Pro Pastor

A JOURNAL OF GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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THOMAS AQUINAS:

A Helpful Guide for Protestants?


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Editor's Introduction

We are excited to announce the launch of *Pro Pastor: A Journal of Grace Bible Theological Seminary*. This journal aims to communicate deep theology in plain language. We want to make the study of God accessible to the pulpit and the pew. The goal of *Pro Pastor* is to bring high-level doctrine down from the ivory towers of academia and put it in the hands of pastors, missionaries, and even laypeople. This project is not just another run-of-the-mill academic journal. Rather than wearing biblical scholarship on our sleeve, we seek to use it to feed the flock of God.

Our inaugural issue addresses a contemporary question that is raging, regrettably, among evangelicals: Is Thomas Aquinas a helpful guide for Protestants? Even hearing such a question might be surprising to those in the spiritual lineage of Calvin, Farel, Beza, and Knox. Many in such ranks have come to regard Thomas as the chief theologian of the Roman Catholic Church. But the question is not a new one. Several decades ago, a prominent evangelical scholar argued that Thomas Aquinas was really a Protestant at heart, albeit in Catholic clothing.[1] In more recent days, a notable Baptist scholar has argued that evangelicals should agree with 88% of Thomas's most famous work, the *Summa Theologiae*.[2] But are such claims true? If Aquinas had lived long enough, would he have stood alongside the Protestant Reformers?

James R. White opens this issue by exploring what the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* really entails. In a second article, White seeks to answer the vexing question of whether Aquinas himself held to such a conviction. The present writer examines the interaction of Paul with the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:16–34 to determine whether Thomas's quest for collaboration with Aristotle was a healthy project. Jeffrey D. Johnson looks at the impact of Aristotle's teacher, Plato, on the history of Christian thought. Finally, Owen Strachan tackles the dilemma of whether it is historically or theologically legitimate to divorce Thomas's doctrine of God from his doctrine of salvation. A summary chart closes out this issue, providing a visual contrast between the doctrinal system of Aquinas and that of Protestant evangelicals.

The current controversy surrounding Aquinas is not a highbrow issue only for scholars in seminaries. Hang with us as we try to make the case that these matters strike at the very heart of how we use Scripture, how we do theology, and how we look at doctrines in relation to one another. We present our case here not primarily for the academy but for pastors and elders, preachers and Christian plowboys—those laboring hard on the front lines of ministry. May the Lord use these modest efforts to lift high the name of Jesus Christ in a day of spiritual confusion.

JEFF MOORE
Editor

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1 John H. Gerstner, "Aquinas Was a Protestant," *Tabletalk* (May 1994), 13–15, 52.
2 Matthew Barrett, "What Is Eternal Generation? (and Interview)," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 33.1 (2022): 192.

What Is *Sola Scriptura*?

by James R. White

INTRODUCTION

In a subsequent article, I will attempt to answer the question: Did Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) believe and practice *sola scriptura*? But we must begin by analyzing more foundational concepts that are at the center of current controversies among Reformed writers and theologians. Only after discussing these preliminary issues can we look at Thomas's context, examine his own statements, and come to some kind of a fair conclusion on the matter.

A word needs to be said as to why the question of Thomas's views on Scripture would even interest readers today. Thomas died almost 750 years ago. Most of us who have been working in the field of Reformed theology and apologetics for decades have only rarely had reason to refer to his works, mainly when the beloved R. C. Sproul forced us to do so. So why should we invest time to consider this topic now?

The answer is found in the reality that Thomism, as a movement, waxes and wanes, both within its native environment of Roman Catholicism, as well as in aspects of Protestant scholasticism. We are currently in a "waxing" moment, with various evangelical seminaries and ministries promoting the importance of Thomistic metaphysics and ethics once again. This situation necessitates a revisiting of basic issues related to Thomas's voluminous writings and the equally voluminous literature interpreting those writings. Our specific inquiry relates to the sources of Thomas's theology and whether or not Scripture can be viewed as the "norming norm" (*norma normata*) in his theological method. Such a question is highly relevant in our current context.

To fulfill our quest of laying an initial foundation, first, we must consider proper historical method so that our inquiries will be truthful and accurate. Second, we need to wrestle with a definition of a phrase that, until recently, we thought Protestants had pretty well understood—*sola scriptura* ("Scripture alone"). As often happens, controversy refines and exposes hazy assumptions, and that is the case here. What does *sola scriptura* actually mean, and can we establish a clear and useful definition in our day?

HONORING THE PAST TRUTHFULLY

We are rarely challenged to think deeply about *how* we consider history. It's just the past, right? We just cite facts and figures, and it is pretty cut and dried, isn't it? But the fact that history is so often twisted and abused should show us the danger of simplistic approaches to the topic. This reality is true in Christian contexts as well.

One of the earliest fields of conflict in church history was over the claim of apostolic succession. In the dark and difficult early years of the infant church, when Gnosticism presented the gravest danger, claims of a historical nature arose very quickly. The Gnostic leaders claimed to have a direct connection to the apostles, and hence, to have secret knowledge not available to those leading the "regular" Christian churches. It is hardly surprising that a counterclaim of similar content arose as early as the latter half of the second century AD. So, the battlefield was

determined, and the war has raged ever since, with different armies taking the field, claiming antiquity for its own.

The Reformation brought into bright light the issue of the continuity of the Christian faith over time, the nature of its institutions, and the content of its message. Both sides battled vociferously over the topic, nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the famous exchange of letters in AD 1539 between Cardinal Sadoleto and John Calvin, who was in Strasbourg, France, at the time, writing at the behest of the Genevans in Switzerland. It is well known that both sides made appeal to the great names of the past, and in particular, to Augustine, in the attempt to establish the legitimacy of their claims to truth. But as B. B. Warfield so rightly observed, "[T]he Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church."[1] In Warfield's words, Augustine bequeathed to the body of Christ the "problem" of how his doctrine of the church, which had been handed on to him through tradition, was to be made consistent with his doctrine of grace, which he worked out himself through Scripture. And, just as with most others down through history, his life span was insufficiently long to allow him to recognize and work through the contradictions of his own experience and the disputes that defined his life.

When I first debated a leading Roman Catholic apologist in August 1990 at a large Roman Catholic church in Long Beach, California, the topic was *sola scriptura*. I was already aware of the centrality of the arguments against biblical sufficiency on the part of Rome's apologists. Indeed, the man I was debating was the first ordained PCA minister ever to have converted to Roman Catholicism, Gerry Matatics. Matatics was also a favorite student of John Gerstner, and he was, at the time, "ABD" ("All but Dissertation") at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I had already heard Matatics, in addition to his close friend Scott Hahn, debating a number of evangelicals on the topic, and the evangelicals had not fared well. The attack on *sola scriptura* was, for the Roman Catholic apologists of the early 1990s, their primary weapon and their "ace in the hole," so to speak. The idea of Roman Catholics making strong biblical arguments for tradition, and for the submission of Scripture to an over-arching authority structure, was unknown to most Protestants.

Just as in the days of the Reformation, citations and counter-citations of earlier church writings appear in the battles of our own day, whether in reference to the positions of Rome, Eastern Orthodoxy, or any other system that claims to honor both Scripture and other external sources of authority (whether those sources are necessary for the *interpretation of* Scripture or whether they exist as co-equal or even superior authorities *alongside of* Scripture). But it is here that we must insist upon this maxim: Let the early church fathers *be* the early church fathers. That is, we must allow them to speak in their own context, to their own battles, in their own language. We cannot demand that they answer our questions and engage in our conflicts, nor can we assume that the battles back then were identical in form and substance to ours today. It is far, far too easy to abuse historical sources in the service of a cause or a movement. Rome has done this, and has done so authoritatively, by claiming her dogmas have been the "constant faith of the church" down through the ages.[2] But Protestants,

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[1] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), 322.

[2] Consider the language of the First Vatican Council (AD 1870), for example, in stating its dogmas were "in accordance with the ancient and constant faith of the universal Church," or later, "as it has been ever understood by the Catholic Church." In case someone might miss the point, in AD 1896 in the encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, Rome claimed, "Wherefore, in the decree of the Vatican Council as to the nature and authority of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, no newly conceived opinion is set forth, but the venerable and constant belief of every age."

free of the dogmatic constraints of Rome's infallible pronouncements, can still emphasize a particular lens through which the statements of earlier generations and previous centuries are filtered, giving a distorted view of earlier theologians' actual beliefs. Ironically, such modern lenses are often constructed with carefully selected citations of the fathers by contemporary historians who insist that they are, in fact, simply walking in the tradition that has come down to them.

SOLA SCRIPTURA DEFINED, AGAIN?

Until recent years there was a settled consensus among Reformed Baptist writers on the subject of biblical authority and sufficiency. *Sola scriptura* was a phrase repeated endlessly in our conferences, sermons, and published works. And while a general recognition of Scripture's supremacy to tradition was acknowledged, such an assertion was limited primarily to the past and specifically with reference to Roman Catholic tradition and claims of authority. Recent developments have demonstrated that many Protestants had not thought through more modern concepts of "church tradition."

Given the centrality of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (2LBCF) to the work of Grace Bible Theological Seminary, a brief definition of *sola scriptura* is in order, as it is laid out in the confession. In fact, enunciating such a definition is now a necessity, in light of recent events, and a new emphasis, in some quarters, upon the term "tradition." We must remember that the 2LBCF arises in the era of what has been referred to as the Protestant "scholastic" period, which itself, while a natural development, was likewise prompted by the pressures of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. This reality means the framers of the 2LBCF were probably more aware of the challenges of Rome's claims than many of their descendants might well be. Let us consider some of the primary assertions made in Chapter 1. In the first paragraph we read:

> The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and his will which is necessary unto salvation.

Here the uniqueness of Scripture is foundational to all else that will be said about its sufficiency, for the first assertion is that Scripture is the *only* sufficient, certain, and infallible rule. The Bible is not one of a few sufficient sources, not the first among others, but the *only* sufficient source of saving knowledge. This is because Scripture is, by nature, *unique*, and it cannot be mixed with lesser authorities. Nor can the Bible be made subject to anything that is, by nature, less than the Bible is. Scripture is said to be a sufficient rule of *all* (not most) saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. It is said to be a *certain* rule as well. The writers of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith had the highest view of Scripture. They viewed it as an infallible rule (cf. the more contemporary term, "inerrant"), once again precluding all modernist views of Scripture that abandon the very idea of perfection. The Confession speaks of saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, comprehending all that the church could possibly need in her sojourn on earth.

Knowing full well the essence of the arguments against *sola scriptura* coming out of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, the Confession also acknowledges the reality of "the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence" in that they "manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable." Such is the apostle Paul's direct teaching in Romans 1:20. But Paul limited the knowledge communicated in nature to that which renders men without an excuse for their idolatry and rebellion; such general revelation is sufficient only to teach men

of God's existence, their creatureliness, and their need to give thanks to God for his provision. Such revelation is "not sufficient" to give saving knowledge of God or his ways.

The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith goes on to recognize that, initially, God's special revelation was given "at sundry times and in divers manners," but that, now for the sake of the church and for the "more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world," God has committed "the same wholly unto writing." This was a key issue in the battle against the Counter-Reformation.

It should be noted that at the Council of Trent (AD 1545–1563), the initial draft of the section on divine revelation in its canons and decrees had included the infamous *partim-partim* formulation wherein God's revelation was contained: (a) partly in the written tradition; and (b) partly in the oral traditions. While that language was not included in the final dogmatic form of Trent's documents, Rome's continued definition of such utterly unbiblical and non-apostolic beliefs as the Marian dogmas and papal authority and infallibility show that in practice, the *partim-partim* concept continues to function in her thinking. The 2LBCF here directly rejects such a concept, recognizing that if there is anything outside of Scripture and the Spirit that is needed to know God's will unto salvation fully, such an allowance opens the door for the very "corruption of the flesh" that Rome displayed so clearly.

After delineating the canon of Scripture, the Confession makes this important assertion:

> The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God. (1.4)

As we will see, the deep insight contained here is central to our inquiry regarding Thomas Aquinas. The Protestant Reformation brought great clarity to the relationship between Scripture and tradition, and it did so in two vital ways. First, as one can see from Luther's final words before Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in AD 1521, the idea that human councils and popes were, in and of themselves, infallible, had been rejected. The contradictions were so abundant that there could be no question of this. But the second point is even more vital in our day. The authority of Scripture is not to be derived from secondary sources. How could it be? If we can appeal to authority X to prove the truthfulness of Scripture, then authority X must be superior to Scripture itself in nature and authority. The church may well testify to the truthfulness of Scripture, but it is insufficient as an authority to *decide* the nature of Holy Writ. Instead, in the language of the 2LBCF, those claims depend "wholly upon God (who is truth itself)." We dare not skip lightly over this statement. The most fundamental reason *sola scriptura* is true is because of the *nature* of Scripture. It is *theopneustos* (θεόπνευστος), "God-breathed," and as such, *it is the only example of God-breathed revelation in the possession of the church.* Scripture simply cannot be subsumed under a broader category of "Sacred Tradition" together with non-God-breathed authorities. Doing so would subject God's very breath to that which is creaturely. Scripture's reception, then, is based upon its nature: the creature "receives" it because the creature acknowledges his dependence upon the Creator.[3]

[3] We cannot here enter into a very important correlative truth, specifically, that in our modern context of secular humanism this assertion runs directly counter to many popular forms of apologetic defense of the faith. Van Til fully embraced the concept here enunciated, and his form of apologetics is thoroughly consistent with this very high view of Scripture.

The framers of the 2LBCF then spoke of the many excellencies of the Scriptures which, if man were not in a fallen state, would be more than sufficient to demonstrate the truthfulness thereof. Surely, Scripture "doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God." But despite this fact, "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." Given that the Confession will later assert the centrality of the Spirit in bringing about regeneration (10.1), it is certainly fair to say that only the regenerate man will have "full persuasion and assurance" of the truthfulness of the Scriptures, and that this is a byproduct of God's purpose in his saints.

Surely, for those who are confessional, the idea of appealing to unregenerate men to "determine" the truthfulness of the gospel, or the Scriptures themselves, is inconsistent. We never grant to the rebel sinner the role of judge or arbiter of truth. Instead, we must clearly pronounce God's truth: the rebel sinner is the creature of God, subject to his judgment, and must submit to him to have true knowledge of himself and anything else in creation.

The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith goes on to state:

> The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men. (1.6)

The centuries since the Reformation have proven clearly that this claim will be under attack in each and every generation, and never more so than in our own. The secular mind is scandalized by such a sweeping claim, and sadly, many come through the doors of church sanctuaries carrying much of this kind of thinking in their minds. To accept this confessional statement, one must truly have Jesus's view of Scripture, that is, his conviction that Scripture speaks to us with God's own authority (Matt 22:31). This is *sufficiency* in its fullest expression. All the Montanists of the entire church age are rejected in the line, "whether by new revelation of the Spirit." Surely the traditions of Rome fall under the phrase "traditions of men," but we can hardly limit the application solely to Rome—it applies to all who would claim authoritative, external sources of divine truth for the expansive area of God's own glory, man's salvation, and faith and life.

So, if Scripture is this clear, why do so many reject its teachings? The Confession continues:

> Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word, and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. (1.6)

Scripture does not just address matters of history or fact but *spiritual* realities that are directly related to man's fallen nature and sinful rebellion. To have a "saving understanding" of such things (which would include submission to the truth of God), the "inward illumination" of the Spirit of God is necessary. Likewise, the Bible is not intended as an exhaustive compendium of all truth, hence, there are "general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed." The 2LBCF recognizes the need for application of general concepts and truths to specific circumstances that would arise as the gospel goes across the world, encounters different cultures, and faces new challenges in history.

The perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture are then expressed in these words:

> All things in Scripture are not alike plain in

> themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them. (1.7)

Much could be said here, but most important is the exclusive nature of the claim made by the Confession—"those things which are necessary to be known" for salvation are found in one source: Scripture. Surely, some passages in Scripture are challenging and hard, but what separates *sola scriptura* from every lesser species of belief is that one's source for understanding the Bible is, in fact, *the Bible*, because of what was said earlier—it is the only "God-breathed" (*theopneustos*) revelation in the possession of the church.

If the Bible needs some kind of external filter, lens, addendum, or tradition, you no longer have *sola scriptura*. That is very plainly the intended meaning of the framers of the 2LBCF, for the final two sections in this chapter close the door on any other understanding:

> The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly. (1.9)

> The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved. (1.10)

If it was the intention of the framers to direct us to ecclesiastical traditions or creedal formulations to validate Scripture, this is where they would have to provide that direction. Instead, they say exactly the opposite. Unlike Origen and his disciples down through history, the Confession says the "true and full sense of any Scripture" is "not manifold, but one." One finds that meaning by reference to the full context of Scripture, not by reference to any other standard. This includes the "decrees of councils" and the "opinions of ancient writers."

The authors of the 2LBCF were fully aware of the existence of early councils such as Nicaea, Chalcedon, etc. But their stance is that those decrees are subject to examination by the supreme judge of Scripture. It is simply impossible for one to claim that any kind of ecclesiastical or creedal authority can be placed on an equal level with Scripture, *or made necessary to the accurate interpretation of Scripture*, and still claim to be "confessional" in the Protestant sense of the term.

This, then, is *sola scriptura*, a central necessity of Reformed theology and practice. Having defined that phrase, we have laid the requisite foundation now to determine if Thomas Aquinas himself believed in *sola scriptura*, the question that we will examine in the ensuing article. •

JAMES R. WHITE IS PROFESSOR OF APOLOGETICS AND CHURCH HISTORY AT GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

Did Thomas Aquinas Believe and Practice *Sola Scriptura*?

by James R. White

INTRODUCTION

The very question posed in the title of this article is, of course, anachronistic at its root: Did Thomas Aquinas believe and practice *sola scriptura*? As with so many other modern theological controversies, our desire is often to transport our own arguments into older contexts and enlist figures from the past in our contemporary battles. But any serious-minded person with a desire to honor the past knows that this is a risky quest. The contexts of the past rarely map well onto those of the present, and hence it is always dangerous to ask the voices of history to speak in our day on topics that they never actually addressed. And yet here we are, and with proper caution in place, it is my intention to attempt a useful answer to the question posed.

One of the main problems in attempting to discuss Thomas's doctrine of Scripture—or his position on almost any topic, for that matter—is the sheer vastness of the literature that he produced. Of course, scholars of Thomas have been climbing that mountain for many years now, and any reader can pick and choose a particular set of Thomistic "experts" to come to a conclusion most amenable to his personal tastes. There is no end of dispute among the Thomists as to exactly what Thomas himself believed, taught, and practiced. The extensive idealistic biographies (i.e., hagiography) that grew up around him in later decades and centuries has not helped us truly identify the historically "real" Thomas Aquinas.

We will utilize two primary means of examining our question. First, when we look at Thomas's handling of Scripture, do we find evidence of at least a basic or possibly "unformed" belief in *sola scriptura*? In other words, has he thought through the reality that Scripture, due to its nature, is utterly unique, and hence cannot be placed under other authorities that are, themselves, ontologically inferior to Scripture? Can we detect a difference, for example, in how Aquinas approached the text of Scripture in the thirteenth century AD and how the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation did so in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries?

Second, we will look at those places where Aquinas made direct reference to the phrase *regula fidei,* to see if these texts are sufficient to assert a belief in some form of *sola scriptura* on Thomas's part. Does he believe there is another rule of faith, or that the Scriptures form a rule of faith that delimits and is superior to other rules of faith? We recognize the problem with this particular inquiry: Thomas was not dealing with the specific contrast between Scriptural authority and, say, church councils, or papal encyclicals or bulls. His historical context is different, so our answers will have to be, at best, provisional, if we seek to apply them to more modern situations.

THOMAS AQUINAS'S EXEGESIS

We will examine two texts in Thomas's body of work as representative examples of his exegesis,

namely, Romans 4:6–8 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15. The first text deals with justification and the second text with apostolic tradition.

In Romans 4 the apostle Paul lays out the groundwork of his argument for justification by faith alone without works of the law, starting with the example of Abraham in Genesis 15:6. Paul contrasts the working man, who receives a wage, with the not-working-but-believing man, who receives the righteousness of faith. He then defines the non-imputation of sin in light of the forgiveness of sin laid out in Psalm 32 (LXX Psalm 31). Romans 4:8 specifically refers to the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin, and this reality is seen as the fulfillment of verse 6's imputation of righteousness apart from works. Modern-day Rome's sacramental system has so completely over-ridden biblical categories of grace and mercy that the very idea of a sin that is not imputed to a believer is out of bounds. A person practicing *sola scriptura* in his handling of the text, however, will have to deal with the argument forthrightly as it is presented. Is this what Thomas Aquinas does? Let us examine his commentary on Romans:

> 334. Then when he says, *blessed are they*, he presents David's words containing the previous judgment and says that those whose sins are forgiven are blessed; consequently, they did not previously have good works, from which they obtained justice or happiness.
>
> 335. But sin is divided into three classes: original, actual mortal, and actual venial.
>
> First, in regard to original sin he says: *blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven* [Ps 32:1; LXX 31:1].

Here it should be noted that original sin is called *iniquity*, because it is the lack of that original justice, by which in equity man's reason was subject to God, the lower powers to reason, and the body to the soul. This equity is removed by original sin, because after reason ceased to be subject to God, the lower powers rebel against reason and the body is withdrawn from obedience to the soul and subjected to decay and death. Hence: *I was brought forth in iniquities* (Ps 51:5).

In both texts original sin is presented in the plural, either because of the multitude of men in whom original sin is multiplied or better because it virtually contains within itself all sins in some way.

Such original sin is said to be forgiven, because the state of guilt passes with the coming of grace, but the effect remains in the form of *fomes*, or concupiscence, which is not entirely taken away in this life, but is remitted or mitigated.

> 336. Second, in regard to actual mortal sin he says, *and whose sins are covered*.
>
> For sins are said to be covered from the divine gaze, inasmuch as he does not look upon them to be punished: *you covered all their sin* (Ps 84:3).
>
> 337. Third, in regard to venial sin he says, *blessed is the man to whom the Lord has not imputed sin*, where sin refers to venial sins which, although light, if they be many, man is separated and distant from God: *the good Lord will pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness* (2 Chr 30:18).[1]

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher (Lander, WY: Emmaus Academic, 2018). Kindle Edition. Italics in original.

Rather than recognizing the Hebrew parallelism in the original passage, Thomas somehow divides the text up into three sections dealing with three different kinds of sins. These categories of sin are extra-biblical, that is, derived from tradition. Thomas categorizes sin into original sin, mortal sin, and venial sin. There is no recognition of the flow of the text, the form of the argument, or the importance of tracking, for example, the term *logizomai* (λογίζομαι). Of course, this could just be a poorly formed method of exegesis, but in this case, what is present in the text (the central argument) is replaced with something that derives from *traditional* teachings that had developed in the centuries leading up to Thomas.

The same influence of tradition is seen in an interesting comment Thomas makes concerning the giving of the highest form of worship (*latria*, though again, this is a traditional definition, not one substantiated by Scripture) to images. As is common, he begins with an anticipated objection:

> Obj. 4. Further, it seems that nothing should be done in the Divine worship that is not instituted by God; wherefore the Apostle (1 Cor. 11:23) when about to lay down the doctrine of the sacrifice of the Church, says: "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." But Scripture does not lay down anything concerning the adoration of images. Therefore Christ's image is not to be adored with the adoration of "latria."[2]

We should always note that Aquinas was a master at accurately and strongly stating the objections to which he replied. He must be given credit where credit is due. This objection directly mirrors that which the Reformation would provide in opposition to the worship of images a few hundred years later. But note Thomas's answer to this anticipated objection:

> Reply Obj. 4. The Apostles, led by the inward instinct of the Holy Ghost, handed down to the churches certain instructions which they did not put in writing, but which have been ordained, in accordance with the observance of the Church as practiced by the faithful as time went on. Wherefore the Apostle says (2 Thess. 2:14): "Stand fast; and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word"—that is by word of mouth—"or by our epistle"—that is by word put into writing. Among these traditions is the worship of Christ's image. Wherefore it is said that Blessed Luke painted the image of Christ, which is in Rome.[3]

This is one of the primary assertions and arguments of the Counter-Reformation and continues to be argued by Roman Catholic apologists to this day. When I debated Gerry Matatics on *sola scriptura* on Long Island in the late 1990s, he boldly asserted to the audience that if they were not holding to *both* forms of tradition mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, the written *and* the oral, they were in serious sin! One could argue that, as with some of the earlier writers, this kind of tradition is being limited to issues relating to worship, practice, etc., but the fact is Thomas actually interprets the text of 2 Thessalonians 2:14 as a fundamental *denial* of *sola scriptura*. If there is a body of *inspired* revelation that purportedly comes from the apostles but is not to be found in Scripture, *sola scriptura* is an impossibility. Somehow Thomas knows the content of this oral tradition, for he asserts that "among these traditions is the worship of Christ's image." While such a position is consistent with the Second Council of Nicaea in the eighth century AD, it is most assuredly not consistent with the New Testament itself. Thomas commented elsewhere,

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[2] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920–22), IIIa, q.25, a.3, ad 4.

[3] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q.25, a.3, ad 4.

> Reply Obj. 1. Human institutions observed in the sacraments are not essential to the sacrament; but belong to the solemnity which is added to the sacraments in order to arouse devotion and reverence in the recipients. But those things that are essential to the sacrament, are instituted by Christ Himself, Who is God and man. And though they are not all handed down by the Scriptures, yet the Church holds them from the intimate tradition of the apostles, according to the saying of the Apostle (1 Cor. 11:34): "The rest I will set in order when I come."[4]

In this text we see both the same kind of overriding influence of a secondary tradition that we saw in Thomas's exegesis of Romans 4, as well as a direct assertion of the apostolic origin of unwritten traditions, hence, a denial of *sola scriptura*.

Modern electronic editions of Thomas's voluminous works allow us to search for key terms and phrases, and we will not needlessly expand the length of this article with dozens of references related to the rule of faith. There are a few that are most important to examine, however, and the reader is invited to look up others that are readily available. Central to any discussion of Thomas on this issue is the following citation from his commentary on the Gospel of John regarding John 21:24:

> 2655. Thirdly, he refers to his zeal when he says, "and who has written these things." As an apostle he testified to the actions of Christ to those who were present; and in his zeal he recorded these actions in writing for those who were not with him and were to come after him: "Take a large tablet and write upon it in common characters" (Is 8:1); "The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; and he who has little business may become wise" (Sir 38:24). For it was granted to John to live until the time when the Church was at peace; and this is the time when he wrote all these things. John mentions such things so that we will not think that his Gospel has less authority than the other three, seeing that he wrote after the death of all the other apostles, and the other Gospels, especially that of Matthew, had been approved by them.
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> 2656. Now John states that his Gospel is true, and he speaks in the person of the entire Church which received it: "My mouth will utter truth" (Pr 8:7). We should note that although many have written about Catholic truth, there is a difference among them: those who wrote the canonical scriptures, such as the evangelists and apostles and the like, so constantly and firmly affirm this truth that it cannot be doubted. Thus John says, we know that his testimony is true: "If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:9). The reason for this is that only the canonical scriptures are the standard of faith. The others have set forth this truth but in such a way that they do not want to be believed except in those things in which they say what is true.[5]

The key phrase is toward the end of the second paragraph, "only the canonical scriptures are the standard of faith." The Latin reads, *sola canonica scriptura est regula fidei,* literally, "only the canonical scripture is a (the) rule of faith." The Latin cannot tell us if this is meant to say "the" rule of faith or "a" rule of faith since Latin does not have a definite article, but the context would hardly flow with the indefinite translation. In either case, much ink has been spilled on this text, for if we did not have the rest of Thomas's writings for context, one might

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[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q.64, a.2, ad 1.

[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 1–21*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 3:306–07.

perhaps hear an echo similar to the Reformation assertion of Scripture as the "sole rule of faith for the church" in these words.

Roman Catholic writers insist that such a position would be taking the text way too far, for Thomas is simply referring to the difference between the canonical Scriptures and any other writing ("many have written about Catholic truth"). Surely the context here is not what it would need to be to establish a strong statement of scriptural sufficiency on Thomas's part. But it has been rightly asked, "Where else does Thomas speak of a rule of faith other than canonical Scripture?" Where, indeed, does he speak of papal encyclicals, for example, with such language?

THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE SCRIPTURES

A few other important statements should be noted. For example, early on in the *Summa* we have these sober words:

> Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments; but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof, and the authority of the doctors of the Church as one that may properly be used, yet merely as probable. For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets, who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors. Hence Augustine says (Epist. ad Hieron. xix. 1): Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem anything in their works to be true, merely on account of their having so thought and written, whatever may have been their holiness and learning.[6]

The topic here under discussion in the *Summa* is "Whether Sacred Doctrine is a Matter of Argument." It is not "the specific difference in authority of Scripture, tradition, and magisterium," as it would be, eventually, in the Reformation, once again reminding us of the important difference in historical context for Thomas's words. Thomas does not here posit the idea of the Counter-Reformation that Scripture is the written component that, together with the oral component, makes up the broader Sacred Tradition—though, as we saw above, he did speak of the written/oral combination (albeit in reference to a practice of the church, not so much a doctrine). We can surely be thankful for the fact that here Thomas speaks with more of the voice of the early church, such as an Athanasius or a Fulgentius, than with the voice of the Counter-Reformation, such as an Ignatius Loyola or a Francis de Sales. Likewise, he says:

> The truth of faith is contained in Holy Writ, diffusely, under various modes of expression, and sometimes obscurely, so that, in order to gather the truth of faith from Holy Writ, one needs long study and practice, which are unattainable by all those who require to know the truth of faith, many of whom have no time for study, being busy with other affairs. And so it was necessary to gather together a clear summary from the sayings of Holy Writ, to be proposed to the belief of all. This indeed was no addition to Holy Writ, but something taken from it.[7]

The reader cannot help but see some parallels between the subject matter here, and that of the 2LBCF 1.7, although here Aquinas concludes that there are those who "being busy with other affairs" cannot invest the "long study and practice" required to possess the "truth of

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[6] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q.1, a.8, ad 2. Do not miss the statement in Augustine of a primitive belief in what today would be called "inerrancy."

[7] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIaIIae, q.1, a.9, ad 1.

faith." In contrast, the Second London Baptist Confession asserts that believers can, through the due use of ordinary means, "attain to a sufficient understanding of them." Further, we must likewise appreciate the assertion that any summary of the faith (e.g., creeds, confessions) does not amount to an "addition to Holy Writ, but something taken from it." This statement is exactly true and, had this element of Thomas's thinking continued in the Roman Church, it would have had a major impact.

The reality is that beginning with Eck's attack upon Luther at Leipzig, the issue of authority forced Rome away from any possible mediating position, polarizing the eventual Counter-Reformation, leading to the famous statement of Ignatius Loyola, "That we may be altogether of the same mind and in conformity with the Church herself, if she shall have defined anything to be black which to our eyes appears to be white, we ought in like manner to pronounce it black."[8] Aquinas's own Dominican order would be caught up in the same solidification of papal claims of authority. But all of this was yet future, and we cannot speculate on how Aquinas would have responded to Luther's teachings had he possessed an accurate and fair exposure to them.

One text that has been proposed from the Roman Catholic side as an antidote to any misunderstanding of Thomas is this:

> Reply Obj. 3. Athanasius drew up a declaration of faith, not under the form of a symbol, but rather by way of an exposition of doctrine, as appears from his way of speaking. But since it contained briefly the whole truth of faith, it was accepted by the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, so as to be considered as a rule of faith.[9]

There are two important elements to this statement. First, it is not a strict parallel to the first phrase we examined. The Latin is *ut quasi regula fidei habeatur*, "so as to be considered the rule of faith"—rather than *est regula fidei*, "is the rule of faith"—a less direct, strong statement. But, along with this, we have the specter of "the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff," which, by the mid-thirteenth century AD, was a great authority indeed. That authority would continue to function in the theological thinking of the period right up to the sixteenth century when, finally, its role would be examined not in passing disputes among monks, but in the stark light of the fires of the Reformation. Questioning its ultimacy could, and did, result in execution at the hands of the Roman-controlled state. And so, it is just here that we are reminded of the fact that Thomas lived in a different day and a different context.

CONCLUSION

Positively, we can acknowledge and be thankful that Thomas was less radical in his application of categories of "tradition" and extra-biblical authority (e.g., papal power) than Rome would become post-Reformation. Of course, living pre-Reformation means that the stark and bright light brought by the Reformation debates on the role of tradition was not a part of Thomas's context. Hence, was he even aware of the influence of traditions regarding exegetical method, for example, that weighed so heavily upon his own arguments and conclusions? Could Thomas critically examine his own hermeneutics so as to recognize how they had been influenced by the growing body of traditions within the church of his day?

Thomas's exegetical practice often elevates patristic citations and traditional interpretations to a high level. Was he fully aware of this, or had he simply

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[8] Ignatius Loyola, "Rules for Thinking with the Church," Rule 13. In Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 364–65.

[9] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIaIIae, q.1, a.10, ad 3.

imbibed this methodology from his immediate context? In his methodology, we often find that a set of disjointed biblical texts, connected only by similar terminology, are joined with the interpretation of an earlier writer, all at the expense of the actual text itself. This approach is Thomas's regular practice throughout his writings.

While Thomas acknowledges *sola canonica scriptura est regula fidei,* what this means, and the *why* so clearly laid out by the Reformation, is plainly missing from his thinking. By the thirteenth century AD the bright lights that had seen the importance of this doctrine had been dimmed by the thick lens of tradition. That darkness would only be dispelled forcefully by the power of the gospel, the message of justification by faith alone, the sovereignty of God's grace, and the underlying supremacy of the Scriptures over the traditions of the church in the Protestant Reformation.

We must conclude that Thomas, on the one hand, possessed certain beliefs that had to be, shall we say, muted, or adjusted, by the later Roman Church as it launched the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century AD. While imbibing Thomas's theology on many other levels, Rome had to go beyond him in the severity of her denunciations of *sola scriptura*. At the same time, Thomas was inevitably influenced by the growth of an ecclesiastical and interpretational tradition in the centuries before him that in many ways compromised any kind of hermeneutical system that could allow *sola scriptura* to be practiced. He accepted external so-called "apostolic" traditions, and allowed, whether knowingly or not, the opinions and perspectives of earlier writers to determine his own reading of the text.

Thomas did not, then, hold to *sola scriptura*, nor could he really have done so in his context and at his time, without making a major break with the institutional church of his day (let alone the views of his own monastic order). But Thomas's views do provide us with a benchmark, so to speak, by which to recognize the *further* departure of later Roman dogmatics from even the high-water mark of the medieval period. Thomas is testimony that the eventual claims of Rome, finally dogmatized at the First Vatican Council (AD 1870) with the doctrine of papal infallibility, were, and are, a novelty that has no meaningful connection to the primitive church.

So, we come full circle and say that just as we must allow the early church writers to be who they were in their own context, so we must do the same with Thomas Aquinas as well. While he did not enunciate a doctrine of *sola scriptura*, neither did he hold to the later radicalization of the self-promoting claims of the papacy and the fundamental subjection of Scripture to higher authorities. Thomas certainly did not hold to Scripture alone, that much is apparent; but the Roman Church, sadly, would further accentuate Thomas's wobbly position in even more drastic ways just a few centuries later. •

JAMES R. WHITE IS PROFESSOR OF APOLOGETICS AND CHURCH HISTORY AT GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

Paul and Pagan Philosophy: Collaboration or Conflict in Acts 17:16–34?

by Jeff Moore

INTRODUCTION

The text of Acts 17:16–34 features neither an American in Paris nor a fool in Rome, but an unlikely person in an equally unlikely place. The apostle Paul, a Christian missionary, finds himself beholding the spectacle of the renowned city of Athens, Greece, the home of world-famous minds such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Yet Paul does not savor the sights and sounds of the glistening city in front of him. He is not a tourist taking in the scenery. This is a time for engagement. Paul sets out on an evangelistic mission and soon ends up dialoging with some of the leading pagan philosophers of his day.

At the site of the Areopagus, a meeting of the minds takes place, one for the ages. This episode features the only account in the Bible in which an apostle interacts directly with worldly philosophers. Thus, pressing questions arise: Will Paul's encounter be one of collaboration or conflict? Does Paul engage in a project of synthesis—taking the best insights of the thought-systems of worldly philosophers and merging them with his own—or a project of antithesis—exposing the fundamental differences that appear when two incompatible systems collide? The question before the reader is stark and of the utmost importance: What do Athens and Jerusalem have in common?[1]

There is also a practical question that emerges from Acts 17:16–34 as we consider church history. If Paul's meeting at the Areopagus provides a clear example of how a Christian believer should engage the outside world, Acts 17 has implications for how a thoughtful Christian should interact with non-Christian philosophy in any era. This passage will give us insight into whether the project of a theologian like Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–1274) was valid as he sought to wed Aristotle's philosophy to the Christian faith. Was Thomas's project one that the apostle Paul would have undertaken?

BACKGROUND OF PAUL'S SPEECH

As Paul walks into the famed city of Athens and sees statues of false gods in every direction (v. 16), he does not marvel at the craftsmanship or beauty of the gold, silver, and stone (v. 29). Instead, the reader is told that Paul's spirit "was being provoked within him" (v. 16, *parōxyneto to pneuma autou en autō*).[2] The apostle was "greatly distressed" (v. 16, NIV). He realized that the glory of God was being exchanged for the likeness of images of mortal man

[1] The reader who desires to avoid technical discussion may read the main text of this article, passing over the transliterated Greek (found in parentheses) and ignoring the footnotes. I am paraphrasing the famous question of Tertullian here. See Tertullian, *Against Heretics* 7, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:246.

[2] All translations of the Greek text are the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

(cf. Rom 1:23). Paul's provocation in spirit prompts him to engage in dialogue (*dielegeto*) and reasoned debate with Jews and Greeks in the marketplace of Athens (v. 17). In these spirited conversations, Paul preaches the good news (*euēngelizeto*) of the Christian faith.

While in the marketplace, Paul soon runs into the intellectual elite of Athens, philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic varieties (v. 18). Epicurean philosophy, founded by Epicurus (341–270 BC), taught that the key to life was pleasure-seeking—not in wild hedonism but in living the simple life and in searching out measured ways to please the senses.[3] Epicureans believed in the Greco-Roman gods—Zeus, Hera, Athena, and the like—but taught that the gods were distant and far-off and took no active interest in human affairs.[4] All of life was composed of matter, something akin to tiny particles like atoms (cf. Democritus), even the gods themselves. According to Epicurean thought, even the soul of a human being was comprised of a material substance, so death brought about annihilation, the cessation of existence.[5]

Meanwhile, Stoic philosophy, founded by Zeno (334–262 BC), taught that the key to life was doing one's duty and a resolute acceptance of one's circumstances.[6] Stoics believed in a plurality of gods (the traditional gods of Greece and Rome) but also affirmed that there was one ultimate world-spirit that united all of nature.[7] All of life was made of air (*pneuma*), a spiritual-yet-physical substance. Although some Stoics believed that the human soul lived on for a short time after death, all Stoics believed that the soul, sooner or later, ceased to exist.

Into this environment of intellectual foes, Paul preaches the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. As he does so, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers accuse the Christian preacher of being a "seed-picker" (v. 18, *spermologos*), likening him to a bird that snatches up various seeds and scraps.[8] The intellectual elite of Athens charge Paul with proclaiming foreign "gods" (plural) because he was preaching the realities of Jesus (*Iēsous*) and the resurrection (*anastasis*). It seems that the philosophers think that Paul is proclaiming two gods, Jesus and Anastasis, perhaps the latter being a goddess known as "Resurrection."[9] The academic guild of Athens believes that Paul is teaching a new religion and bringing new ideas to their ears. Soon Paul is brought to a meeting of the Areopagus so the intellectuals can hear more.

PAUL'S SPEECH UNPACKED

Paul stands up in the meeting of the Areopagus (v. 22) and notes that the Athenians are "very religious" (*deisidaimonesterous*).[10] Paul has

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[3] N. C. Croy, "Epicureanism," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background* [*DNTB*], eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., (Downers Grove, IL; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 324–27.

[4] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 331.

[5] For a summary of the life and teachings of Epicurus, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. R. D. Hicks, repr. ed., Loeb Classical Library 185 (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1965), 528–677.

[6] J. C. Thom, "Stoicism," in *DNTB*, 1139–42.

[7] See the references to a plurality of "gods" in Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.6, 16 in Cicero, *De Natura Deorum (On the Nature of the Gods)*, trans. H. Rackham, repr. ed., Loeb Classical Library 268 (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1994), 139, 141, 165. Cleanthes's *Hymn to Zeus* shows a prominent Stoic's affirmation of Zeus as the supreme god of the traditional Greco-Roman gods. Johan C. Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus: Text, Translation, Commentary*, Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 40-41. Cleanthes (331–230 BC) was a Stoic philosopher who succeeded Zeno, the founder of the philosophical movement of Stoicism.

[8] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 561.

[9] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 282; Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 331.

[10] This form is a comparative adjective used as a superlative. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 299–300. The KJV translates this phrase as "too superstitious."

traversed the city of Athens and has observed there is hardly a crack or crevice in the metropolis which does not hang under the shadow of idols, Greek objects of worship (v. 23, *ta sebasmata*). In his survey of the city, Paul found an inscription on an altar labelled: "To an Unknown God." But Paul does not commend the men of Athens for their religiosity. Instead, Paul starts off his speech by critiquing the Athenians—he declares that they worship in ignorance (*agnoountes*). Paul notes, "That which you worship, being ignorant (*agnoountes*), this I proclaim to you."[11]

The content of Paul's speech—and what he conveys about God—can be summarized in five points. First, Paul starts his speech by proclaiming that the God of the universe "is" the Lord (*kyrios*), the covenant God of the Bible (v. 24). Paul does not take an observation about the natural world and reason up to higher principles. He does not observe that every effect has a cause, and thus, there must be a Grand Cause behind all of these effects. The Christian preacher does not "philosophize" with the philosophers. Instead, at the beginning of his speech, the apostle Paul declares with vigor that the one true God, the Creator of the world, *is* the Lord—he is the Lord God who made heaven and earth (cf. Gen 2:4). Although Paul's religion is accused of being "foreign" (v. 18, 20, *xenos*) and "new" (*kainē*, v. 19) by the pagans (v. 18, 20), the God whom Paul worships is actually the One who was in the beginning.

As Paul says elsewhere, all human beings do not simply know that there is "a god" in a fuzzy, generic way; rather, they know *God* (Rom 1:21, *gnontes ton theon*).[12] Affirming anything less—some generic "god" or supreme being or dominant deity—would be undermining what all human beings know to be true. God has made his existence plain to men through created things such that his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen (v. 20, *kathoratai*) and understood (*nooumena*) so that men are without excuse. Having all the evidence they need, human beings have no defense for not worshipping God correctly. As Calvin notes, natural human worship always "incline[s] downwards, that [men] may lay hold upon God after a carnal manner."[13] Such is true of the Athenians.

Second, Paul affirms that the Creator God, by the very fact that he is the Maker of everything, is entirely different from his creation. There are two negatives—two critiques—spoken early on in Paul's speech. Because the Lord God is the Creator of all things, he is "not" bound to manmade temples or cathedrals (v. 24), and he does "not" need anything from any human hands (v. 25). There is an ultimate and essential distinction between the Creator God and his creatures. God is not simply quantitatively greater than man. God is *qualitatively* different from man. God and man are not on the same chain of being; they are entirely different beings altogether.

Third, Paul argues that the one true God is not only the Creator but also the Sustainer and Ruler over all.[14] God does not just create man and step back to let things transpire. God is the one who presently and actively "gives" (*didous*, present

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[11] Sandnes argues that in the text of Acts 17:16–34, there is an implicit "comparison between Paul and Socrates." Karl Olav Sandnes, "Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15.50 (1993): 22. Such an appraisal is speculative and cannot be demonstrated convincingly from the text.

[12] Some scholars assert that Paul of Acts 17 is not the same as the Paul of Romans 1. One of the leading scholars who held this view was Martin Dibelius. See the discussion in Colin J. Hemer, "The Speeches of Acts II: The Areopagus Address," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40.1 (1989): 250.

[13] John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Christopher Fetherstone, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol. 19 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 2:161.

[14] Compare Calvin's roughly synonymous language of "Governor" and "Preserver" in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.16.1.

active participle) to every man (*pasin*) life and breath and all things (v. 25). He is the Sustainer. He made every nation of men (v. 26) from one man, such that the human race is related. The first man was the great-great-great grandfather of all of those who would come to inhabit the earth—and thus, the Greeks should not have any inflated ideas about their ethnic superiority.[15] The Lord God determined the times (*kairous*) and boundaries (*tas horothesias*) in which every human being would live. God has every human being's birthdate and address in his heavenly registry before any details emerge on earth.

Fourth, Paul maintains that God has clearly revealed himself in nature. God has made himself known in his work of creation, in his providence, and in his rulership. He has done so in order that (v. 27, *zētein*, infinitive of purpose) men may seek him, reach out for him, and find him. God has not somehow hidden himself from man's sight. He has left fingerprints of his handiwork in the created realm as nature reveals God's eternal power and divine nature (Rom 1:20). Because of this glorious truth, God indeed is "not far" (*ou makran*) from each one of us (Acts 1:27). The conditional of verse 27 is all-important—"if indeed then (*ei ara ge*) they may grope and may find him" (two aorist optative verbs). [16] Paul does not say that men "will" reach out to God, but that they "may" do so. Human beings have an opportunity that is right in front of them.

The rest of Scripture, however, reveals the stark reality that although God is within reach of men, men grope about in the dark.[17] Having everything they need to know about God right in front of their faces, men search in vain and fall into self-made, self-designed religious falsehood (cf. Is chs. 40–48). Stott wisely remarks that God "is not far from each one of us," but rather, "[i]t is we who are far from him."[18] That is why, in a different place, Paul says, "Although knowing God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their reasoning became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom 1:21). It is not just that man worships God incorrectly—that much is true, to be sure; but in his suppression, man formulates faulty thoughts and conceptions about *who* God is. There is intellectual sin from the outset.

It is at this point in his speech that Paul quotes two Greek poet-philosophers. Paul refers to a statement by the Greek poet Epimenides (6th century BC), whose words in their original context honored the false god, Zeus: "For in you we live and move and have our being (lit: 'are')" (*Cretica*, line 4).[19] How, though, could a god like Zeus be everywhere-present if he was bound to a body and himself was birthed by Titans? Yet Paul, having already asserted the reality of the one true God who "himself gives all men life and breath and all things" (v. 25), states that this refrain *is*, in fact, true of the Lord God. With the correct referent of the pronoun now in view, "in *him*" (v. 28, *en autō*)—that is, in the one true God—humans really *do* have their being. The Lord God is the One who alone possesses divine being and gives humans a reason for being. Only the God who is spirit (cf. Jn 4:24) and is everywhere present (Ps 139:7–10) could fit this description. Extracted from its original context, Epimenides's statement is true of the one true God.[20]

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[15] Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 337; Hemer, "The Speeches of Acts II," 245; cf. Kenneth O. Gangel, "Paul's Areopagus Speech," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127.508 (1970): 310.

[16] It is important to note that the optative mood indicates possibility, not probability. A conditional optative indicates "usually a remote possibility." Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 484.

[17] Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 4.194.

[18] Stott, *Message of Acts*, 286.

[19] For an extended section of the poem, see Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 338–39.

[20] Bruce observes that "the direct quotations from pagan poets … in no way commit the speaker to acquiescence in their philosophical

Similarly, Paul quotes another Greek poet-philosopher, Aratus (315–240 BC), who, also speaking of Zeus, states: "We are his offspring" (*Phaenomena*, line 5).[21] In the original context of his poem, Aratus refers to the fact that human beings were spawned in procreation by Zeus, who also remains spiritually present in their lives. Yet, if natural procreation was in view, Zeus and man would be in the same line of generation. This fallacy is what Paul has already made pains to challenge from the outset of his speech. The declaration that humanity is the "offspring" (*genos*) of God only makes sense if human beings were "made" (*poiēsas*; *epoiēsen*) by God's hands (v. 24, 26) and fashioned in his image (cf. Gen 1:26–27). Once again, by changing the proper referent of the pronoun ("his"), Paul makes it clear that God "births" human beings by an act of creation, not by physical procreation. Paul co-opts the language of another Greek poet-philosopher to show that this religious observation only makes sense within the Christian worldview—when applied to the one true God.[22]

Paul's conclusion to God's revelation in nature is that human beings "ought not to think (*ouk opheilomen nomizein*) that the divine nature is like (*homoion*) gold or silver or stone—an image engraved by the design and skill of man" (Acts 17:29). It is not simply that God isn't a statue. He isn't even *like* a statue and should not be represented in that way, even as an aid to worship. Such base religiosity is an affront to the grandeur and glory of God. If it is true that human beings are the offspring of God (pointing back to the reframed quote from Aratus), then it is logically impossible for human hands to make an image of God. God makes man; man does not make God. And yet the Athenians have statues and images of gods all throughout their city! Paul shows that man's attempt to worship by his own design always leads to confusion.

Fifth, Paul maintains that God has clearly revealed himself in salvation history. God has acted in history and has spoken in history. God's word from heaven, special revelation, is the counterpart to natural revelation. God's speech provides the way for men to find him. Although the Old Testament prophets spoke of the horrors of idols made of wood and stone (e.g., Is 40:18–20), symbols of ignorance (Is 45:20, *ouk egnōsan*), the messengers of God also spoke of a day when individuals could "repent" of their sins and be restored to the Lord (2 Chr 6:37; Eze 18:30, 32). This era of repentance was ushered in through the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who proclaimed to his hearers, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). In past times, before the arrival of Christ, God overlooked the times of ignorance (*tous chronous tēs agnoias*). This phrase does not indicate that God did not punish the sin of idolatry—he certainly did, crushing Canaanites, Philistines, and even rebellious Israelites who prostrated themselves before a golden calf. But there is a greater judgment and a cosmic reckoning (v. 31 "the world") on the horizon now that Christ has come.

God has given proof of the coming judgment of Christ "by raising him from the dead" (v. 31b). There is a veiled reference to the cross, or at least to the effects of the cross, in the fact that Paul mentions a resurrection "from the dead" (v. 31).[23] The Messiah's resurrection (cf. Ps 16:10) is

presuppositions." Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 342.

21 Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 339. See also a reference to the poetry of Aratus in Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.41.

22 It should be remembered that most Epicureans and Stoics would have had some type of belief in the traditional Greco-Roman gods, and thus, both groups would have affirmed a place for Zeus in their religious observance.

23 Stott, *Message of Acts*, 289.

vindicating proof of his deity, and his victory over death ensures an impending day of judgment by the Messiah that will soon take place for all the world (Ps 2:7–12). The universal nature of this future event is apparent in the repeated language of "all men" (v. 25, 31), "each one of us" (v. 27), and "all people everywhere" (v. 30). Every man will stand before the judgment seat of God.[24]

It is at this point that Paul's speech possibly ends prematurely due to "sneering" listeners (v. 32). Although differing in their goals for humanity and in some of their conceptions of deity, Epicureans and Stoics would have been united in at least two key beliefs—they rejected: (a) the resurrection of the body; and (b) a future judgment in which men would be held eternally accountable for their actions.[25] Thus, at Paul's proclamation of these two realities, some of the apostle's hearers decide that they have had enough! But the word of God does not return void. The apostle's preaching leads to converts to the Christian faith, including a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and several others (v. 34).

THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

Having expounded five (5) interpretive observations from the text of Acts 17:16–34, the present section will seek to formulate seven (7) theological conclusions from the data observed. What are key takeaways from the monumental meeting of Paul and the pagan philosophers at the Areopagus?

1. Paul states that pagan philosophy is a display of human "ignorance" (v. 23, 30). He characterizes both the Epicureans, who affirmed a "far off" and transcendent view of god(s), and the Stoics, who affirmed a "near" and immanent view of god(s), as being devoid of true knowledge about the divine. Both groups made their gods in the image of man. Paul poses a critique of human philosophy from the outset of his speech.[26] The apostle begins and ends his sermon with a reference to natural man's "ignorance" (v. 30).[27]

2. Paul does not affirm natural theology, defined as man's ability to use natural reason in a positive direction to get to God. Paul illustrates the fact that man's fallen reason will always lead to something less than the God who made the world, the Lord of heaven and earth. Sinful man will reduce the God who is knowable to a God who is "unknown" (v. 23). The inescapable problem for natural man is suppression of the truth about God (Rom 1:18–20). All men do have real knowledge of God, but they suppress what they know to be true about him. Three times Paul negates the faulty religious views of the Athenians.[28] The apostle states that God does "not" live in temples built by hands (v. 24), God is "not" served by human hands, as if he needed anything (v. 25), and the divine nature is "not" like gold or silver or stone. The problem is not that pagan philosophy doesn't get far enough in its quest for God—it doesn't get to the right God at all.

3. While not affirming natural theology, Paul does affirm natural revelation. God clearly reveals himself to man through nature and the created realm. The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 8:1, 3; 19:1–6). Man is the image of God (Gen 1:26–27)

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[24] F. F. Bruce notes, "Like the biblical revelation itself, his [Paul's] argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all." Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 335. Stott sums up Paul's speech by noting that the apostle presents God in five roles: Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, Father, and Judge of humanity. Stott, *Message of Acts*, 285–88.

[25] Bock, *Acts*, 571.

[26] Contra C. K. Barrett, who states that Paul's sermon is "an attempt to see how far a Christian preacher can go in company with Greek philosophy." C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1998), 829.

[27] Stott, *Message of Acts*, 287.

[28] David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 495.

and possesses a conscience that gives him an inner pulse on what constitutes God's standards for morality, both right and wrong (Rom 2:14–15). Through nature, God reveals himself to man, even to *fallen* man, that he is Creator (v. 24), Sustainer (v. 25), and Ruler (v. 26). The apostle affirms that there is simply no excuse for the Athenians to have a God who is "unknown" (v. 23). Speaking about natural man's knowledge of God, Calvin pointedly says: "[It] is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget."[29] All men have instant, personal, inescapable knowledge of the one true God—the problem is they do not *like* the God who reveals himself (Rom 1:21).

4. Paul embarks on a strategy of contrast, not collaboration, with pagan philosophy. Paul does not somehow take the "noble ideas" of pagan men and bump them up a bit. It is not that the pagan philosophers are on the right track and just need a little boost. The apostle declares that the natural man does not have proper ideas at all about the one true God. That is why Paul starts the main content of his speech with a declaration that the true God is "the Lord" (v. 24). It is not the fear of a generic "God" or a Supreme Being or a Higher Power that brings knowledge. It is only the fear of "the Lord" (Yahweh) that is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10). The apostle Paul posits a radical distinction between Creator and creature from the outset of his speech. Such a distinction is missing in all forms of pagan philosophy, even among the "most noble" pagans. Paul exposes the fact that Christianity and paganism are incompatible systems of thought and engages in a strategy of antithesis, not synthesis, with unbelieving philosophers.

5. By way of application, unlike Thomas Aquinas, the apostle Paul would not engage in anything but a strategy of antithesis with the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that philosophers, however few, could come to a true knowledge of God "from the natural light of human reason."[30] Thomas is well-known for taking Aristotle's ideas about God and reality, discovered through reason and the fivefold senses, and supplementing them with Christian doctrine. Countless problems emerge, though, with such a project of synthesis. Many Christians might be surprised to learn that it is heavily debated among Aristotelian scholars as to whether he held to monotheism at all (i.e., affirmation of one God). Some scholars believe that he did, others believe that he didn't, and still others charge Aristotle with having internal contradictions in his writings.[31] The problem is that Aristotle speaks of "god" (singular) at times and "gods" (plural) at others.[32]

Even if, for the sake of argument, we grant that Aristotle was a monotheist, he believed that

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[29] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.3.

[30] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries* (London: Blackfriars, 1964–81), Ia, q.1, a.5.

[31] For a scholar who considers Aristotle to be a monotheist, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1990), 29, 36–38. For a scholar who maintains that Aristotle was a polytheist, see Richard Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. Jan Edward Garrett, SUNY Series in Ancient Greek Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 185–98. For the conclusion that Aristotle was, perhaps, internally inconsistent, specifically with regard to positing one "unmoved mover" alongside of forty-seven "unmoved movers," see Philip Merlan, "Aristotle's Unmoved Movers," *Traditio* 4 (1946): 1–30.

[32] For a reference to "god" (singular), see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12.7.9.1072b24–30, in Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Books X–XIV*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, repr. ed., Loeb Classical Library 287 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1962), 151; for a reference to "gods" (plural), see Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 10.8.1179a24–30, in Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 291. Bodéüs argues that even the designation of "god" as a singular should not be assumed to be a reference to one deity. He notes, "Most often, it [*theos*] refers to the god in general, that is, collectively or generically, the individual beings that can be subsumed under the common idea, as explained in the *Metaphysics*: the god, like the human being or the horse, is a species of living beings." Bodéüs, *Aristotle and the Theology of the Living Immortals*, 4.

created matter was eternal. Yet the esteemed philosopher should have known, simply by looking at nature, that only God is eternal (Rom 1:19–20). The true God is utterly distinct from his creation, and thus, Aristotle did not affirm the true God. Moreover, even if Aristotle believed in one God, it must be stated that the true God is always one God *in three persons*. Unless a philosopher has a *triune* God, he does not have in mind the *true* God. God's oneness should not take priority over his threeness, just as his threeness should not take priority over his oneness. He is eternally both. Still further, Aristotle's God, the Prime Mover, is unknowable by human beings and concerned only with himself. He is "pure thought" contemplating itself. The problem, thus, is not that Aristotle did not reason deeply enough; the problem is that, in his quest for knowledge of divine things, Aristotle did not know the true God at all.

6. Paul demonstrates that wrong thinking about God always results in wrong practice. The "ignorance" (Acts 17:23, 30) that the Athenians displayed in their knowledge of God played out in their practical worship of God—they sought to show their devotion through images of gold and silver and stone (v. 29). Based on Romans 1:21–23, Calvin astutely notes, "[W]e must hold this general doctrine, that God is falsely and wickedly transfigured, and that his truth is turned into a lie so often as his Majesty is represented by any visible shape."[33] Calvin's penetrating critique goes beyond raw Greek paganism. He also chastises Roman Catholicism, whose worship of God is "inwrapped in the same error."[34] And of course, the theologian most revered by Rome, Thomas Aquinas, affirmed that images of God may be used in the worship of him. For Thomas, the images themselves may be venerated and through them God himself may be adored.[35]

We must remember the response of the apostle when he walked through the streets of Athens and saw images of the divine—he was vexed, provoked, irritated—"greatly distressed" in spirit (Acts 17:16, NIV). At the end of his sermon, Paul gives a resounding negative to the question of whether God may be worshipped through images: "We should not think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone—an engraved image formed by the skill and design of man" (v. 29). The unbound God of heaven and earth must not be bound to manmade images. We must not seek to domesticate God to our personal tastes. Stott rightly reminds us: "In brief, all idolatry tries to minimize the gulf between the Creator and his creatures, in order to bring him under our control."[36] There is only one proper reaction for the Christian to the religious statues of Athens or to the graven images approved by Aquinas—with the apostle Paul, we should be greatly distressed.

7. Paul does, in the end, believe that Jerusalem has something to do with Athens. Although Paul believes that Jerusalem must not be mixed with Athens, he contends that Athens can, and must, learn something from Jerusalem. Jerusalem provides the launching pad for the redemptive event that alone gives hope to lost sinners—the death and resurrection of Jesus. The one who is coming to judge the world is risen "from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Although the apostle Paul does not collaborate with the philosophers in Athens, he does serve as a light amid darkness to the people of Athens. In so doing, he proclaims the hope that the

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[33] Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts*, 2:171.
[34] Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts*, 2:171–72. For a full discussion, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.1–16.
[35] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae, q.81, a.3.
[36] Stott, *Message of Acts*, 287.

infinite gap between God and man due to sin has been bridged.

CONCLUSION

In his meeting of the minds at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34), Paul does not build on a foundation of pagan philosophy, supplement it with Christian truth, and thereby raise pagan philosophy to new heights. Instead, Paul razes pagan philosophy to the ground. Paul shows the utter bankruptcy of the philosophers' views of God so that he can declare the true hope that is found only in Christ, the Son of God. In assessing whether common ground with non-Christian thought is possible with Christianity, Acts 17 serves as ground zero. While individual insights may contain some grain of truth (e.g., "In him we live and move and have our being"; "We are his offspring"), such statements can only have ultimate truth when extracted from their pagan context and brought into the light of the true God.

Thomas Aquinas didn't need to supplement Aristotle. He needed to uproot Aristotle's flimsy foundation entirely and replace it with Scripture-saturated stone. But regrettably, that is not what Aquinas did. In the same way, the philosophers of Athens didn't need the apostle Paul to come and supplement their insights about "an unknown god." They needed their faulty worldviews exposed and their false pretenses shattered. And that is what the faithful preacher did. Paul called them to repentance and proclaimed to them that it is only faith in Christ—the one who has been raised from the dead—that allows the natural man to find the true God. •

JEFF MOORE IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT AT GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

Is Platonism a Part of the Great Tradition?

by Jeffrey D. Johnson

Thomas Aquinas is known for his synthesis of Christianity with the philosophy of Aristotle. However, it is arguable that Aristotle's mentor and teacher, Plato, had an even more far-reaching effect on the history of Christian doctrine. Some contemporary evangelical scholars have argued that Christian Platonism comprises the "great tradition" of faithful witness in the church, spanning from the pro-Nicene period to the Middle Ages to the post-Reformation era.[1] However, is Christian Platonism—the wedding of Christian theology to philosophical ideas related to Plato—a sound development in the history of doctrine? Put simply, is it true that Platonism is a part of the great tradition?

THE IMPERSONAL GOD OF PLATONISM

The Greek philosopher Plato (429–347 BC) did not anchor knowledge in the empirical senses, unlike his student, Aristotle. Rather, Plato built his explanation of the universe upon the innate and abstract ideas of the mind. In Plato's thought, individuals who were preoccupied with the ever-shifting and changing world around them would remain blind to the true realities of life that are perceived only by the mind. The sole entity that is not in flux, according to Plato, is the category of abstract ideas.

Since for Plato, the only changeless and timeless realities are Ideas (or Forms), they are more real than any physical substances that are forever changing. Ideas or Forms are more real because they don't change. They are forever the same. Because of their eternal changelessness, our knowledge of them can be certain.

Though there are many Forms in Plato's thought, there is one Form that is higher than all the other Forms—the Form of the Good, which Plato identified as the One. The One is an irreducibly simple substance or being that acts as the foundation of all substances or beings that flow out of it. Because all Forms are good, all the Forms participate and emanate from the Form of the Good. Below the Form of the Good are all the other abstract and timeless Forms that represent the Good.

Below these abstract and timeless Forms are material substances that exist in time and space, such as stars and trees and rocks and bees. Physical things, like stars, trees, rocks, and bees, imperfectly represent the Forms. Such items are always in flux. Although they participate in being/existence, they participate in being/existence imperfectly. Each physical object points to an eternal and timeless Form, and each Form points to the Form of the Good—

[1] Craig A. Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 7.

the One. To give a concrete example, the Form of "Beeness" is more perfect in being than a physical bumblebee that will be dead within fourteen days. And the Form of the Good is more perfect in being than the Form of "Beeness." In this way, the One, the Form of the Good, is the ground of all being and existence.

But it is important to note that the Form of the Good, the One, according to Plato, is not the personal and relational God revealed in nature (i.e., natural revelation). In fact, the One is not even an impersonal *god* at all. Rather, the One is a lifeless and abstract Idea. The One is the irreducibly simple substance with no distinct attributes and with no ability to act or will or do anything other than to self-exist. For Plato, the most godlike being is a figure called Demiurge (the Carpenter), the one who crafted the cosmos out of eternal matter in the pattern of the immaterial Forms. In the hierarchical Chain of Being, the Demiurge exists somewhere between the Form of the Good and the physical cosmos.

Far from being autonomous and independent, the Demiurge is subordinate to the abstract Forms. The "god" of Plato, if he can even be called a god, is dependent upon the eternal Forms, which are above him, and dependent upon eternal matter, which is below him. Thus, the god of Plato is not the absolute, independent, ontological, self-contained, and personal God of natural revelation.

Plato concluded that there was a hierarchical Chain of Being that ontologically connects the One, the Idea of the Good, to all the particulars of the universe. The five hierarchical eternal realities in Plato's ontological Chain of Being are:

1. The One
2. The Forms
3. Demiurge (The Carpenter)
4. Formed Matter
5. Formless Matter

THE IMPERSONAL GOD OF NEOPLATONISM

Certain aspects of Plato's philosophy lived on in the Neoplatonism of Egyptian philosopher Plotinus (AD 204–270). After being introduced to the writings of Plato through his teacher, Ammonius Saccas (AD 175–242) of Alexandria, Egypt, Plotinus was influential in bringing the rational bent of Platonism into the Greco-Roman world.

According to Plotinus, there are three principal modes of existence, or hypostases, which are different degrees or levels of being. The first hypostasis is called "the One," which is equivalent to Plato's Form of the Good. The One is Ultimate Reality. The One is the very ground of existence and the principal and prime source of all being. The second mode of being is the Nous (mind). The Nous is the realm where Plato's Forms exist, all the archetypal ideas or prototypes. The third mode of being is the World Soul.

How does all this fit together? According to Plotinus, the Nous and the World Soul emanated and flowed out of the One (the very ground of all being). Each hypostasis weakened as it moved further away from the One. Last of all is matter, which proceeded from the World Soul. Matter, being the furthest away from the One, is the weakest stage of the cosmos and the antithesis of the One.

In other words, as light emanates from the sun, the Nous emanated from the One, and the World Soul emanated from the Nous. The further light travels away from the sun, the dimmer it becomes. Although the Nous emanated from the One, the brightness and strength of its being do not shine as strong. The World Soul, having proceeded from the Nous, is even dimmer. Eventually, light, when traveling far enough away from its origin, dissipates altogether—being engulfed by the surrounding darkness. When this occurs, light ceases to be light at all.

Likewise, matter, although having its origin from the One (via the Nous and the World Soul), has

traveled so far away from the One that it ceases to have any relationship or similarities with the One. Like beams of light that begin to dim and slowly dissipate, turning into their opposite (darkness), matter has turned into its opposite: non-being. The One is an absolute being, the Nous is somewhat diluted in its being, the World Soul is very weak in its level of being, and matter is the antithesis of being.

Neoplatonism, therefore, is a sort of paradoxical panentheism. Panentheism claims that God is in everything. In other words, God and creation cannot be separated. Even matter is a part of God. Neoplatonism, however, claims that though everything has emanated from God, some things no longer remain a part of God. The physical world, for instance, with all its particulars, has traveled so far away from God, pure unity, that it is on the verge of losing its connection with God.

Though Plotinus distinguished the One from the particulars, there is clearly a hierarchical Chain of Being in his thinking that is fundamentally inconsistent with the Creator-creature distinction of divine revelation. Under Plotinus, there is not a personal God who created all things out of nothing, but rather an impersonal, unknowable, and undifferentiated being that emanates everything from its own ineffable existence.

NEOPLATONISM IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

When rationalist philosophies like Platonism or Neoplatonism begin their search for God from the foundation of an impersonal conception (e.g., an abstract idea) tied to the universe, it is impossible for the system to conclude with a personal God who is ontologically distinct from the universe. Such philosophies have no other option than to view God as existing on a pantheistic Chain of Being with everything else in the universe. These thought-systems inevitably clash with Christianity, however, because the latter affirms a Creator-creature distinction rooted in divine revelation that is utterly incompatible with pagan philosophies. Nevertheless, various types of syncretism have emerged in the history of the Christian church, resulting in inconsistency and confusion.

PLATONISM AND NEOPLATONISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

According to the church father, Hippolytus of Rome (170–235 AD), Greek philosophy was to blame for the heresies that plagued early Christianity. Numerous figures were all too eager to accommodate Christianity to the pagan wisdom of this world, especially that of Plato.

The authors of the New Testament had to combat the influence of Stoicism, Gnosticism, Epicureanism, and Docetism in particular. Each of these philosophies was heavily influenced by Platonism. Each was constituted around a hierarchical Chain of Being. Each of these philosophies had adherents, however, who attempted to dress up the hierarchical Chain of Being with Christian verbiage. With the physical universe subsisting at the bottom of the hierarchical chain, some, such as the Stoics, viewed the universe and the physical body as good—being an emanation of the divine. Others, such as the Gnostics, believed the universe and the body to be bad. The Epicureans felt that what took place in the body was of little to no eternal consequence, while the Docetics denied that Christ had a physical body at all.

Marcion (AD 85–160)

According to Philip Schaff, Marcion "was the son of [the] bishop of Sinope in Pontus."[2] A Platonic dualism undergirded all of his theology. In Marcion's thought, the physical world, being so far removed from the good, was the source of bondage and evil in the world. This reality led Marcion to

[2] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 484.

reject the God of the Old Testament and claim that Christ was merely a spiritual being who was not defiled by possessing a physical body.

Valentinus of Rome (AD 100–180)

Pagan philosophy continued to impact Christianity in the teaching of Valentinus (AD 100–180). According to Hippolytus, Valentinus was a Gnostic who attempted to adapt the dualism of Platonism to Christianity. For Valentinus, the One (i.e., the Form of the Good, which Valentinus called "Monad") was the ontological source of all being. From the One emanated 30 Aeons, which consist of 15 pairs of sexual complements. From two of the lower Aeons, Sophia and Sakia, the material world was generated. It was through the mistake of Sophia and the ignorance of Sakia that the lower world was brought into existence under the bondage of matter. Man, the highest being in the lower world, can either move back towards the One via knowledge or move further into the bondage of the material world by remaining spiritually ignorant.

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215)

Clement of Alexandria also sought to overlay Christian theology on top of the foundation of Platonism. For Clement, God was "the One." Below the One was the Logos. The Logos functioned as an intermediate agent that emanated out of the mind of God, serving as the wisdom of God, and possessing the power of God to create and govern all that is below him.[3] The process of creation by the Logos took place in three distinct stages. The Logos first created the immaterial forms in which formless matter was shaped. Second, the Logos created immaterial souls. Third, the Logos created the physical universe and human bodies out of eternal matter. These preexisting souls afterward were incarnated into their earthly bodies. In all this, Clement did not believe in creation ex nihilo, and he placed the Logos as an intermediate being that ontologically exists between the One and the cosmos, a confusion of the Creator-creature distinction.

Origen (AD 185–253)

Clement of Alexandria's student, Origen, similarly tried to incorporate the basic infrastructure of Platonism into Christianity. He viewed creation as occurring in two well-defined phases. Genesis 1:1–2:4 depicts the first phase, in which God created immaterial forms, which are only perceivable by the intellect. Genesis 2:5–5:2 depicts the second phase of creation, namely, the material universe that is perceivable by the five senses. Once again, an uncomfortable synthesis between Platonic dualism and Christian doctrine developed.

Theologians like Valentinus and Marcion were rejected as heretics by the early church, while individuals such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen were often viewed as near-heretics, or, at best, men trending in an unorthodox direction. Nevertheless, such syncretism continued in the early centuries, perhaps reaching its culmination in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, who lived sometime between the late third and early sixth centuries AD. Regrettably, this theologian's writings were later embraced by the medieval church.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS[4]

Background

As his name implies, Pseudo-Dionysius was not who he claimed to be. The real Dionysius lived in apostolic times (as mentioned in Acts 17:34) and was one of Paul's first converts in Athens, Greece. Tradition claims that the real

[3] Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 199–212.

[4] Some of the following material is taken from Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology: A Critical Appraisal of the Philosophical Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, New Studies in Theology (Conway, AR: FGP Academic, 2021), 71–94.

Dionysius became the first bishop of the church of Athens and suffered martyrdom under the persecution of Domitian—he was known as "the Areopagite," likely because he was a former member of the Areopagus council that convened on Mars Hill in Athens.

It appears that Pseudo-Dionysius was seeking to add weight and credibility to his philosophical and religious writings by claiming to be Dionysius the Areopagite of Acts 17—a man who presumably was first schooled in the philosophy of Athens and then in the doctrine of the apostle Paul. It is no wonder that Pseudo-Dionysius, in his attempt to mix Athens with Jerusalem, chose the name of Dionysius the Areopagite to be his own.

Regardless, because of the author's unwillingness to be open and truthful about his real name, not much is known about his life.[5] For hundreds of years, his books were passed on and generally believed to be the writings of an earlier age. Because of this, his Neoplatonic ideas had a huge influence on the church in the Middle Ages. It was not until the Florentine humanist scholar Lorenzo Valla (c. AD 1407–1457) challenged the date of the Dionysian corpus in the mid-fifteenth century AD that the author Dionysius became known as *Pseudo*-Dionysius.[6]

At the heart of Neoplatonic thought is the idea that there is an outflow of all things from God and an inflow of all things back into God. Dionysius sought to synthesize the Chain of Being of Neoplatonism with Christianity by inserting biblical language into this divine outflow and inflow framework. The highest degree of being, according to Dionysius, is God. God is the One—the very ground of all being. God is the One because he is irreducible and operationally simple with no distinct attributes. The second degree of being is the Trinity. This is because the Trinity has two opposing streams that eternally flow out of the Godhead and back into the Godhead. The stream of unity (the divine essence) contains universals, and the stream of diversity (the three divine persons) contains particulars. From the universals and particulars flowing out of and back into the Trinity emanates the cosmos with all of its own universals and particulars. According to Dionysius, there are two main ways of arriving at knowledge of the unknowable God—the *way of negation* and the *way of affirmation*.[7]

The Way of Negation

According to Dionysius, the irreducibly simple God, who is completely transcendent, is entirely unknowable. Dionysius claimed that God transcends all thought and is beyond any human comparisons: "For if all the branches of knowledge belong to things that have being, and if their limits have reference to the existing world, then that which is beyond all Being must also be transcendent above all knowledge."[8] Therefore, nothing positive can be said about God, ultimately. Dionysius said, "The One which is beyond thought surpasses the apprehension of thought, and the Good which is beyond utterance surpasses the reach of words" (*DN* 1.1).

Since God cannot be described using any meaningful language, God is best understood by the things which he is not (*via negativa*). In this, Dionysius agreed with Plotinus, as summarized by Herman Bavinck:

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[5] "Everything that we know about him," Bernhard Blankenhorn stated, "comes from his corpus." Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 4.

[6] The rest of this article will refer to Pseudo-Dionysius simply as "Dionysius." The earliest reference to the Dionysian corpus was by Severus in AD 553 at the Council of Constantinople in defense of monophysitism. Monophysitism asserts that Christ's human nature was absorbed by his divinity.

[7] Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* 1, in *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, trans. C. E. Rolt (Berwick, ME: Ibis, 2004), 191–94 (hereafter cited in text as *MT*).

[8] Dionysius, *The Divine Names* 1.4, in *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, trans. C. E. Rolt (Berwick, ME: Ibis, 2004), 59 (hereafter cited in text as *DN*).

> [A]ccording to Plotinus nothing can be said of God that is not negative. God is absolutely one—above all plurality—and therefore not describable in terms of thought or the good, not even in terms of being, for all these determinations still imply a certain plurality. As pure unity, God is indeed the cause of thought, being, and the good, but he himself is distinct from them and transcends them. He is unbounded, infinite, without form, and so altogether different from every creature that not even activity, life, thought, consciousness, or being can be ascribed to him. He is inapprehensible by our thought and language. We cannot say what he is, only what he is not.[9]

What is God not? First, God is not personal. Man is personal because he can be distinguished from other persons. Personhood is something that is separate from the whole, something that is distinguishable. God, however, is simple and absolute, something that transcends all forms of separation. God is beyond all relations. According to Dionysius, God is "Unity." Thus, God is beyond personhood; he is "Super-Personal," or as Dionysius often stated, God is "Super-Essential."

Second, God is not even a conscious being. Why? Because consciousness implies a state of thinking, and thinking implies self-awareness. Self-awareness cannot happen without a thinking subject making a distinction between his thoughts and that which is being thought upon. Thus, there is a separation, at least in the mind, between the thinking subject and the object of thought. With the Super-Essential, however, there can be no distinction or divisions.

Third, God does not even exist—or, at least, he transcends the concept of existence. As stated by Dionysius, "He neither was, nor will be, nor hath entered the life-process, nor is doing so, nor ever will, or rather He doth not even exist, but is the Essence of existence in things that exist" (*DN* 5.4). This is because, according to Dionysius, the word *existence* implies a distinction between that which exists and that which does not exist. And God, being purely simple, is beyond all distinctions.

Finally, Dionysius went so far as to undermine the foundation of his whole argument. The reason why God is not personal, a conscious being, or even a being that exists is because he is absolute unity. God is absolute unity because God is one. Because God is simple, God is without differentiation. Yet, according to Dionysius, even the word *unity* comes infinitely short in defining God. Although it might be the best human term to help push our minds off into unknowable darkness, it remains inadequate in bringing us to any true knowledge of the unknowable. The term *unity* fails in that it implies a distinction and separation from that which is plural or divided. God is neither *one* nor *many*; he transcends them both. Thus, Dionysius's God is not even unity—he is, as Dionysius claimed, "Super-Unity."

For Dionysius, God is beyond consciousness, life, unity, essence, existence, and every other cognitive concept. God is beyond all these things, even beyond the word *transcendence*. What is left? Nothing. That is, nothing that is knowable:

> It [that is, God] is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding; nor is It any act of reason or understanding; nor can It be described by the reason or perceived by the understanding, since It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, or equality, or inequality, and since It is not immovable nor in motion, or at rest, and has no power, and is not power or light, and does not live, and is not life; nor is It personal essence, or eternity, or time; nor can It be

[9] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 35.

> grasped by the understanding, since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Goodness; nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; nor do existent beings know It as it actually is (MT 5).

Dionysius built his doctrine of God on negation. But the way of negation, though it can push our minds in the right direction, can only take us so far—and no further.

The Way of Affirmation

The way of affirmation, like the way of negation, is based on the Chain of Being. Because all things flow from the goodness of God—the first cause—all things share in his goodness. Thus, both the way of negation and the way of affirmation understand the nature of God by understanding the nature of the cosmos. The way of negation says God is like the cosmos but without all the imperfections, while the way of affirmation says God is like the cosmos in its perfections.

But with this stated, how is God the efficient cause of the world? How can something come out of nothing by a God who transcends existence? How could Dionysius say that "It [God] is the Universal Cause of existence while Itself existing not" (*DN* 1.1), and in another place, "It [God] is the Cause of all things and yet Itself is nothing" (*DN* 1.5)? Moreover, how does an unconscious God reveal himself to creation? What motivation do we have to seek God when he is completely unknowable and nowhere to be found? Rather than attempting to reconcile these statements, Dionysius seemed to revel in the inherent tension of his position: "[H]ow these things are so we cannot say, nor yet conceive" (*DN* 2.7).

To understand why Dionysius gloried in these paradoxes, we must understand his doctrine of "unification and differentiation." According to Dionysius, two antithetical poles exist in God—unity and diversity. There is a transcendent and hidden God and an immanent and revealed God. The revealed Trinitarian God flows out of the hidden non-Trinitarian God. And from unity and diversity within the Trinity flows the unity and diversity in creation, in the souls of men, and in everything else that exists. Therefore, Dionysius believed there are two sides to all existing things: unity and diversity, oneness and divisions, universals and particulars, and the one and the many. Unification and differentiation are the sole ingredients to all existing things, and their source flows out of the hidden God that transcends both unity and diversity.

Thus, Dionysius goes from a God who does not exist to a God who emanates out of his own being two separate streams—unity and diversity. In this way, God is the sole source of all universals and particulars. These two streams flow from God and at the same time remain in God. Dionysius, on more than one occasion, stated that "the Super-essence actually passes outside of Itself even while It remains all the time wholly within itself."[10] Nevertheless, although God transcends unity and diversity, God still is somehow (in a mystical way) both unity and diversity and thus the source of all universals and particulars that exist in the universe.

These two streams of unity and diversity are invisible emanations that eternally proceed out from and back into God. From a timeless and

[10] C. E. Rolt, introduction to *Dionysius, the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, trans. C. E. Rolt (London: SPCK, 1920), 15.

ongoing eternal act, these two streams forever flow out of his being and back into his being. The stream running out of God is diversity, whereas the stream rushing continuously back to God is unity. Diversity proceeds out of God as light emanates from the sun, and unity proceeds back into God as raindrops merge with the ocean. The closer something is to God, the more unified it is with God, as light beams are brighter the closer they are to their source. Conversely, the further something is removed from its source, the more diverse and different it becomes. Since God's diversity is running (or emanating) continuously out from God, it grows weaker in its being. Conversely, since the stream of unity is traveling back into God, its level of being continues to strengthen.

The "unification and differentiation" doctrine, according to Dionysius, can be seen most clearly in the Trinity. The essence of the triune God is unity. Yet without division or disturbance to this unity, the Trinity is at the same time diverse in that the Trinity includes three persons. Not only is the Trinity both unity and diversity, it is also both without compromise. The Godhead is diverse, seeing that the three persons are emanations that have flowed out of God. Yet, the three persons are one in unity, in that they continually flow back into God. Although diversity flows out of God, God never ceases to be God since he remains unified in his essence.

Though Dionysius taught that the Trinity is God, he often backpedaled by claiming that the Trinity is only a symbolic representation of God. As C. E. Rolt contends, according to Dionysius, "[T]he Eternal Distinctions of the Trinity because They have been revealed … must belong to the sphere of Manifestation or They could not be revealed."[11] In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity is not something that defines the ontological essence of God. The Trinity, therefore, exists only as an outward and visible manifestation of the invisible and unknowable Godhead, who is beyond differentiations and relations in his essence.

Therefore, according to Fran O'Rourke, "While Dionysius gives to the way of positive affirmation a real value, it is nevertheless evident that he attaches even greater significance to the path of negative knowledge."[12] The way of negation ends up overshadowing the way of affirmation. And as Herman Bavinck concluded about such approaches to God, "[E]ven negative theology fails to furnish us any knowledge of God's being, for in the final analysis God surpasses both all negation and all affirmation, all assertion and all denial."[13]

CONCLUSION

The evidence shows that, indeed, there has been a trajectory of professing Christian theologians in history who have been heavily influenced by the philosophy of Plato—Valentinus, Marcion, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Pseudo-Dionysius, to name a handful. But the theology of all these men spilled over into heresy or near-heresy. These individuals, in their attempt to wed the beliefs of Christianity with Platonic rationalism, embarked on projects of synthesis that all led to dead ends.

In contradictory fashion, rationalistic approaches to God seek to define God as existing at the top of an ontological Chain of Being, only afterward to deny that the essence of God can be known at all. Before Christian rationalists define God as utterly unknowable, however, they claim that he is an irreducibly simple abstract substance. Although everything emanates out of this irreducible abstract substance, this substance is not a personal

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11 Rolt, introduction, 8.

12 Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 16.

13 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 38.

being that is able to make active decisions. In such a simple substance there are no distinct operations. Therefore, at the end of the day, such an Ultimate Reality is not anything close to the personal God of natural revelation. This Ultimate Reality does not know humanity, does not speak to humanity, cannot hear humanity, and will not judge humanity.

Platonism, Neoplatonism, and Christian Platonism do not leave room for a knowable and personal God who created the world out of nothing. And yet that is exactly what the apostle Paul states that creation reveals—the eternal, divine, and personal God who is the Creator of all things (Rom 1:18–21). These philosophies, thus, are not built on natural revelation. Neither do they correspond with special revelation. All three philosophies fail because they are built on a Chain of Being, and a Chain of Being is fundamentally incompatible with the Creator God who is distinct in essence from his creation.

It has been said by some in our day that Christian Platonism is a part of the "great tradition." It is true enough that Platonism is found in one historical offshoot of professing Christendom, a tradition that has many branches. In that sense, Platonism may be considered a part of the *Christian* tradition. But when examined closely for the fruit that it has borne over time, one thing is certain. Platonism is not a part of the *great* tradition. For it leads its followers to a God who is not, in any way, distinct from his creation—and such a God is not, in any way, *great*. •

JEFFREY D. JOHNSON IS PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AT GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

Did Thomas Teach the Biblical God of Monergistic Salvation?

by Owen Strachan

INTRODUCTION

My father walked the woods of Maine for a living as a forester. Somewhere in the mists of memory, I remember a conversation with my father about tree health. Many of us would assume that trees are planted, they grow, and that is all one needs to say about the matter. But in truth, my father taught me, trees require care. Trees need help. Nature needs stewarding. It was always so, even in unfallen Eden. It is particularly so in a world under sin's dominion.

The principle of tree health that most stuck in my mind was this: weeds target trees. They try to kill them. They do so with tremendous cunning. I have often pondered how trees relate to the work of ministry and of false doctrine (Matt 7:15–20). There are some challenges to the gospel that one can spot a mile away. There are others, however, that require much closer care. They are like the weeds that choke the tree, albeit quietly and undetectably. Such doctrinal and spiritual threats constitute some of the toughest challenges the church's teachers face.

One such challenge is the rise of Neo-Thomism. Neo-Thomism has gained momentum in evangelical circles in the last few years. Neo-Thomism takes flight from the thought of Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–1274), who is credited with developing a system sometimes called "Classical Theism" that purportedly was inaugurated at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and came to full flower under Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformed Scholastics. Leaving discussion of broader Neo-Thomism aside, my central contention in this article is two-pronged, and the two parts are inextricably connected: (a) the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) of Thomas Aquinas represents a different system of redemption than that found in Scripture; and (b) as Thomas's doctrine of salvation is unbiblical, it presents a different God than the biblical God.

HOW DID WE GET HERE? ON THE RISE OF NEO-THOMISM AND ECUMENISM

Having nearly begun our study, we now screech on the brakes. We do so in order to answer a common question in our day. Asked in different forms, it is this: *Why is Thomas Aquinas such a big deal among evangelicals all of a sudden, and where does the disagreement over him come from*? In recent months, I have had many conversations with pastors, scholars, and friends about this question. They are, in many cases, mystified by the sudden ascendance of Thomism in professedly Protestant Reformed circles. After all, Thomas is "the" esteemed theologian of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant onlookers genuinely do not know why the scholastic method is being promoted, they struggle to follow various tooth-rattling clashes over Trinitarian doctrine, and they are surprised to see non-Thomistic evangelical institutions suddenly warm to Thomas.

Broadly speaking, the "great tradition" movement downplays soteriological differences and focuses attention on supposed ecumenical agreement over the doctrine of God (theology proper). It finds this common ground in the Nicene tradition, as it is often called, which took shape in the four ecumenical creeds, continued to be developed in the medieval period, and came to full flower under Thomas Aquinas.[1] In generations past, many Reformed theologians and pastors had little interaction with Aquinas and little sympathy for his broader program. Evangelical seminaries remained wary of him.[2] Today, however, Aquinas has emerged as the theologian the church has needed but has not heeded.

With such interest has come a very strong push to embrace strict subscription (even hyper-subscription) to various confessions and creeds, and a corresponding interest among some evangelical professors and seminarians in fraternity with Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers. Indeed, some "great tradition" advocates surprisingly seem to find more practical unity with Roman Catholics than with Reformed brothers who are not so persuaded of all the finer points of the classical "consensus."

In the present hour, Aquinas is supposedly the theological hero who can rescue us from theological drift. The neo-Reformed project, it is alleged, platformed soteriology, but divested itself of sound classical theology proper. Now, by a return to a certain version of Reformed scholasticism, we can right the ship. If we will embrace Doctor Angelicus (Aquinas, per the Catholics); if we will learn extensively from Catholic theologians and philosophers; if we will root out the biblicists with their supposedly "solo scriptura" method; if we will exchange the Reformational paradigm carved loosely by diverse voices and works like old Princeton, Spurgeon, early Westminster, Lloyd-Jones, and the neo-Reformed movement for a "great tradition" paradigm knit together by an ecumenical band of thinkers, we will save the church from its fundamentalist capsizing.

AQUINAS'S DOCTRINE OF SALVATION: FOUR CENTRAL TENETS

As we will see below, we must be very wary about such partnership. It is not that we should fail to love Roman Catholics; no, we must love them with the love of Christ. It is that Aquinas's program, including his soteriology, has some devastating problems. In what follows, we will examine four dimensions of Aquinas's soteriology, finding major failings in each.

First dimension: baptismal regeneration. Aquinas followed Augustine in affirming that baptism regenerates the sinner. His affirmation of baptismal quickening was not guarded or cautious, as the following selection shows:

> I answer that, By Divine institution water is the proper matter of Baptism; and with reason. First, by reason of the very nature of Baptism, which is a regeneration unto spiritual life. And this answers to the nature of water in a special degree; wherefore seeds, from which

[1] Strangely, the "great tradition" rarely features voices from the East, aside from the Cappadocian theologians. The more person-oriented Trinitarianism of the east, for example, often gets no mention in works that supposedly capture the unanimity of the "great tradition." Further, many elements of "great tradition" theology simply mute or bypass considerable theological reconstruction of different doctrines—for example, Calvin's argument that the Son's person (*hypostasis*) is eternally begotten, not his essence of deity.

[2] One exception was Southern Evangelical Seminary and its emphasis on evangelical Thomism under the direction of Norman Geisler. This led a number of young Baptists, including some who did not have much grounding in historical theology, first to become curious about Thomas, then to develop a strong interest in his theology, and finally, to become Roman Catholic. By no means did all SES students become Catholic; many, it seems, did not. But a shocking number did—by one informal count, more than thirty students—alongside leaders at the institution. See Douglas Beaumont, *Evangelical Exodus: Evangelical Seminarians and Their Paths to Rome* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2016).

> all living things, viz. plants and animals are generated, are moist and akin to water. For this reason certain philosophers held that water is the first principle of all things.[3]

For Aquinas, "spiritual life" begins with baptism. In it, nothing less than "regeneration" occurs. Thus, we conclude, following his teaching, that without the act of baptism, in normative terms man cannot be born again. As "water" gives life in the created order, so the water of baptism gives life in the spiritual realm. Water is the "first principle" of spiritual life, and without it, no one can live.

Aquinas underlined this point in another section of the *Summa*. Against the idea that baptism only partially addresses sin, Aquinas argued as follows: "Hence it is clear that by Baptism man dies unto the oldness of sin, [*sic*] and begins to live unto the newness of grace. But every sin belongs to the primitive oldness. Consequently every sin is taken away by Baptism."[4] The conviction could not be clearer: Aquinas saw the moment of newness, of living under the reign of grace, as arriving in baptism. Before this, man lives under the "oldness of sin." During baptism, the "newness of grace" dawns. Nor is this an undefined spiritual awakening with indeterminate effects. In baptism, "every sin is taken away." Aquinas does not hedge or qualify this verdict; baptism removes sin decisively and definitively.

Second dimension: justification by infusion. Thomas held that justification was a free act of God. He pointed to the sovereignty of God in salvation all throughout his writings. Thus, one can find many passages that sound Reformational and Protestant on the surface. But embedded in Thomas's doctrine of justification was a parallel idea, one that corrupted his emphasis on divine action in justification. "[T]he justification of the unrighteous," Thomas argued, includes "the infusion of grace." Perhaps no aspect of Thomas's soteriology is more complex than this one. For Thomas, justification both remits sin and instigates an "effect" upon us, as the following quotation displays:

> Now an offense is remitted to anyone, only when the soul of the offender is at peace with the offended. Hence sin is remitted to us, when God is at peace with us, and this peace consists in the love whereby God loves us. Now God's love, considered on the part of the Divine act, is eternal and unchangeable; whereas, as regards the effect it imprints on us, it is sometimes interrupted, inasmuch as we sometimes fall short of it and once more require it.[5]

One could easily read these words and miss the doctrinal dynamite they contain. For Thomas, justification does, in biblical terms, mean the remission of sin, as Thomas argues in his first two sentences above. But then he expands the point, and in that expansion he enters a world of trouble. Justification for Thomas is a remission, but it is also an *effect*. Elsewhere Thomas will use the term "infusion" to capture this principle implanted into the soul:

> Objection 2. Further, the remission of guilt consists in the Divine imputation, according to Psalm 31:2: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord hath not imputed sin." Now the infusion of grace puts something into our soul, as stated above (I–II:110:1). Hence the infusion of grace is not required for the remission of guilt.
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> Reply to Objection 2. As God's love consists not merely in the act of the Divine will but

[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920–22), III.66.3.
[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.66.3.
[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II.113.2.

> also implies a certain effect of grace, as stated above (I–II:110:1), so likewise, when God does not impute sin to a man, there is implied a certain effect in him to whom the sin is not imputed; for it proceeds from the Divine love, that sin is not imputed to a man by God.[6]

As presented here, justification is both a momentary act—in which God "does not impute sin to a man"—and an effect in the Christian. The best explanatory picture of the infusion motif of the Roman Catholic works-based gospel is, perhaps, that of a little engine planted into the soul. God makes us a Christian, yes, but he also puts an engine in us that produces works that help to justify us. Salvation is of grace, yes, but it also stems from "a certain effect" in us that God brings about.

This subtle addition radically alters the nature of biblical justification. It changes justification from a decisive, once-for-all declaration issued by God on the lone basis of the faith he gives us (Rom 3:28; 4:5) to a *process* begun in the moment of remission—yet not at all completed without the "effect" of our works—in correspondence to the Catholic sacramental system. Thomas's justification doctrine might initially sound positive, we see, but if one pays attention and reads closely, one finds that the biblical system of salvation has been altered, expanded, and thus rejected. Calvin spoke well in response to the Council of Trent's (AD 1545–1563) justification doctrine:

> Scripture, indeed, removes all doubt on another ground, when it opposes faith to works, to prevent its being classed among merits. Faith brings nothing of our own to God, but receives what God spontaneously offers us. Hence it is that faith, however imperfect, nevertheless possesses a perfect righteousness, because it has respect to nothing but the gratuitous goodness of God.[7]

We are justified by faith alone, not by an infusion of grace or by the works that grace "effects." What Thomas taught is essentially what Trent codified; what Trent codified is what Calvin and the Reformers blessedly denied.

Third dimension: acts of penance. For Thomas and his fellow Catholic doctrinaires, believers must throughout their lives atone for sin through penance. In specific form, sins committed after baptism necessitate penance, which comes as sinners confess their sin to a priest and are absolved of them by that priest. Such acts form a crucial part of the Roman Catholic sacramental system. When one engages penance rightly, one comes away clean; without penance, one remains polluted by sin.

Aquinas developed such a view in unmistakable terms. He wrote that "[T]his sacrament of Penance … [consists] in the removal of certain matter, namely sin, in the sense that sins are said to be the matter of Penance," an articulation showing that penance is no merely symbolic act.[8] As with all dimensions of Catholic sacramentalism, the act itself communicates grace to the person involved. Penance effects the "removal" of sin for Thomas. He reinforced this point elsewhere in the *Summa* by using his characteristic "both-and" method, ascribing absolution from penance to God and also to those ministering to the flock: "God alone absolves from sin and forgives sins authoritatively; yet priests do both ministerially, because the words of the priest in this sacrament work as instruments of the Divine power, as in the other sacraments: because it is the Divine power that works inwardly

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[6] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II.113.2.

[7] John Calvin, *Acts of the Council of Trent with Its Antidote*, Comprehensive John Calvin Collection (Ages Digital Library, 1998), 110.

[8] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.84.3.

in all the sacramental signs, be they things or words, as shown above (III:62:4; III:64:2)."[9]

What a troubling conception this is. The sacraments "work as instruments of the Divine power," effecting salvation as they are performed by the priest. God alone absolves, he declares, but then he doubles back. The priest must "ministerially" absolve the sinner. The outcome is obvious: without performance of the sacraments, sin is not absolved and—we can say even more strongly—*cannot* be absolved. Penance is what God has appointed to forgive sinners; without this sacramental performance, forgiveness does not occur. Lest anyone think this conclusion is overextended, Aquinas wrote just as much:

> [I]t is necessary for the salvation of the sinner that his sin be taken away. This, indeed, cannot take place without the sacrament of Penance, in which the power of Christ's Passion works through the absolution of the priest, together with the action of the penitent who co-operates with grace for the destruction of sin.[10]

Over against a monergistic biblical understanding of confession and forgiveness—all located in God's working without any human ministerial conduit—Aquinas states beyond a shadow of a doubt that sin's removal "cannot take place" without "penance." Sin remains in the life of the individual in question unless that person takes the sacrament, leaving them in continual distress and peril. But once the priest makes absolution, all is well. The conscience is cleared, and sin is overcome—until, that is, the next time transgressions occur.

In this section on penance, Aquinas did not point his readers to Christ the great high priest. He pointed them to Catholic priests as the agents of forgiveness. He gave a set formula by which absolution occurs—a formula nowhere found in the Word of God. With his fellow Catholic theologians, Aquinas invented a mechanism of grace. Nor did he equivocate about the importance of this sacrament: "[I]t is evident," he wrote, "that after sin the sacrament of Penance is necessary for salvation, even as bodily medicine after man has contracted a dangerous disease."[11] We contrast these words, and Thomas's positions, with Calvin's biblical approach to supposed "absolution":

> When Christ gave the command to the apostles and conferred upon them the power to forgive sins [Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23], he did not so much desire that the apostles absolve from sins those who might be converted from ungodliness to the faith of Christ, as that they should perpetually discharge this office among believers. Paul teaches this when he writes that the mission of reconciliation has been entrusted to the ministers of the church and that by it they are repeatedly to exhort the people to be reconciled to God in Christ's name [2 Corinthians 5:18, 20].[12]

How different Calvin's faithful counsel is from what Thomas taught. Much as it pains us to say, in Thomas's system, the believer does not live all his days with sin dealt with and removed by the work of the cross; in Thomas's system, the Catholic worshipper must have sin continually handled and re-handled as he passes from sinful back to clean, and clean back to sinful, in a never-resolving process.

Fourth dimension: indulgences. The most rudimentary version of Reformation history features this essential detail: Martin Luther went to war with Rome over indulgences. Luther

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[9] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.84.3.
[10] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.84.5.
[11] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.84.5.
[12] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.22.

felt unease over many corruptions wrought by the Catholic church, but none of them piqued his righteous displeasure more than the sale of indulgences, which offered plenary forgiveness of sins at a monetary price.

Along these lines, it is curious that Thomas is being feted by some in the evangelical academy today, for his vision of indulgences does not pass the biblical smell-test. Thomas mishandled Scripture to ground the granting of indulgences, as the following section of his writing reveals:

> I answer that, All admit that indulgences have some value, for it would be blasphemy to say that the Church does anything in vain. But some say that they do not avail to free a man from the debt of punishment which he has deserved in Purgatory according to God's judgment, and that they merely serve to free him from the obligation imposed on him by the priest as a punishment for his sins, or from the canonical penalties he has incurred. But this opinion does not seem to be true. First, because it is expressly opposed to the privilege granted to Peter, to whom it was said (Matthew 16:19) that whatsoever he should loose on earth should be loosed also in heaven. Wherefore whatever remission is granted in the court of the Church holds good in the court of God.[13]

Thomas gets numerous realities disastrously wrong here. First, the Catholic Church did many things in vain. At the top of the "Things in Vain" list would be the sacramental soteriology we have thus far outlined, with indulgences in pride of place. Second, Thomas assumes that "Purgatory" is a real state, where Scripture nowhere teaches such a concept. Third, Thomas interprets Christ's granting of the "keys" of his kingdom to entail the sacramental performance of forgiveness (where it actually signals the commission to preach the gospel and guard the church by discipline). Essentially, this entire paragraph represents a system of falsehood constructed off a distortion and misreading of the biblical ecclesiological framework.

But there is more trouble to come, sadly. Thomas next argues in the *Summa* for what is called the "treasury of merit" in Catholic theology, concluding that the righteous acts of believers may suffice to meet the sinful deficiencies of other believers:

> Hence we must say on the contrary that indulgences hold good both in the Church's court and in the judgment of God, for the remission of the punishment which remains after contrition, absolution, and confession, whether this punishment be enjoined or not. The reason why they so avail is the oneness of the mystical body in which many have performed works of satisfaction exceeding the requirements of their debts; in which, too, many have patiently borne unjust tribulations whereby a multitude of punishments would have been paid, had they been incurred. So great is the quantity of such merits that it exceeds the entire debt of punishment due to those who are living at this moment: and this is especially due to the merits of Christ: for though He acts through the sacraments, yet His efficacy is nowise restricted to them, but infinitely surpasses their efficacy.[14]

Alas, this is all a fiction. Christ does not "act through the sacraments" as Thomas says; this is a wrong conception of the working of God. There is no *ex opera operato* ministry performed sacramentally according to Scripture. Neither is there a whole-church treasury of merit that can

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[13] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Suppl.25.1.
[14] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Suppl.25.1.

cover the "debt of punishment" that living people deserve. Outside of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone, Scripture nowhere teaches that one man's righteousness avails for another. Aside from Christ, one man cannot store up merit for another, communicate merit to one another, and stand in for another before God.

Tragically, Thomas Aquinas made a major contribution in accrediting these false notions. In so doing, he abetted the Babylonian captivity of the church that Luther heroically revolted against. We could say it this way: what Aquinas accredited, Luther abominated. When Luther initially condemned Rome's errors, he repudiated the standard Catholic teaching on indulgences: "Any truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of both the penalty and guilt, even without letters of indulgence."[15] So it was in Luther's time, and so it is today.

SUMMARY: AQUINAS'S DIFFERENT GOD

Some tell us in our time that we can chart a middle way here. We can love Thomas but avoid his errors. We can avoid his doctrine of salvation, even while we embrace his doctrine of God. We may share many commitments with some who make these claims. We desire no doctrinal war with them, and we pray for peace in the body. But we cannot constrain ourselves from warning the church today: Thomas was not a proto-Reformer. Considered in wide-scope view, with his body of teaching taken into account, Thomas is not a sound guide.[16] Surely mature Christians can read Thomas, yes, but all who do so need to be advised that this man's theology has unsound soteriology—among other considerable issues—at its core.

Thomas's way differs sharply from the biblical witness. We are not regenerated by baptism; we are regenerated by the Spirit (John 3). We are not justified by infusion; we are justified by faith alone, such that we are counted righteous solely in Christ (Rom 4–5). Our God does not require penance of us; our God enables us to produce good works, but those good works in no way atone for sin, nor even address it (Eph 2:8–9). We have no ability to transfer merit to others through indulgences, nor to buy them for ourselves; only the perfectly righteous Christ will suffice as the basis of our acceptance before God (2 Cor 5:21).

This brings us to the matter of systems. The God of Thomas has some real overlap with the biblical God, no doubt. But the God of Thomas's trinitarian theology is the same God who, in Thomas's view, saves sinners through baptism, the merit of the saints, penance, and indulgences. Plainly stated, the God of Thomas presides over an entirely different system of salvation than the biblical God. Does God make the first move in salvation for Thomas? Yes, he does. But the God of Thomas is nonetheless an adapted God who accepts an adjusted gospel. As with wrong conceptions of God in countless other systems and religions, the God Thomas presents, we must ultimately say, is not the biblical God. You cannot take the biblical God, tear away the doctrine of salvation he has given us in the Word, and retain the true God. Taking away the soteriology of Scripture and replacing it with synergistic

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[15] Martin Luther, "A Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," No. 36.

[16] A number of faithful theologians and pastors have come to this conclusion for some time. As a sample, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Thomas Aquinas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019); Lane Tipton, interview with *Reformed Forum*, "Van Til, Thomas Aquinas, and the Natural Knowledge of God," April 8, 2022; Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008 [1955]); John Owen, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ* (1661); Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority, Volume Five: God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (Dallas: Word, 1999 [1982]); Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology: A Critical Appraisal of the Philosophical Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2021); John Frame, "Scholasticism for Evangelicals: Thoughts on *All That Is in God* by James Dolezal," November 25, 2017, accessible at https://frame-poythress.org/scholasticism-for-evangelicals-thoughts-on-all-that-is-in-god-by-james-dolezal.

sacramental soteriology means losing the biblical God. In the end, a different being (created by man)—with different prerogatives, different standards, and a different soteriology—stands where the biblical God should be.

A skilled philosopher, one cannot doubt the sincerity of Thomas's convictions, nor the breadth of his thinking. He both thought deeply and wrote searchingly. We all fail in many ways, the present writer included (Jas 3:2). But it is not that Aquinas only made a couple mistakes in his writing. No, the problem goes much deeper. Though he is sometimes puffed by evangelicals as "the Angelic Doctor," Aquinas practiced Catholicism with seriousness and unflagging zeal. In truth, Aquinas stands as the foremost pre-Trent architect of the false gospel of formal Roman Catholic teaching.

But perhaps, even after this treatment of Thomas, someone will say in response to me, "But Thomas has all this rich theology proper that you're ignoring! He's orthodox as I read him. How can you charge him with not knowing the true God, even if he does get some things wrong on soteriology?" My reply is simple. Just as Thomas might have seemingly orthodox theology proper, so too may a prosperity gospel preacher have a seemingly correct Trinitarianism. Let's say that on paper, he holds to Nicene theology, and even honors the "great tradition." But what if that preacher proclaims a false gospel, one in which sin has no place, and the gospel as he presents it is actually about God making all your biggest dreams come true? Clearly, even technical orthodoxy on the Trinity does not change the fact that such a preacher does not honor or know the true God.

We can give a second example along these lines. If we think back to the rise of Protestant liberalism in America roughly 100 years ago, we can readily identify many seemingly orthodox pastors in the Protestant ranks. They posed no challenge in their stated confession to the creeds and councils. They checked every orthodox box there was regarding the doctrine of God. They affirmed the Trinity. Yet it was just this type of figure that enabled the dying of the light in multiple denominations. Why was this so? Because these seemingly orthodox leaders did not love the biblical gospel. Many rejected Christ's penal substitutionary atonement for sinners. They rejected the theological import of the very act by which men are saved. And in doing so, they rejected the biblical God.

Mark this well: if you do not preach the true gospel, you are not a Christian pastor. If you do not love the true gospel, you do not love God, nor do you know God. Said differently: lose the true gospel, and you lose the true God.

CONCLUSION

At base, while we can recognize Thomas as a gifted writer and thinker, we cannot introduce seminarians and church members to him as a sound proto-Reformer who taught the true gospel and would have stood shoulder to shoulder with Luther, Calvin, Knox, and the rest. When studied carefully, Thomas's theology appears as dangerous growth that would choke out the life of the tree. In our feeble efforts to guard the true biblical gospel (2 Tim 1:13–14), we cannot fail to speak. We must, after all, seek to protect the flock Christ loves—and in doing so, honor the true biblical God and the system of salvation he has given us. •

OWEN STRACHAN IS RESEARCH PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AT GRACE BIBLE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

SUMMARY CHART

Twenty Watershed Doctrines on Which Evangelicals Do Not Agree with Thomas Aquinas

CATEGORY OF THEOLOGY	#	DOCTRINE	*SUMMA THEOLOGIAE* QUOTE (I.E., AQUINAS, IN HIS OWN WORDS)	PARALLEL DOCTRINE IN THE RCC TODAY: *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* REFERENCE	BIBLICAL REFUTATION (ESV)
Doctrine of Scripture	1	Scripture and oral tradition (i.e., Church teaching) are both divine and infallible sources of authority.	"Constantly inspired as they were by the Holy Cross, the Apostles left to their churches certain observances which were not committed to writing but were preserved in the practice of the Church through successive generations of the faithful." (IIIa, q.25, a.3) "[O]ne who holds fast to Church teaching as to an infallible rule of faith gives assent to all that the Church teaches." (IIaIIae, q.5, a.3)	§§80–83, 97, 182	**2 Timothy 3:16–17** "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."
	2	Individual Christians are not permitted to interpret the Bible for themselves (it must be mediated through Catholic teachers).	"Conversely, anyone who from among the many things taught by the Church picks some and not others as he chooses, no longer holds fast to Church teaching as an infallible rule, but to his own will. Clearly, then, a heretic obstinately disbelieving one article is not prepared to follow Church teaching at every point." (IIaIIae, q.5, a.3)	§85, 100	**Acts 17:11** "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."
Doctrine of God	3	God cannot be understood by human beings in what He is, but only in what He is not.	"Now we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not; we must therefore consider the ways in which God does not exist, rather than the ways in which he does." (Ia, q.3 pr.)	§43	**Romans 1:19–20** "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."
Doctrine of Man	4	Sin is a desire for something good but one that spills over into excess.	"[E]very sin presupposes an inordinate desire for some temporal good." (IaIIae, q.77, a.4) "[S]in enters into these desires [concupiscences], so Aristotle thinks, only when they are excessive as to amount." (IIaIIae, q.142, a.2)	§2515	**Romans 8:7** "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."

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Doctrine of Salvation	5	There is no salvation (ordinarily) outside of the Catholic Church and the Pope.	"The interior flow of grace comes from no one else but Christ, whose humanity, because it is joined to the divinity, has the power to justify. But influence over members in the form of external guidance can be had by others. And in this sense others can be called heads of the Church … [T]he Pope is head of the whole Church, but only during the time of his pontificate … [he] take[s] the place of Christ…." (IIIa, q.8, a.6)	§846, 868	**Acts 4:11–12** "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
	6	Salvation is by grace and works.	"By his will man does perform works meriting eternal life; but … for this there is need that man's will should be prepared by God through grace." (IaIIae, q.109, a.5)	§1815, 2010, 2027	**Ephesians 2:8–9** "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
	7	Justification is by faith and baptism; it includes actual infused righteousness in the sinner (not just declared righteousness).	"[T]he justification of the unrighteous [includes] … the infusion of grace." (IaIIae, q.113, a.6) "The *reality and sign* is the baptismal character, for the latter is the reality signified by the external washing and is itself the sacramental sign of interior justification." (IIIa, q.66, a.1, italics in original)	§§1987–1995	**Romans 4:5–6** "And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works."
Doctrine of Sacraments	8	Sacraments are necessary for salvation.	"[T]he sacraments are necessary for man's salvation." (IIIa, q.61, a.1)	§1129	**Romans 4:9–10** "We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised."

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Doctrine of Sacraments	9	Baptism regenerates the sinner.	"[B]y baptism a person is rather regenerated spiritually." (IIIa, q.69, a.5)	§§1212–1215, 1227	**1 Peter 3:21** "… and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ …" (NIV 1984)
	10	The Mass (Lord's Supper) is a re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ that reconciles man to God and brings eternal life.	"[T]he Eucharist is necessary in order to bring [spiritual life] to its culmination.... [T]he Eucharist is the sacrament of the passion of Christ because in it a man is brought to spiritual perfection in being closely united to Christ who suffered for us." (IIIa, q.73, a.3) "[I]t is proper to this sacrament for Christ to be sacrificed in its celebration." (IIIa, q.83, a.1)	§1212, 1354, 1357, 1364–68, 1371, 1382–83, 1414	**Hebrews 9:25–26** "Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."
	11	The Christian should worship (adore) the bread and wine of the Mass since it turns into the physical body and blood of Christ.	"The reality of Christ's body in this sacrament demands, then, that the substance of the bread be no longer there after the consecration … [I]t would go against the reverence which is accorded to this sacrament if there were another substance present there which ought not to be given the worship of *latria*." (IIIa, q.75, a.2], italics in original)	§1378	**1 Corinthians 11:26–28** "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."
Doctrine of the Church	12	The Pope has supreme authority over all Christians.	"The head here is Christ himself, in whose place the Sovereign Pontiff [Pope] acts in the church. So then schismatics are those who refuse obedience to the Sovereign Pontiff and who refuse to communicate with the members of the Church subject to him." (IIaIIae, q.39, a.1)	§882, 937	**1 Peter 3:21** "So I [Peter] exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you … And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

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Doctrine of the Church	13	Sins can be forgiven only by confession to a Catholic priest (or bishop).	"[I]t is necessary for the salvation of the sinner that his sin be taken away. This, indeed, cannot take place without the sacrament of Penance, in which the power of Christ's Passion works through the absolution of the priest, together with the action of the penitent who co-operates with grace for the destruction of sin." (IIIa, q.84, a.5)	§§1456–57, 1461	**James 5:16** "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."
Doctrine of the Christian Life	14	No one can have assurance of salvation.	"Now the principle and source of grace, and its object, is God himself, who is beyond the reach of our knowledge on account of his sublimity … And so his presence in us or his absence cannot be known with certainty … Thus man cannot judge with certainty whether he has grace …" (IaIIae, q.112, a.5) "Paul is speaking here of the gifts of glory, given us in hope, which we know with the utmost certainty of faith; and yet we do not know with certainty that we have the grace by which we can merit them." (IaIIae, q.112, a.5)	§2005	**1 John 5:13** "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."
	15	Mortal sin results in a loss of grace and requires acts of penance by the sinner.	"For actual mortal sin is properly and principally the object of Penance …" (IIIa, q.84, a.2; cf. also IaIIae, q.71, a.4 for the distinction between mortal and venial sin)	§§1434–38, 1856	**Romans 8:38–39** "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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Doctrine of the Christian Life	16	Acts of penance rejustify the sinner before God.	"[T]hose things which are done by the penitent, whether they be words or deeds, are as it were the matter of this sacrament, but those things which are done by the priest take the part of the form." (IIIa, q.84, a.3) [T]his sacrament of Penance … [consists] in the removal of certain matter, namely sin, in the sense that sins are said to be the matter of Penance …" (IIIa, q.84, a.3)	§§1456–57, 1461	**Romans 4:2–3** "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.'"
	17	Indulgences granted by the Catholic Church remove or lessen the temporal punishments for one's sins.	"[I]ndulgences hold good both in the Church's court and in the judgment of God, for the remission of the punishment which remains after contrition, absolution, and confession … he who grants indulgences pays the debt of punishment which a man owes, out of the common stock of the Church's goods." (IIIa Suppl., q. 25, a.1)	§§1471–73	**Acts 8:20–21** "But Peter said to him [Simon the sorcerer], 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.'"
	18	Sinners can be restored to grace through the treasury of merit of the saints.	"[T]he saints in whom this super-abundance of satisfactions is found, did not perform their good works for this or that particular person, who needs the remission of his punishment (else he would have received this remission without any indulgence at all), but they performed them for the whole Church in general … These merits, then, are the common property of the whole Church." (IIIa Suppl., q.25, a.1)	§956, 1474–77	**Philippians 3:9** "… not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

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Doctrine of the Christian Life	19	Mary the mother of Jesus should be given hyper-veneration by Christians.	"[T]he Blessed Virgin … [deserves] the veneration known as dulia; however, since she is the Mother of God, this should be of a higher form than that given other creatures. For this reason the veneration paid her is termed hyperdulia, to indicate that it is more than ordinary dulia." (IIIa, q.25, a.5)	§971	**Revelation 22:8–9** "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.'"
Doctrine of Future Things	20	Purgatory is a third possible destination after death, distinct from heaven and hell, in which a sinner's sins can be paid.	"The purifying of the soul by the punishment of purgatory is nothing else than the expiation of the guilt that hinders it from obtaining glory." (IIIa Suppl., q.71, a.6)	§§1030–32, 1472	**2 Corinthians 5:8** "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

References to the *Summa* (except for the Supplement to the *Summa*) come from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols. (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964–81).

References to the Supplement to the *Summa* come from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920–22). James A. Weisheipl explains: "[T]he Supplement, intended to complete the Summa, is 'put together with scissors and paste from pieces cut out of Aquinas's writings on the Sentences [of Peter Lombard] (especially Bk. 4).'" James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 362.

References to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* come from *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City; Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000).

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