is also visible convergence in the understanding of natural law, as underlined by Paul Helm¹⁵, which reveals itself not so much in relation to the *Summa theologiae* as it does with regard to the interpretation of the Letter to the Romans. Perhaps this focus on Aquinas's exegesis, once again bringing to the foreground his role as a *magister in Sacra Pagina* rather than a philosopher and thus overcoming the dominance of Cajetan's interpretation of Thomism as a point of reference, will open a new chapter in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue. As authors including Ian Hislop observed a long time ago, «there is not much in the Scriptural Commentaries [of Thomas] that Calvin could object to»¹⁶.

Generally speaking, Thomas's thematic constructs are accepted inasmuch as they provide explanatory power for Protestant theology, and he himself is often treated as a «proto-evangelical biblicist»¹⁷. This stems from his conviction of the importance of Sacred Scripture to Christian life and from his Christocentric exegesis.

13 Guy Mansini, "Without Me You Can Do Nothing": St. Thomas with and without St. Augustine on John 15:5, in M. Dauphinas – B. David – M. Levering (eds.), *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 159-180.

14 Francis Cavalli, *Aquinas and Calvin on Predestination*, from: <https://journal.rts.edu/article/aquinas-and-calvin-on-predestination-is-there-any-common-ground/>

15 Paul Helm, *Nature and Grace*, in M. Svensson – D. VanDrunen (eds.), *Aquinas Among the Protestants* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2018), 229-247.

16 Quoted after F. Cavalli, *Aquinas and Calvin on Predestination*.

17 Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Publishing, 1991).

III. BETWEEN THE THEOLOGICAL “BATTLEFIELD” AND “COMMON GROUND”

What emerges from the above brief outline is a conviction that there is consensus at the conceptual level—that is, at the level of the theological framework that builds upon respect for and reliance on the literal sense of Scripture—and at the level of the core interpretation technique. This consensus stems from the manner in which Thomas understood Sacred Scripture as a witness to Divine Revelation. In that regard, as can be seen in the more in-depth reflection on the charism of prophecy, the distinction between the *res* and the *verbum* that describes it remains crucial. This is why in his exegesis, St. Thomas searched for the root rather than the leaves.

It seems that there are several areas in which a debate is taking place today on the encounter of the Thomistic and Protestant views, such as the understanding of Revelation itself and its relationship to Sacred Scripture or the role of the Church in the interpretation of the Bible. As a pre-Reformation theologian, he has been cited by both sides and represents a certain “common ground” from before the division, which is why his ideas can act as a point of reference for later theological views. In the following sections, I would like to focus on two of the above areas: the understanding of Revelation and the authority of the Church in the interpretation of Scripture.

3.1. THE UNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION (“SOLA SCRIPTURA”)

It is generally accepted that Thomas’s view of Revelation was propositional. In other words, he saw Revelation as the transmission of messages which the human reason would never have devised unless certain truths had been revealed (*revelata*) to it. Although Thomas never wrote anything *de revelatione*, one can observe (as Blankenhorn has done) that a summary to that effect can be seen in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 13 in terms of both structure (i.e., what subjects are discussed before and after the issue in question) and references to eschatology: «Revelation means that Christ the teacher, by all that he said, did, and suffered, illumines his disciples on their eschatological end and the Christ-like virtues needed to obtain that end. Revelation is divine teaching, as understood in light of the whole of the *Summa* and the biblical commentaries, especially the Gospel

commentaries»¹⁸. Revelation is an indirect knowledge of God that involves divine naming and mediation (so that it can be adapted to the human way of knowing¹⁹) and requires an understanding of the missions of the Persons of the Trinity, which makes it both Trinitarian and salvific. For Thomas, Revelation is not a list of dogmatic theses to be believed but a manner in which salvation takes place in history. In consequence, it is a place where metaphysics meets theology: since action flows from being, Christ's *acta et passa* reveal God to us²⁰.

In light of the above, as M. Levering has emphasised²¹, there is no room in Catholic theology for a deistic approach to Revelation. What this term means is an understanding of Revelation that is in a sense “trapped” in a specific historical period in which it was formulated: once it has taken place, contemporary people can only look back into the past, as if at a fossil, and the entire effort consists in bridging the gap between the consecutive generations of readers of Scripture and the original events. In the classical view, however, while Revelation is granted from eternity, it can be participated in throughout history, era after era, thanks to the assistance of the same Spirit who was present with those recounting the events and who is now present with the modern-day recipients. Thomas approaches the biblical text as one which uses words (*verba*) to convey events (*res*), transforming rather than merely “informing” the reader in the process²². Thus, it could be said that we become contemporary with Revelation through Scripture.

Aquinas's view of history is not merely «a linear unfolding of individual moments, but also [...] an ongoing participation in God's active providence, both metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatologically»²³. In other words, the aim is not to penetrate into the mind of the human author (e.g., to understand what St. Paul was thinking) and discover his ideas and perceptions but rather to participate in the divine teaching that allows the reader of the Bible to better understand the *res* of the lesson. To follow C. Baglow's metaphor, Aquinas performs his theological reconstruction like a sculptor who works on an existing skeleton (biblical text)—a

18 Bernhard Blankenhorn, *Locating a Theology of Revelation in the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, in R. Barron–S. W. Hahn–J. R. A. Merrick (eds.), *Engaging Catholic Doctrine: Essays in Honor of Matthew Levering* (Steubenville: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 55.

19 *ST*I, q. 43, a. 7.

20 Piotr. Roszak, “Exegesis y metafísica. En torno a la hermenéutica bíblica de santo Tomás de Aquino”, *Salmanticensis* 61 (2014): 301–323.

21 Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

22 Jeremy Holmes, “Participation and the Meaning of Scripture”, in P. Roszak, J. Vijgen (eds.), *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 9.

23 Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 1.

skeleton which he does not remove and which he instead incorporates in his work²⁴. At the same time, the distinction between *res* and *verbum* makes it possible to heed Aquinas's warning against reading the text *ad verbum* instead of *ad sensum*, because then one would be treating Revelation superficially, reducing it to the manner in which it is being conveyed. To avoid that pitfall, an important aspect of the interpretation becomes the *credo*—the symbol of faith as a rule. However, this is not a debiblication, as the Catholic doctrine has often been portrayed, but a hermeneutical key that derives from the unity of faith (analogy of faith). Thomas remains in a vital relationship with Scripture—in fact, there have even been references to Thomas's "submission to Scripture", both in the sense of commenting on everything that there is in Scripture (and that has found itself there for a reason) and in the sense of the method upon which he builds his synthesis, which presumes familiarity with Scripture. This can be seen in the *Summa theologiae*, which was not written for those completely ignorant but rather for those who were already familiar with Scripture, even if that familiarity had not yet translated into a systematic interpretation of the faith. In fact, the differences can be seen by comparing the treatment of Trinitarian themes in the *Summa theologiae* and the *Summa contra gentiles*. In other words, there is a feedback between exegesis and theology in Thomas.

The above view of Revelation entails a subjective understanding of the Tradition as being complementary to the approach in question, which reifies the Tradition and thus reduces it to a collection of truths. Thomas gradually developed an awareness of the *traditio in Scripturis*, that is, the unity of the Tradition—written and passed down in the spirit of the Greek *paradosis*²⁵. Still, he did not relativise Scripture: it remained his *regula fidei*, and he was convinced of its value at all times. This can clearly be seen in passages such as the following:

We believe the successors of the prophets and apostles only to the extent that they proclaim to us those teachings which the prophets and apostles left behind in their writings²⁶.

Another example is the following passage from the commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *On the Divine Names*, which even alludes to the benefits of reading Scripture:

24 Christopher. T. Baglow, "Modus Et Forma": A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the Lectura super Epistulam ad Ephesios (Rome: Editrice PIB, 2002), 69.

25 Cesar Izquierdo, *Parádoxis: estudios sobre la tradición* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2006).

26 *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, ad 11: «Successoribus autem apostolorum et prophetarum non credimus nisi in quantum nobis ea annuntiant quae illi in scriptis reliquerunt».

We, having received from Sacred Scripture the knowledge of God, must guard those teachings which are proposed to us in Sacred Scripture as the supreme rule of truth. We may neither enlarge Scripture by adding to it, nor diminish it by subtracting from it; nor may we pervert it by explaining it badly. For when we guard these holy things, we will be guarded by them²⁷.

Still, Thomas made a clear distinction in his approach so as not to confuse or idolatrise Scripture by simply equating it with Revelation²⁸.

3.2. ECCLESIAL AUTHORITY

Despite the above points of convergence, there has been tension between the Reformers and Aquinas as to whether the authority of the Church should be taken into account in explaining Sacred Scripture, and the idea of reading Scripture in isolation from the hierarchical Church has been one of the points of contention with Protestantism. Luther emphasised that Scripture can be understood by a person endowed with the spirit of God without interpretational guidance from ecclesial authorities with their immorality and infidelity. In other words, his view was that the only binding authority was Sacred Scripture itself²⁹.

An important point in the dialogue—albeit open to polemics in all likelihood—is the conviction that there is no single and exclusive sense of Scripture. This applies not only to the spiritual sense but also to the multitude of literal senses, and literalism must not be identified with the intention of either the human author or the Divine author. While the sense of a given text can be reached through the text itself, what is discovered is not definitive; instead, it provides a “path” towards the discovery of the original sense intended by the author and the editor³⁰.

27 *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 2, l. 1, n. 125: «Quia nos, a sacra Scriptura recipientes manifestationem Dei, ea quae in sacra Scriptura sunt posita, oportet nos *custodire* sicut quamdam optimam regulam veritatis, ita quod neque multiplicemus, addentes; neque minoremus, subtrahentes; neque pervertamus, male exponentes; quia dum nos custodimus sancta ab ipsis custodimur *et ab ipsis confirmamur ad custodiendum* eos qui custodiunt sancta».

28 Matthew Levering, *The Scriptures and Their Interpretation*, in L. Ayres – M. A. Volpe (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 42–54.

29 It is worth emphasising that the primacy of Scripture has also been established by the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, which reminds us that the Magisterium is not above the Word of God and that «there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth» (DV 8).

30 John W. Martens, *Aquinas, Modern Biblical Exegesis and Dei Verbum*, “America Magazine”, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/good-word/aquinas-modern-biblical-exegesis-and-dei-verbum/>.

Reformed thinkers commended Thomas on his conviction that Sacred Scripture is not only the “standard of faith” (*regula fidei*)³¹ but also the basis of faith³² and the foundation of its certitude³³. This conviction can be seen, for example, in the distinction between the necessary arguments taken from Scripture and the probable arguments of the doctors (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2) and in the practice of cross-referencing other biblical texts³⁴, which stems from Thomas’s belief in the unity of Sacred Scripture as something that God desired to be a whole rather than a collection of random books. The Church is not external to Scripture, since the latter is an expression of the Church’s faith and of the Spirit that acts in Her—the same Spirit who inspires the Church to convey revealed truths. Therefore, correct interpretation of Scripture requires Church’s creedal teaching as the “infallible and divine rule” for interpretation. This teaching flows from Scripture and, at the same time, provides the key to the interpretation of its message, since «the truth of faith is contained in Holy Writ, diffusely, under various modes of expression, and sometimes obscurely»³⁵.

As Thomas explicitly noted, when symbols of faith are drawn up, the aim is not to add something to Sacred Scripture but to extract from it the truths of faith that are necessary in order to progress towards salvation, so that the faith is not subject to *corruptio* through erroneous interpretations³⁶. For Aquinas, this movement from Scripture to the Creed and adherence to the Creed in the interpretation of Scripture revealed the authority of the universal Church³⁷—acting under the guidance of the Spirit who leads Her to the knowledge of the fullness of truth. In essence, this feedback between Scripture and dogma—and thus between Scripture and the Church—offers a model way of thinking about their mutual relationship. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Reformers invoked Aquinas’s ideas to counter the theory of the two sources of Tradition (written and oral). Thomas, however, also saw the meaningfulness of symbols in the fact that they bring the Church together in professing a faith formed by love (*fides formatae*), thus demonstrating that reading Scripture through the Creed makes ecclesiological sense.

31 *In Io.*, cap. 21, l. 6: «sola canonica Scriptura est regula fidei».

32 *ST* III, q. 55, a. 5.

33 *ST* II-II, q. 110, a. 3, ad 1.

34 The powerful interpretations of 1 Timothy 6:3 show the weight that he attached to Scripture as the *auctoritas*.

35 *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 9, ad 1: «veritas fidei in sacra Scriptura diffuse continetur et variis modis, et in quibusdam obscure».

36 *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 10 co.

37 Jose Manuel Salgado, “Eclesialidad y salvación según B.-D. de La Soujeole”, *Scripta Theologica* 2(2022), 369-394.

IV. CASE STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY PROTESTANT SCHOLARS AND AQUINAS'S EXEGESIS

St. Thomas has been present in the works of Protestant exegetes—both past and contemporary—not only through his principles of interpretation of Scripture but also through the scholars' dialogue with his reading of certain books of the Bible. This has often involved explicit quotations from Aquinas's interpretations of the passages under study, but certain contemporary publications can also be evaluated through the lens of their tacit consonance with his thought, even if it is not invoked directly. Some Protestant publications engage expressly with Thomas as an exegete (e.g., by comparing him with Kierkegaard³⁸), while others attempt to see how his exegesis can contribute to the evangelical reading of specific biblical passages (such as Hebrews 6), establishing possible models of interaction in the process³⁹. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at several contemporary Protestant exegetes to see the roles in which Aquinas appears in their biblical exegesis.

4.1. WESLEY HILL

Aquinas appears in Hill's book *Paul and the Trinity*⁴⁰, in which the author aims to discover Paul's Trinitology and does so with the conviction that the identities of God, Jesus and the Spirit can be explicated not from an external perspective but through the relations between the Divine Persons. Hill proposes a unique method of study that overcomes the opposition between low and high Christology. Specifically, he suggests combining exegesis with theology, thus emphasising the need for a theological approach to Paul's Christology, which in turn manifests itself in the inclusion of later formulations of the faith (such as the Nicene Creed) and Trinitarian theologies that emphasised the relationality of the Divine Persons. The Christology of the first Fathers is rooted in Paul's exegesis and can be used as a hermeneutical lens.

In essence, Hill proposes the kind of reflection that has already been practiced in history and stems from the conviction that the theology of the New

38 Brian Stiltner, "Who Can Understand Abraham? The Relation of God and Morality in Kierkegaard and Aquinas", *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 21 (1993) 2: 221–245.

39 William Sipling, Aquinas as Evangelical Historical-Critical Biblical Commentator: Hebrews 6:1-12, in Aquinas the Biblical Theologian Conference, Ave Maria University, Ave Maria, FL, February 2, 2019; see also: Francis J. Beckwith, *Never Doubt Thomas: The Catholic Aquinas as Evangelical and Protestant* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019).

40 Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

Testament is unified, making it possible to look at Paul from a perspective that goes beyond the reductionist historicism. This method is close to that adopted by Aquinas, who practiced such a reading—founded on the unity of salvation history and the participative understanding of Revelation. Thus, Hill proposes a two-step approach: a historical reading followed by the application of the later Trinitarian theologies that uncover the sense of Paul’s reasoning. For him, a Trinitarian theology is a resource that explains the different ways of speaking of the unity of God and Jesus and the “asymmetrical mutuality” between Them in Pauline texts. In that manner, he successfully demonstrates that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are constituted by Their mutual relation in Paul’s writings.

In Hill’s book, Thomas Aquinas is invoked several times in the context of Trinitarian theology as the one who illustrates the relational view of the Divine Persons in the Trinity. While there is no preference for Aquinas, and references to his texts are not frequent, it is clear that his Trinitarian theology is treated as a faithful reflection of the biblical understanding of God’s mystery. Furthermore, the author juxtaposes Aquinas’s views with modern interpretations (such as those by John Zizioulas), noting the differences with regard to the relations between the Divine Persons and with regard to the Divine being and its simplicity. What is worth emphasising, though, is the perception of Thomas’s Trinitology as a good key to the interpretation of Paul’s reflections, which is consistent with Thomas’s hermeneutical stance and underlines the biblical character of his Trinitarian theology.

4.2. MARKUS BOCKMUEHL

Other authors turn their attention directly to Aquinas’s interpretations of specific passages from Sacred Scripture. For example, in his chapter in the book *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, Markus Bockmuehl discovers Aquinas as a «careful exegete at work who repeatedly allows his critical questions to be both generated and addressed by a close reading of the biblical text»⁴¹. The author is interested in the way in which St. Thomas negotiates the conceptual tensions between faith and justification. He notes that Thomas aptly captured something that contemporary exegesis has also recognised: before Abraham was circumcised, his faith had been tested and he had received a promise, which means that his justification preceded his circumcision. Aquinas assigns a logical and causal relationship to both sides of the faith–works

41 Markus Bockmuehl, *Aquinas on Abraham’s Faith in Romans*, in M. Levering – M. Dauphinais (eds.), *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 40.

dilemma (which is something «of which even Calvin might have approved»⁴²) by noting the need to first be justified inwardly.

While the author finds some of Aquinas's argumentation fanciful, he shares Thomas's view of Christ as the hermeneutical key to the Old Testament and notes his thorough discussion of Romans 4 and "Abrahamic faith" as the seed (or prefiguration) of faith in Christ—in view of the fact that Abraham was the father of faith. Similarly, he recognises that in the discussion concerning the power of circumcision to remove original sin, Thomas's interpretation of circumcision offers not only a spiritual reading but also an anagogical one.

Bockmuehl notes that Aquinas's style takes some getting used to due to his use of Aristotelian categories and tendency to engage in excursions and dogmatic intricacies. Another observation made by the Protestant exegete is that an encounter with Thomas's biblical commentaries changes one's view of Aquinas—often based exclusively on the *Summa theologiae*. In the commentaries, Thomas reveals himself as being immersed in the tradition of biblical glosses and expositions of the Church Fathers—something that is not visible when one is first exposed to his systematic works. The author also notes that while Thomas's views are at odds with certain Protestant interpretations (both liberal and conservative), it is worth noticing and appreciating his attempts to read some problematic passages of Sacred Scripture from the perspective of the relations between Jews and Gentiles and between Jews and Christians—perhaps an outcome of his philosophical references to thinkers from other circles.

4.3. BREVARD CHILDS

In his book *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*⁴³, Brevard Childs cites Aquinas's main hermeneutical assumptions, which he believes can be helpful in reading Isaiah as a book that is part of the Christian Scripture. The author notes—as O. H. Pesch, OP, has done in the past—that while Thomas remained faithful to the patristic tradition, he built a new hermeneutical foundation in order to respond to the challenges of his thirteenth-century world. Therefore, it is not surprising that Childs also says the following

⁴² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴³ Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

of Aquinas: «one could hardly wish for a more serious and brilliant model for Biblical Theology on which a new generation can test its mettle»⁴⁴.

Childs points out that in the commentary on the Book of Isaiah, Thomas repeatedly emphasised the profundity and obscurity of Scripture on account of it containing the mysteries of Christ and the Church. At the same time, the author observes the lack of figurative interpretation and even treats it as a hallmark of Aquinas's approach. As Charles Raith II has stressed, Childs's criticism of Aquinas concerns the fact that he «“blurs the particular concerns of the biblical author”» and that he «“blurs or even conceals” the theological role of the Old Testament in distinction from the New Testament as its “goal”»⁴⁵.

In his discussion of Thomas's method of interpretation, Childs recognises that through his reliance upon *ad litteram* interpretation and his meticulous structural analysis of each chapter of Isaiah, Aquinas was able to successfully demonstrate the coherence of the whole and the logical connections between the different parts and reasonings; he also notes that the use of «Aristotelian categories such as causality» enabled Aquinas to achieve great precision. For Thomas, the relationship between the Divine Author and the human author was not problematic due to the fact that it was inscribed in the scheme of instrumental causality⁴⁶. As a result, there was no tension between Divine Revelation and human works (scriptural forms), as would later be the case in the Enlightenment. At the same time, according to Childs, St. Thomas was careful about his terminology, although he appears to have attached greater weight to reading the sense through the lens of other biblical texts so as to see the entire context, discern the relationships and invite new ideas.

The Protestant exegete emphasises the importance of Thomas's distinction between *res* and *verbum*, which was the cornerstone of his hermeneutical

44 Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 42. It is also worth quoting the following passage: «It is unlikely that any modern biblical scholar would be tempted to imitate Thomas' appropriation of Aristotle. Yet the basic hermeneutical issue at stake turns on the fact that no modern biblical theologian can function without some other conceptual framework. Much of the modern search for the recovery of only internal biblical categories has been extremely naive. Rather the crucial hermeneutical issue turns on how well one can hear and understand the biblical witness even through the time-conditioned human categories which each interpreter has inherited or adopted. A study of Thomas is invaluable in seeing to what extent the author was able to adjust his philosophical perspective to the uniquely biblical message and in the process, cause his own alien categories actually to serve toward the illumination of the biblical text».

45 Charles Raith II, “Aquinas on Paul's Use of the Old Testament: The Implications of Participation”, *Logos* 18 (2015) 2: 66–87.

46 María Teresa Enriquez and Jorge Martín, Montoya. “Imperium and causality in Thomas Aquinas”, *Scientia et Fides* 1(2021): 329–355.

approach to the biblical text: his interpretation focused not so much on the “words” of the Book of Isaiah as it did on the “substance”, that is, the event itself. In his work as a commentator, Aquinas tried to proceed from the words to the events which they described, overcoming the dualism that had still existed in Augustine by adopting Aristotle’s methods.

Childs notes that there has been criticism of Thomas’s use of intertextuality, which may be perceived as mechanical and naïve, especially when Thomas moves from literal to figurative interpretation. Perhaps this criticism—as was the case with twentieth-century exegetes—stems from the historicism that has emerged as a trend in hermeneutics and only accepts connections between actions explicitly intended by the human author. For Thomas, however, the Bible is not an ordinary book of Middle-Eastern wisdom but a testimony to Revelation. Similarly, Childs critically addresses the practice—so common in St. Thomas’s biblical commentaries—of placing biblical quotations next to one another, often without any commentary, at the end of an explanation, which Childs calls an «ontological interpretation» (p. 160), forcing readers to reflect on the “nature” (substance) of events and opening them to a new understanding. A similar function is also served by the *notandum* in the structure of the commentaries. Childs thoroughly analyses Thomas’s *modus operandi* and observes that he «quite correctly distinguishes the genre of biblical books of the Old Testament» (p. 161). The author underlines a certain intent present in Aquinas’s commentaries to briefly recount the “essence” (e.g., of a prophecy) and the relationship between sense vision and sense in the prophet’s text before relating it to the passage that Thomas is commenting on. This is a complicated issue because Thomas—along with the Church Fathers—did not seem to distinguish between biblical and systematic theology, and yet he asked questions about the biblical author’s intention and about theological issues which were not expressly intended (as would be typical of systematic theology). For Thomas, however, as Levering notes, this distinction would mean artificially dividing one theological process into two⁴⁷.

Another issue addressed by the Protestant exegete is the fact that many meanings may be present in the literal sense of one passage. Contrary to modern suspicions, he argues, St. Thomas did not directly accept an understanding of literal sense as «that which commands communal assent». As Childs notes, «Thomas’s careful attention to the ontological force exerted by the subject matter itself (its *res*)» contradicts Eugene Rogers’s and Stephen Fowl’s claims (p. 164). Aquinas was also far from hermeneutical indeterminacy due to his

47 Matthew Levering, “Ecclesial Exegesis and Ecclesial Authority: Childs, Fowl, and Aquinas”, *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 69 (2005) 3: 407–467.

strong reliance on the ontological *res*, which allowed him considerable freedom in establishing the spiritual sense without pushing him into the realm of blurred meanings. Nevertheless, it has been noted—as emphasised by Y. Congar in the past—that disregarding biblical categories and using philosophical ones (such as the Aristotelian understanding of science or wisdom) in their place leads to difficulties in identifying the literal sense. Admittedly, however, this criticism loses its edge when one considers the emphasis on the *res* that Childs has observed and that Congar seems not to have fully grasped⁴⁸.

4.4. CHRISTOPHER SEITZ

References to Thomas Aquinas can also be found in Christopher R. Seitz's commentary on the Letter to the Colossians⁴⁹. Aquinas is mentioned nearly ten times in the book, and the author not only invokes his interpretations (with multiple direct quotations from Aquinas's biblical commentaries) but also points out the things that Thomas omitted in his explication of the biblical text. Seitz emphasises Aquinas's unique style that can be seen in his reading of St. Paul and notes the fact that he combines passages from the letter into larger wholes (e.g., Colossians 2:5–7) in order to establish a structure, which is an important hermeneutical element in scholastic Bible studies (here, the author directly refers to Aquinas's *divisio textus*). In addition, Seitz invokes Thomas's ideas in the context of reading «elements of the universe» (in a way that puts focus on secondary causes and blends primary and secondary ones) and in reference to the saints who lived before Christ. Here, he points to Aquinas's tendency to quote other passages and establish interpretational contexts.

What seems even more important is that Seitz emphasises the value of the tradition of reading Sacred Scripture that makes exegesis a communal project, following the ideas of St. Irenaeus, who spoke of the necessity of a rule of faith (his proposed metaphor being that of a mosaic, whereby knowledge of the whole is needed to understand the arrangement of the pieces). According to Seitz, this doctrine contains the clarifying principle that guides the exegete towards a coherent reading of Scripture as a unified witness, thus making for a comprehensive interpretation—a view that would later be challenged by the modern approach that advocates for a departure from the classical doctrine by

48 This was a general evaluation of the biblical exegesis of the entire scholastic tradition, cf. Yves Congar, *A History of Theology*, transl. and ed. by H. Guthrie (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 139.

49 Christopher R. Seitz, *Colossians: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014).

claiming that it distorts the meaning of Scripture. Postmodernism—the critique of critics—believes that the interpretational framework is inevitable, but looks for it in the tensions and divisions (e.g., of a social nature) present in the historical events recounted by the biblical author.

Seitz wonders whether the doctrine is a «moldering scrim of antique prejudice» or whether it amplifies the voice of Scripture. The living character of Sacred Scripture means that there is a history of its reception which is not limited to the last 200 years, and yet there appears to be a universal amnesia in that regard. A similar case is that of the historicity of the texts: biblical texts are hermeneutical due to the fact that “original meaning” may refer not only to what was there in the beginning but also to what or whom it has served, and all that with reference not to a single book but to the Bible as a whole.

While Seitz does not directly call upon Aquinas in his hermeneutical assumptions, these assumptions are surprisingly consistent with the latter’s ideas. The emphasis is not only on Aquinas’s interest in the message and content (which is why he omits many details concerning the dating of the letters, their authorship, etc.), but also—and here Seitz quotes Thomas to demonstrate his characteristic approach—on seeing the book in the context of the whole, interpreting it from the perspective of both Testaments and seeing the Church’s interpretation in the arrangement of the letters. Therefore, the history of interpretation has educational value and prevents one from making the mistake of transposing modern-day concepts, such as authorship, onto Paul’s time—as has been suggested by the historical and critical reading. This reduces the importance of the questions—often raised in a radical manner—concerning the differences between the letters, the locations in which they were written and the continuity or lack of it at the theological level, which have been used to argue against Paul’s authorship. Seitz shows the deficiencies of that approach and demonstrates the importance of an ecclesiological reading of all the letters: the «historical Paul» must not be juxtaposed with the «canonical Paul», one of the reasons being that he may have written his letters in the broader context of the administration of his apostolic office (which, in fact, is consistent with St. Thomas’s view). Therefore, reading a single letter in the context of the *corpus Paulinum* appears to be an entirely meaningful endeavour which, as Seitz expressly notes, was in fact practiced by such theologians as Thomas Aquinas. This approach is also reflected by the presence of a prologue (argument) that shows a complete interpretation—similar to the prologues written by Aquinas.

4.5. JOHN BARCLAY

On account of its references to Thomistic exegesis, John Barclay's book *Paul & the Gift* was discussed during a symposium that produced the papers which were later collected in one of the volumes of "Nova et Vetera"⁵⁰. Barclay himself addressed the interpretations and observations in a text which, in a way, offers a record of convergences and divergences that can be helpful in looking at the conceptual framework and at the further paths of convergence of traditions of interpretation.

Barclay recognises the value of Thomas's contextual reading of Paul, similar in his view to that which Martin Luther offered by following this type of reading instead of a "timeless" or universalised one⁵¹. Despite attempts to separate Thomas from the context of his time, there is a time-bound element in his metaphysics that can no longer be maintained today. The key thing, however, is Thomas's effort to inscribe Paul's theology, written «in and for the Gentile mission», into the Aristotelian framework and to include both creation and salvation in that framework. This is the first of the areas in which Barclay recognises Aquinas's exegetical merits. The author notes that the Doctor Angelicus introduced an integrative framework for theology—from the description of original justice to the salvation accomplished by Christ—and thus focused his attention on the same issues as Paul. Nonetheless, he criticises Aquinas for the fact that by doing so, he expanded the original idea in which there had been no pre-fall human being but only the notions of the fall and of being saved. By integrating Paul, Thomas reduced the tensions or even dualisms between nature and grace and between old and new life that had still existed in the Apostle's writings, thus diluting the concepts of discontinuity, change and reversal. According to Barclay, Thomas seems to have been unaware of the fact that Paul had conducted social experiments in the communities, reversing the logic of the wisdom of the world and playing with antitheses. Similar charges were raised at one point by O. H. Pesch, who spoke of making Paul a «professor of theology»⁵². Moreover, Barclay notes that for Paul, the notion of nature had a more cultural connotation (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 11) and was not a coherent concept such as that used by Thomas.

50 M. Dauphinais, *Love as the Law of the Gift: Reading Paul with John Barclay and Aquinas*, "Nova et Vetera", English Edition 17 (2019) 1, 149–181; David V. Meconi, "The Ultimate Gift: The Transformative Indwelling of Christ and the Christian", *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 17 (2019) 1: 197–213.

51 John M. G. Barclay, "A Thomist Reading of Paul? Response and Reflections", *Nova et Vetera* 17 (2019) 1: 235–244.

52 Otto-Herman Pesch, "Paul as Professor of Theology: The Image of the Apostle in St. Thomas's Theology", *The Thomist* 38 (1974) 1: 584–605.

Despite the above, Barclay believes that Thomas was right to read Paul as someone who had recognised the cosmic order of justice introduced by grace and the transition from incongruity to congruity. As he points out, Thomas's concordance with Calvin concerns his views of sanctifying grace as *gratia gratum faciens*, of final judgment and of the relationship between old and new law. Among the differences, he notes the tendency to read God's righteousness in terms of distributive justice rather than His saving power to right what is wrong, which clashes with Thomas's gentle vision of the operation of God's wisdom in time because Christ comes with a breakthrough by asserting that grace comes to those who are not worthy of it. Here, it appears that by reading the Bible as a "whole", Thomas aims for a comprehensive account rather than concordism; what he does not do is delight over a single passage. What is at stake is not an increase in grace, either, as that would lead to a detachment from a previous life, but a one-time gift: Christ as the one who puts aside the desire to "receive grace upon grace". In general, Barclay argues against a "linear" and "stable" perception of grace and in favour of seeing it as a set of interruptions, a constant renewal in grace.

If there is order in the world, it stems from mercy—as evidenced by the irrational hope for grace that permeates the tragic history of the world. Seeing a gift as something ordered seems to move away from Paul's thinking, which relies on contrasts. As the author admits, his view sometimes «resonates at point with the Thomistic tradition» (p. 241), referring to the view of Divine and human action (as non-conflicting), of God's presence in every human act and of transformation as something integral to salvation rather than added to it. Barclay is not certain whether the Aristotelian-Thomistic anthropology can properly convey Paul's paradoxical language or whether a better relational ontology is needed for Pauline theology.

While Barclay criticises Aquinas's language for speaking of the «infusion of grace» as if it were a substance, this stems from a misunderstanding that is common in Protestant publications, since Thomas treats grace as a *habitus/motus* rather than a substance⁵³. The newness of life that comes with grace is then an eccentric existence for Barclay because it shows who really guides the life of a Christian. Nonetheless, the notion of "life" as a principle of motion in Thomas conveys the exact same idea.

53 Bernhard Blankenhorn, "Double Agency in St. Paul and in St. Thomas Aquinas", *Angelicum* 91 (2014) 1: 127–48.

Barclay notes that Thomas interpreted “flesh” in terms of a physical body, thus moving away from Paul’s understanding of “flesh” as the manner of operation of an entire human person rather than a “part” of that person. Surprisingly, Thomistic ideas concerning “relations” (a characteristic category in Paul’s anthropology) or participation in the life of Christ for a man renewed in grace, although not explicitly invoked by Barclay, are central to his theology. For Thomas, being in Christ is not a metaphysical category, a replacement of one’s nature, but rather a reinforcement and relational redefinition of that nature, to use Barclay’s terms.

4.6. N. T. WRIGHT

Another exegete who implicitly refers to Aquinas’s views is N. T. Wright, especially in his book *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*⁵⁴. While he does not directly cite Aquinas’s texts, his discussion of habits and the virtuous circle shows that Aristotle’s theory of virtue is not the proper goal in Christianity and that it is the *telos* discovered in the Biblical vision that gives meaning to the Aristotelian perspective on virtue (in that respect, he distinguishes three stages: aiming at a worthy goal, figuring out the steps to reach it and internalising those steps as second nature). The objective is to remain faithful not to who we are now but to who Jesus wants us to become, and the measure of virtue is not its effect but the meta-answer to the question of what virtues are in the first place. This approach is clearly close to Aquinas, who was not a simple recipient of Aristotle’s thought; here, virtue is construed on the basis of the teaching of St. Augustine and of his perception of *virtus*. At the same time, pointing to Scripture as the point of reference for virtue means recognising that metaphysics and the Bible are integrated in Thomas’s philosophy.

Wright’s attempt to understand why it is important to uphold moral behaviour and character brings him to face the same fundamental soteriological issues as those which Aquinas dealt with: the motivation is not the fear of hell but the promise of becoming fully oneself in Christ. The goal is to discern the biblical framework that points to the redemption of all creation, to embrace transformation instead of sanctioning the status quo. Our habits and practices anticipate this ultimate goal of creation and contribute to its attainment. The convergences with Aquinas’s theology are striking, though tacit.

54 Nicholas T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

V. CONCLUSIONS

If the central idea of Biblical Thomism is the “integration”⁵⁵ of tradition and speculation, of the Bible and metaphysics, then this integration is also taking place in relation to the Protestant tradition. As a matter of fact, this can be noticed in many publications that present the ecumenical efforts towards a shared reflection on the biblical text that come from the Protestant and Thomistic theologies. In the publications analysed above, written by theologians who represent different currents of contemporary Protestantism, one may observe various models of interaction with Aquinas: inspiration, inclusion of direct quotations reflecting Aquinas’s views on a given passage, resonance (convergence of ideas), or dispute. Protestant exegesis emphasises the value of exegetic reliance on the literal sense and the merits of Thomas’s hermeneutic that reads Scripture as a whole. While Aquinas’s lack of familiarity with the original text is held as a weakness, the general correctness of his interpretations (which can be credited to his perspective of salvation history) is also underlined.

For many contemporary Protestant exegetes, Thomas’s exegesis is valuable but requires a stricter theological focus so as to offset the “Aristotelisation” of the scriptural text. The categories that he uses are not purely biblical—for example, wisdom is interpreted in Aristotelian terms. Nonetheless, this does not have to be a drawback; instead, it may mean a conviction of the value of the *res* as a credible message that takes into account the *scientia*. The Bible remains in dialogue with culture; it has not been cut out of the latter and frozen like an exhibit (or like an organ in an autopsy). What Thomas finds important is to abandon the reductionism that reveals the fullness of the mystery in too narrow terms.

A potential problem in interpreting Aquinas is the fact that he tends to be perceived through the lens of later theological disputes and that these disputes are transposed onto (or expected to be addressed in) his practice of biblical commentary. And yet, it is that practice that offers an opportunity to discover Thomas as a biblical scholar immersed in the flow of the Word of God and not merely as the author of scholastic syntheses⁵⁶.

55 Piotr Roszak, “Text, Method, or Goal? On What Really Matters in Biblical Thomism”, *Religions* 14 (2023) 1, 3.

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Piotr Roszak
Facultad de Teología
Nicolaus Copernicus University
C/ Gagarina, 37
87100 Toruń (Polonia)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2723-2667>