
LANGUAGE, METAPHYSICS AND THE BIBLE

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF

AQUINAS'S EXEGESIS OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

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Abstract

For many years, studies dedicated to Aquinas and his philosophy have concerned its potential for dialogue with postmodern thinking. In this new intellectual milieu, Aquinas' philosophy retains a certain vitality and he has been presented both as a supporter and opponent of cultivating theology in a postmodern context. This significant presence of Thomas in the writings of contemporary philosophers of Hermeneutics has been confirmed in the project of Oliver-Thomas Venard OP. The goal of this article is to conduct an analysis of the philosophical background of Aquinas' reading of the Bible, especially his theory of biblical senses (together with its reception in actual Hermeneutics). Following this analysis, we try to answer the question regarding the contribution of Thomism to contemporary thought. In this sense, Thomism is not a static entity, but a dynamic intellectual idea.

Keywords: medieval, exegesis, postmodernity, literal, sense

1. Two approaches in Ethics

Perhaps contrary to all expectations, Thomas Aquinas's philosophical 'citizenship' remains unquestioned in the postmodern intellectual world, with it being neither revoked nor marginalized in contemporary philosophical literature. Indeed, according to Professor Alarcon's research, the opposite seems to be true as there has been spectacular growth in Thomistic scholarship since the end of the twentieth century [1]. This new 'renaissance' presents Aquinas in a manner which is perhaps paradigmatic for our culture. He is not primarily seen as a bulwark of Orthodoxy and the best representative of classical theism but rather as an interlocutor for all those who wish to engage with the questions raised by our contemporary culture [2]. In some cases, he is even regarded as a patron of postmodernism, as in the Radical Orthodoxy movement, for example, or at least he seems to be a distant precursor of this school of thought [3, 4]. Such an attempt to find an ally in Aquinas for one's own particular project is an affirmation, albeit indirectly, that his thought is not regarded as a mere relic of

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the past but that, on the contrary, he offers a comprehensive view of the Christian meaning of existence and a variety of possible interpretations.

This contemporary interest in Aquinas has arisen in particular cultural circumstances which Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue* [5], compares to the situation of the world after the explosion of an atomic bomb. The consequence of such an intellectual ‘explosion’ is an irregular and divided world in which particular fields of knowledge are no longer interconnected and, as a result, are practiced in isolation from one another. This contemporary interest offers at the same time a diagnosis of post-secular thought which tentatively admits that the zenith of secularizing atheism and liberalism (the explosion of the bomb, as it were) is over and that humanity cannot be fully understood without its religious context, however one may care to define religion. Such a view was initiated by F. Rosenzweig and today includes thinkers such as J. Habermas and Ch. Taylor, who are attempting to integrate (albeit in different manners) a sound secularism while religion leads us to modern attempts at social integration, such as in Bielik-Robson.

As a result, however, of secularist theories and the rise of scientism, language seems to have lost its analogical character. It is this loss which makes any attempt to find a new, unificatory discourse extremely difficult, if not impossible. This is because it either conflates secularism with religion (univocal) or it pulls them apart into an intrinsic conflict (equivocal). Returning to MacIntyre’s metaphor of the ruin the modern world, some, such as John Milbank, are trying to restore the power of pre-modern religious texts such as the Bible by taking into consideration the Christian humanism of figures such as Augustine or the Venerable Bede. From another side, O.-T. Venard’s analyses [6] are of particular significance in this respect as he has sought to restore Aquinas’s position in a poststructuralist discourse. Some unjustly classify his research as ‘postmodern Thomism’ but Venard’s project is an attempt to overcome the immanentist positions of structural linguistics by referring to Aquinas’s reference attitude. In this manner, Venard’s research draws attention to the significance of Aquinas’s hermeneutics and to the wide range of tools of linguistic expression.

Although there have been numerous studies made of Aquinas’s hermeneutics, a presentation of the philosophical foundations of his biblical interpretation within the context of the contemporary achievements of Hermeneutics has been lacking to date. This article, indebted to Venard’s suggestion of paying closer attention to the poetics of Aquinas’s language, is an attempt to delineate the basic philosophical principles of Thomas’s biblical interpretation.

In the first part of this contribution I will describe the characteristic features of Venard’s project. Subsequently I will proceed to outline the ontology of Hermeneutics underlying Thomas’s biblical interpretation. In this way, and by developing Venard’s line of argumentation to some extent, I wish to show how the philosophical foundations of Aquinas’s exegesis might be an inspiring source for the contemporary debate on the nature of religious language and

Hermeneutics. There is a third option which lies between uncritical acceptance of the pre-modern hermeneutics and its refusal of historical-critical methods: this is integration into a modern discourse. In this light we may comment as to where the postmodern interaction with Thomism results in danger or where it becomes shallow and where a fruitful dialogue may result.

2. The contemporary context - the postmodern 'stretching' of Aquinas's thought

It appears that the strategies of the postmodern reading of Aquinas discussed in general are primarily based on 'extending' or 'stretching' Aquinas's thoughts, often with strange effects [7]. Such a 'stretched' form of Thomism is less Thomistic, indeed perhaps not Thomistic at all, insofar as key elements of Thomistic doctrine are set aside. Like the house where the walls have been rearranged so that it looks the same only from the outside, it is difficult to imagine Aquinas's thought without a strong concept of truth and fundamental metaphysical premises concerning the priority of being. Nevertheless, the postmodern movement has already reached the second stage and is no longer interested in blurring everything into unrelated elements and deconstructing the grand narratives. Instead it has withdrawn from this form of analysis in favour of what has been repeated throughout the ages in, for example, negative theology.

What seems to be of fundamental importance for postmodern hermeneutics is a departure from the modern ontological project of for the pursuit of the mechanistic and changeable structures which condition cognition yet which remain largely invisible. In fact, postmodernism assumes a programmatic disenchantment of modernity which rests on the disjunction of language from reality. It stands in stark contrast to the Thomistic thesis about the origins of our thinking and our words in reality, in fact being closer to Ockham's view that language is different from the ontological order [8]. As a result, the postmodern path indicated by Nietzsche will be a never-ending, purely linguistic, partial and imperfect tuning into the truth which is ultimately impossible to attain.

In modern Hermeneutics there are three methods of approaching a text which are characteristic of different schools of textual interpretation. In the first, research focuses on what is 'behind' the text, a pre-assumption or a context which enables a proper interpretation to be conducted. This was followed by critical-historical exegesis, tracing the invisible assumptions of the commented text, together with the origin and sense intended by the author. In another, however, the attention is focused on the text itself and its structure, an approach typical of structuralism but also present in Thomas's interpretation, although his reflections refer mostly to the rhetorical principles inherited from Aristotle and Christian antiquity. As Herwi Rikhof points out: "Thomas' commentary... is 'exegetical' in the modern sense. That is to say he explains the structure of the texts, he gives an outline of the argument, he elucidates the meaning of terms, and gives possible alternative readings." [9]

Yet this approach has been left by the wayside and many researchers emphasize nowadays the necessity of including the position of the reader towards the text they encounter (post-structuralism). Interpretation always takes place in a certain hermeneutic environment and the text is assimilated in a given place and time so that the traces of earlier readings, as Lubac observed, constitute the 'soil' from which the ear of grain grows [10, 11].

Remaining in one of those circles impoverishes the text and does not produce a fruitful reading. Aquinas offers the theory of biblical senses which protects the interpreter from stopping half-way and leads from the literal sense to the discovery of spiritual senses. Thomas frequently reflected on the multiplicity of biblical senses and their establishment, together with the criteria of truth. In a text crucial for his hermeneutics, he explained the splitting of the biblical senses, starting with the literal one (*Quodlibet* VII, q. 6 a. 1 ad 1). This is not the multiplicity of explanations of one sense but a kind of 'chain reaction' in the exegetic procedure, which splits the levels of meaning in the biblical text. It is similar to some physical phenomena, such as when a light beam splits into several colourful ones when it passes through a prism. The process of understanding is built on the basis of several stages which are not independent of one another.

3. Oliver-Thomas Venard - the metaphysical power of language

Before we discuss these questions thoroughly, let us focus on Thomas's attention to religious language [12]. Some even refer to it as the 'radical intellectual asceticism' of Aquinas, which is characterized by its precision and rigor. It was taken into consideration by twentieth century authors who regarded Aquinas as a source of inspiration and included it in their reflections, although they did not accept all the details of his output (Gadamer, Ricoeur). Particularly significant in this sense is the project of the French Dominican, Oliver-Thomas Venard.

His trilogy, described by some as "poetic Thomism" [13], is devoted to the role of metaphor in investigating truth and its function in *sacra doctrina* as well as the aesthetics of Aquinas [14]. The term 'poetic Thomism', coined by John Milbank, indicates the direction of Venard's project. Seeing the confluence between the subjective austerity of modernism and the formal laconism of Aquinas, Venard constructs the option of 'alternative modernity', where a metaphysics dependent on linguistic expression is appreciated (hence the eponymous 'poetic quality') [15]. Venard insists that Ontology and Hermeneutics are inseparable and, since being always discloses itself enigmatically, a fundamental task at hand is the care for language. Language requires metaphysical speculation, which is a part of phenomenology as man can comprehend the essence of things which appear. Thus Hermeneutics demands the consideration of the ontological, phenomenological and semiotic character of the thing. It opposes the nihilistic interpretation of the 'linguistic turn' and its interpretation which highlights the role of synaesthesia.

Venard discovers the confirmation of his intuition in the rhetorical strategy of Aquinas when introduced to literary analysis: the proper choice of words in every utterance matches and reinforces logical arguments. It is indicated by the frequent mention of appropriateness or *convenientia* as an argument [16]. Moreover, the laconism of Aquinas's expression, linked with his emphasis on the simplicity of God, seems to be an option which encourages scholars not to concentrate on words but on reality itself and the real signs of God.

The hermeneutic context is based on "triple isomorphism in Aquinas between the composition of essence and existence in (relatively) simple substances, the logical-grammatical unity of *signification* and *supposition* in predication, and a rhetorical style which constantly minimizes our inevitable prolixity of phrase in order to point to the substantive unity of what we must necessarily separate out in thought" [15, p. 154]. Undoubtedly, Venard transgresses another neo-Thomistic and modern paradigm which interpreted Thomas's intentions associated with Theology as being an exact and rigorous science. Reflecting on language (especially in *La langue de l'ineffable. Essai sur le fondement théologique de la métaphysique* [17], a volume of essays on the theological foundation of Metaphysics) Venard focuses on the primacy of discourse in the analogical naming of God. Our ability to give names to God invokes some kind of 'ontosemiology' which presents the role of the 'book of nature' in the interpretation of the Bible. God's names are available both through Revelation and by means of natural consideration. Nature discloses things which are present in the Bible but there is a reciprocal action: thanks to the Bible, these things might be understood better in the final meaning. The formulation of analogical names for God assumes that God constantly 'speaks,' also through the natural world, which is, however, a limited expression of His inexhaustible being [18]. What was lost in the Garden of Eden is the ability to answer God's Revelation and therefore Incarnation restores this ability in human language, while the Bible is the origin of every human language, (although it is not written with human language), being a collective work without an author, which makes it different from the Quran [10, p. 40]. The Bible is the book made *vellum*, which hermeneutic *re-velatio* in turn makes comprehensible. In this way, Venard reaches the point of describing the relation between the Bible and Christ, understanding it as 'reverse causality' where a certain simultaneousness and interaction exist, but also as the continuation of the mystery of Incarnation where Logos becomes flesh. The Incarnation of Jesus in the New Testament is associated simultaneously with a human answer [19].

We could also observe that in his project Venard notices 'language' as an opportunity for mediation between the phenomenological and the metaphysical [20]. Like Gadamer, Venard relies, albeit to a greater extent, on the reading of the doctrine on the inner word, where he sees a characteristic attempt of the juxtaposition of the Aristotelian category of *species* with the Augustinian *verbum*: between *species* and an external thing *verbum mentis* appears, which allows a thing to be comprehended when it is already absent. The question arises

as to why precisely Thomas needs this category. Venard's answer demonstrates that *verbum mentis*, being an active reflective grasp of a passive-receptive species, introduces a certain inventive and self-expressive character. In this way, relying on Thomas's statement concerning a divine act of creation as the relation with *novitas essendi* [S.Th. I, q.45, a.2, ad 3; De Pot., q. 3, a. 3, ad 6], Venard associates the notion of *verbum mentis* with human creativity. Understanding referred to a divine act of creation and thinking alone having a linguistic structure are both creative events and Venard interprets the link between the inner and outer word in an analogy to the Incarnation and not to the Trinitarian *processio* in which the Person of Verbum and Holy Spirit is constituted, but the eternal procession of the Son from the Father, meaning the same nature.

4. The philosophical foundations of Aquinas's biblical hermeneutics

Having briefly presented the main line of Venard's project, it is worth recalling here that, for Aquinas, the understanding of *littera* encompasses both the analysis of what is usually defined as the first meaning (words, *littera*) and also *sensus*, which builds *sententia* (Hugo of Saint Victor). Therefore, Thomas's reflection on the word of God is not an analysis of a dead word, a post mortem examination, to use the famous comparison of Paul Ricoeur's, but Aquinas is aware of the context of a living community which receives the message of God. It is visible that the encounter of Thomas's biblical exegesis with twentieth century hermeneutics generates numerous similarities and differences. The return to 'canonical exegesis', initiated by the *Verbum Domini* of Benedict XVI, is the appreciation of the value of Thomas's proposal (although in some cases unconsciously). The points below indicate the essential hermeneutic heritage of Aquinas, which is present in contemporary research on the Bible and demonstrates how far modern Hermeneutics is in line (although not identical) with the principles of Thomas's philosophy.

4.1. Exegetic Ontology - the primacy of the 'event' over the text

In contrast to the postmodern and deconstructivist approach (visible in Derrida's works) biblical exegesis of Aquinas is aware of the primacy of *res* over *anuntiabile*, namely the event of Revelation over the text which transmits this event (*traditio*). In Thomas's texts it is possible to observe the beginnings of the conviction that Sacred Scripture is the *testimonium* of Revelation, rather than a simple identification of both terms. This conviction is visible in Thomas's understanding of the spiritual sense of Scripture: God speaks not only with His words but also through the events which happen in history and are rendered literally. As a consequence, we might say that the spiritual sense is the meaning of the literal sense [21]. It results from the logic of the central truth of Christianity – the Incarnation of Logos: historical (literal) understanding, like the humanity of Christ, is legitimate but historical reason is not able to carry the

weight of the mystery of divinity. It is not only the question that something happened but that particular transcendental events took place.

Everything points to the beginnings of what we call today ‘sacramental ontology’; the signs of God are not simply words but things designed by those words [22]. This sensibility of Aquinas is visible in his usual brevity in the manner of expression which indicates that we should not concentrate solely on words. Although sacramentality seems to be perceived as a postmodern contribution to modern theology, it undoubtedly results from the old patristic tradition. It suffices to recall here the famous statement of St. Thomas that the point in the act of faith is not to concentrate on words but on the reality signified by them. In the same sense, a dogma transmits more than the content and is mystagogic in its essence. To use the metaphor of Father Jacek Salij OP, it might be compared with a windowpane through which we look at reality and thus we cannot concentrate only on the windowpane but have to reach further.

The relationship between words and things should not be viewed in terms of dialectic categories which are used in modern thinking but more as a derivative of the Christological grammar *communication idiomatum*. This old theological rule permits one to ascribe his human and divine attributes to his other nature because of the unity of Christ’s person. This observation of Venard’s, which interprets the relationship between a written word (meaning) and an event in this way, makes us aware of Thomas’s thinking and the foundations of his hermeneutics. The text refers to history, the past event in the literal sense, and to the future event in the anagogic sense, rejoicing in the excess of meaning. This is the feature of the theology of Revelation and, to a certain extent, the essence of theology as *sacra doctrina* of Aquinas.

Milbank, when commenting on the work of Venard, focuses on a certain medieval tendency associated with developing writing techniques, the practice of silent, individual commentary, division into chapters and verses, which led to a “spatialising’ approach to the textual page, such that it came to be seen more in terms of a closed rational unity, denying the priority of the event” [15, p. 184]. Although Aquinas remains rooted in tradition, his understanding of *lectio* turns against this textual one-dimensional understanding of the Bible. For Thomas, the Bible is something more than just a book; it is history with its participatory character.

4.2. Exegetic Epistemology - the primacy of *sensus* over *littera*

In his commentary to the Gospel of St. Matthew, Thomas observes that the task of the interpreter is not to get to the outer level of the text (*superficie tenus litteram* [S.Th., I, q. 68, a. 3c]) but to discover the sense of the given words. The literal sense does not depend on the sound of words but on their message. Thus the ‘content’ of a metaphor is not a literal sense but its message. In the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Job, commented *ad litteram*, Thomas emphasized that “the literal sense is what is first intended by the words whether properly speaking or figuratively” (Job 1). In this context, it

is worth recalling that ‘intend’ (*intenditur*) does not have a subjective meaning but rather an objective one – as indicated by the words, and not by the author’s hidden motivations.

In this sentence we discover Thomas’s perspective of the ‘metaphysics of writing’, the significance of which he emphasized in the *Summa* in the context of why Christ did not leave any written works and only preached [23]. Among the arguments which Thomas cites, there is an indication of the effectiveness of oral teaching which reaches the hearts of the listeners (thus outstanding teachers, such as Socrates, did not leave any written works) and also some order of teaching based on the fact that Christ did not teach alone but through the Apostles, engaging them in the work of the transmission of truth. This last argument should be interpreted even further, referring to Thomas’s understanding of God’s action in the world, which includes the dignity of secondary causes (Thomas speaks of the grace of being a cause) [*S. Th.*, I, q.22, a.3c]. Nevertheless, the third argument of Thomas is very interesting as it explains that it took place “on account of the excellence of Christ’s doctrine, which cannot be expressed in writing; according to John 21.25: ‘There are also many other things which Jesus did: which, if they were written everyone, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written’. Which Augustine explains by saying: ‘We are not to believe that in respect of space the world could not contain them . . . but that by the capacity of the readers they could not be comprehended’. And if Christ had committed His doctrine to writing, men would have had no deeper thought of His doctrine than that which appears on the surface of the writing.” (“Secundo, propter excellentiam doctrinae Christi, quae litteris comprehendi non potest, secundum illud Ioan. ult., sunt et alia multa quae fecit Iesus, quae si scribantur per singula, nec ipsum arbitror mundum capere eos qui scribendi sunt libros. Quos, sicut Augustinus dicit, non spatio locorum credendum est mundum capere non posse, sed capacitate legentium comprehendi non posse. Si autem Christus scripto suam doctrinam mandasset, nihil altius de eius doctrina homines existimarent quam quod Scriptura continere.” [*S. Th.* III, 42, 4c])

In this sense, the exegetic epistemology of Aquinas presents a *meta*-perspective focusing the attention of the reader on the message and the sense of Scripture which should not be corrupted or distorted as a result of false interpretations, and which decides the sense of the apostolic mission [*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 4 cap. 28 n. 1]. Therefore, when speaking about *sensus Scripturae*, Aquinas warns against superficiality and adhering to one’s visions. It is evident that the search for the meaning of a biblical text is far from arbitrary but instead based on certain procedures that are watched over by Aquinas. Quotations from the Fathers of the Church only reinforce this certainty that it is not the pursuit of originality but rather inquisitiveness which leads us to embrace the full meaning of Scripture. Medieval exegesis does not like one-dimensionality or reductionism (‘it is nothing more than ...’), but it focuses on seeing all relevant aspects. In this symphony of biblical senses not all are of equal importance: the melodic line, to stick to this metaphor, sets the literal sense.

4.3. *Language without idols - the metaphysical lining to Aquinas's biblical hermeneutics*

An antidote to postmodern attempts to ensure the domination of language over reality, which also finds its expression in the specific approach to the interpretation of the Bible in some form of pan-Biblicism, is the project of Matthew Levering. In his *Scripture and Metaphysics*, Levering stresses the purifying function of Metaphysics in biblical exegesis [24]. It is based on rejecting the prejudices which weigh heavily on the reading of the text due to the pedantry of analyses and differences so that the interpretative perspective is not reduced to a narrow reading. In the context of the Christian concept of Revelation, which is not limited to the pre-conceptual approach but indicates a positive aspect of the content which is prone to notional formulations (although always imperfect) [25], Aquinas's attitude, based on using metaphysical terms in his commentaries, is fully understandable. With Revelation we not only receive signs but, above all, their supernatural meaning. In the commentary to a passage from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, he analyses the difference between teachings based on the wisdom of the word and teaching in the wisdom of the word: "It is one thing to teach in eloquent wisdom, however you take it, and another to use it to teach eloquent wisdom in teaching. a person teaches in eloquent wisdom, when he takes the eloquent wisdom, as the main source of his doctrine, so that he admits only those things which contain eloquent wisdom and rejects the others which do not have eloquent wisdom: and this is destructive of the faith." (1 Corinthians 1.3)

It signifies the disagreement with an idolatrous approach to words and an admiration of them which obscures the sense. Levering perceives the strength of Aquinas's exegesis in the presence of metaphysics which protects against any superficiality of approach and a subtle notional idolatry which focuses on the words alone. What is fundamental is the discovery of the "final causes" [26], the ultimate reference of the entire reality. The aim is not to 'subordinate' the discourse but for there to be an awareness of the limitations of language and how the *verbum* is created in man.

The essential element of Aquinas's exegesis is this metaphysical turn, based on the rejection of the fascination with words and a concentration on *res*, knowing the real world, which is more than just an idea [27]. In this way, the metaphysics present in Aquinas's biblical commentaries encourages one to go further so that the word does not become the 'idol' but the 'icon,' to use Marion's famous distinction. Metaphysics denotes opening to a world full of meanings, constituting, in a sense, the framework of 'pre-understanding' which modern hermeneutics deals with. Thanks to this, the Word of God resonates with its authentic tone [28].

5. Conclusions - towards a fertile Thomism?

With this description of the biblical exegesis of Aquinas and how it challenges post-structural hermeneutics, we may return to the question of the actual status of Thomism in a postmodern context.

Among many postmodern trends, the common denominator is the conviction that the search for universal truth is a sign of violence. Reason is unable to achieve stability in a sense of history which is fragmented and always 'in the context' of place or time while radical contingency does not allow the acquisition of the necessities typical of the ideal of *scientia*. All these claims seem to strike at the fundamental theses of Thomism. Postmodernism, however, attempts to demonstrate Thomas's openness and extracts his thoughts which are not in dialectic opposition but rather form a peculiar symphony with the postmodern ideal. Postmodern thinkers, thanks to its apophatic threads, emphasize Thomas's awareness of the unattainability of *comprehendere* despite having the tools of analogy at his disposal. Although both Thomas and many postmodernists indicate the conditions of the act of cognition, he does not absolutize it at the expense of objectivity. According to Aquinas, reflection on truth is not yet knowledge, as this possesses a necessary character: "the consideration of truth is not science insofar as it is an object of volition, but according as it tends directly to its object". (*De virtutibus in communi*, qu. un., a. 7: "veri consideratio non est scientia in quantum est volita, sed secundum quod direct et tendit in obiectum.") Gregory Reichberg observes "how Aquinas's approach to theoretical knowing, at first sight so antithetical to postmodern concerns, does, in fact, create an opening through which those concerns may pass" [29].

MacIntyre's project is also classified by some scholars as a form of postmodern Thomism which bears the signs of the twentieth century pragmatism of Peirce, the post-Popperian philosophy of science and a particular approach to the relationship between Philosophy and Theology, reason and Revelation. From a stereotypical understanding of Aquinas, MacIntyre develops a fuller version in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* [30]. Thomas has been a 'victim' of the modern wave of abandoning classical philosophy, which found its ultimate expression in Hegel's philosophy which deprecated the past and glorified the future. In this version of postmodern Thomism, of particular interest are its reflections on universality and individuality, which in Thomas's case are infused with realism and insight [31]. As Juha-Pekka puts it: "If we take Aquinas seriously, he can offer us an alternative to the total demolition of structures by helping us understand why the structures edified by modernity are misconstrued. Then, instead of pulling down everything, we may be able to keep the viable structures while discarding the rotten ones. In this way we can turn his premodern thought into a postmodern critique of modernity, and make a fresh start with better insight." [32]

A similar observation was made by DiNoia at the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, when he suggested an interpretation of Thomas which would make his thought and philosophical impulses accessible to postmodern sensitivity. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to cultivate a specific ‘creative Thomism,’ which DiNoia has described in the following manner: “Can there be a Thomas after Thomism? Is there a post-Thomistic, or at least a post-neo-Thomistic Aquinas? I shall argue that there is a post-Thomistic Aquinas, an Aquinas unencumbered by the enormous weight of commentary, debate and systematization that has made his thought seem inaccessible to modern theologians and unusable for the theological work, an Aquinas who speaks with pristine clarity to a host of urgently postmodern theologians ... There is every reason to believe that Aquinas will have a significant and continuing role in these developments, particularly as *ressourcement* comes to terms with the advent of postmodernity.” [33, p. 512-513].

We have to note, however, one point about the character of Theology. Aquinas is a theologian who forged his views on the basis of dialogue with others. Practically, at least one-third of each question from the *Summa* is based on dialogue with those who had formed their arguments otherwise or had asked questions. He expressed himself in dialogue with Tradition, his opponents and those who sought answers. In this way, the Thomistic laboratory is constructed, as a place in which theology as *sacra doctrina* contributes to the constant harmonization of faith and reason.

From this essential dialogism of Thomas, or from ‘dragging’ his thought in the direction of postmodern hermeneutics, an ‘extended’ Thomism is born. The risk of a one-sided approach is hidden in such an attitude, as absolutizing the apophatic moment of his thought is inscribed in the cataphatic character of Revelation. However, if we refer Aquinas’s hermeneutical solutions to a modern project which is mostly reductionist, his approach may be seen as an antidote to the cognitive aporias of modern times. What is important to postmodern sensitivity, namely combatting the two ‘tyrannies’ of the modern age – the supreme being and the superego – finds in Thomas an ally. His understanding of God as something which is not a supreme reality but rather which is distinguished from the world in a non-competitive manner, opens the way to the correct understanding of transcendence. At the same time, the profound theology of creation is “completely non-invasive, non-disruptive, peaceful, since there is, literally, nothing that opposes or resist him” [34]. This may explain why the project of Thomas’s philosophy, in which he dismantles the mythological understanding of God as *ens summum*, is in harmony with the aspirations of many modern philosophers [35]. If it is a deconstruction, it is only a positive one. However, forcing Aquinas’s thought into postmodern discourse appears to be a procedure for ‘extending’ Thomas in which his true nature is lost. A better solution would be to let Thomas inspire us.

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