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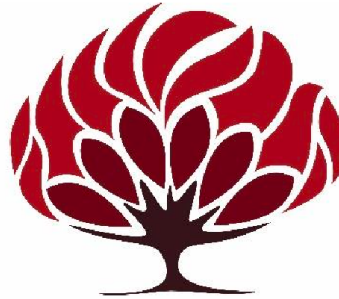
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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

***Sensi litterales et spirituales, lignum vitaeque: the Literal and Spiritual Senses of the
Scriptures with Reference to the Tree of Life in the Works of Thomas Aquinas***

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology by Research
at the University of Glasgow
in Partnership with Edinburgh Theological Seminary

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Revised July 2025

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Winfield Hart Benko, 6 March 2025

Abstract

“That first meaning, therefore, [in] which words signify things, pertains to the first sense, which is the ‘historical’ or ‘literal’ sense. Then, that second meaning, [in] which things which are signified through words also signify things, is called the ‘spiritual sense’; which is founded upon the ‘literal’, and presupposes it”. (*ST* Ia.q1.a10.co. My translation).

Thus runs Thomas Aquinas’ theory of meaning of the Scriptures. Wrestling with this seemingly simple statement, however, interpreters of the Angelic Doctor have argued much over what, precisely, Thomas sought to communicate in this pronouncement. Is it truly appropriate to understand Thomas to be speaking of multiple distinct kinds of meaning to be accessible in and through the text of the Scriptures? How much weight, in the friar’s mind, ought the interpreter of the Scriptures to rest on readings following the literal sense of the text, as opposed to those following the spiritual senses communicated through the words on the page? And does Thomas’ method of interpretation, as evidenced throughout his body of work, belie his celebrated statement at the opening of the *ST*?

This present work holds that Thomas does indeed insist upon the necessity of interpretation of the Scriptures according to both the literal and spiritual senses. The opening of the *ST* is no mere lip-service to a stock medieval formula. This work bears this thesis out through detailed examination of Thomas’ polymorphic readings of the Scriptural entity of the Tree of Life.

The first chapter of the present work rigorously examines the nature of Scripture itself in Thomas’ thought, focussing upon his understanding of the literal sense (the kind of meaning communicated through conventional signs, *i.e.*, words) and the spiritual senses (the kinds of meaning communicated through the *things* referred to by the conventional signs which fill the pages of the Scriptures). While the first category of meaning inheres in all texts, regardless of authorship, the second category is the sole province of works authored by both God and man.

The following chapters of the present work demonstrate the significant role which this distinction bears throughout Thomas’ body of work by way of numerous examples. The second chapter outlines Thomas’ readings, which follow the literal sense, of Scriptural passages referencing the Tree of Life. The third chapter examines Thomas’ readings, which follow the spiritual senses, of Scriptural passages referencing the Tree of Life.

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Abbreviations

Thomistic Sources¹

Opera maiora

- *Scriptum* - *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*
- *SCG* - *Summa contra gentiles contra paganorum*
- *ST* - *Summa theologiae*

Quaestiones

- *Pot.* - *De potentia*
- *Malo* - *De malo*
- *Quod.* - *Quaestiones de quodlibet*

Opuscula

- *Comp.* - *Compendium theologiae*

Commentaria

- *De Div. Nom.* - *Commentary on The Divine Names*

Commentaria biblica

- *Psal.* - *Super Psalmos*
- *Iob* - *Commentary on Job*
- *Isa.* - *Commentary on Isaiah*
- *Ier.* - *Commentary on Jeremiah*
- *Threnos* - *Commentary on Lamentations*
- *Matt.* - *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei*
- *Ioan.* - *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis*
- *CaMatt.* - *Catena aurea in Matthaum*
- *CaLuc.* - *Catena aurea in Lucam*
- *Caloan* - *Catena aurea in Ioannem*
- *Rom.* - *Commentary on Romans*
- *II Tim.* - *Commentary on 2 Timothy*
- *Heb.* - *Commentary on Hebrews*

¹ The conventional order of Thomas' works, including the *probabilia authenticitate* status of *Hic est liber* and *Germinet terra*, are drawn from the standard list provided by the Corpus Thomisticum, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html>.

Opera probabilia authenticitate

Sermones

- *Hic* - *Hic est liber*
- *Germinet* - *Germinet terra*²

Non-Thomistic Sources

Augustine

- *DGL* - *De genesii ad litteram*³
- *DDC* - *De doctrina christiana*⁴

² I follow Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, Revised Edition (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 338, in accepting both *Hic* and *Germinet* as Thomistic works.

³ In Augustine, *On Genesis: A Refutation Of The Manichees, The Unfinished Literal Meaning Of Genesis*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 13 (New City Press, 2004).

⁴ Saint Augustine, *Teaching Christianity: De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. Edmund Hill (New City Press, 1996).

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Introduction

I.1 General Introduction

Illa ergo prima significatio, qua voces significant res, pertinet ad primum sensum, qui est sensus historicus vel litteralis. Illa vero significatio qua res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant, dicitur sensus spiritualis; qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit.

“That first meaning, therefore, [in] which words signify things, pertains to the first sense, which is the historical or literal sense. Then, that second meaning, [in] which things which are signified through words also signify things, is called the spiritual sense; which is founded upon the literal, and presupposes it”.⁵

Thomas’ words at the opening of his *Summa theologiae* seem to elucidate his approach to Scriptural interpretation quickly and succinctly. However, as with so many Thomistic distillations, the Angelic Doctor’s thought grows in complexity the closer one looks. What does Thomas mean by describing a *sensus historicus* in distinction from a *sensus spiritualis*? Is the friar seeking to elevate the former whilst eclipsing the latter, or is he on a mission to enshrine and protect the supernatural meaning of the *sensus spiritualis* from being eclipsed by the *sensus historicus*? Recent scholars differ, and the debate on Thomas’ position has never been settled.

Why, though, does the Angelic Doctor’s position matter? A truly ‘catholic’ thinker, Thomas’ influence across broad swaths of Christian thought as an intellectual powerhouse has only grown over the past (nearly) eight centuries. The church would do well, then, to

⁵ ST Ia.q1.a10.co. My translation.

correctly understand his thought. While Thomas' hermeneutical theories have received attention in recent decades, they yet remain too little studied. This thesis is simply one footnote in that larger work.

I.2 Recent Developments in Thomistic Studies

Following from the Catholic *ressourcement* (retrieval) movement spearheaded by figures such as Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), a nova of scholarly interest in Thomas' work has been expanding since the mid-twentieth century. Centred mainly in France in the decades surrounding the Second World War,⁶ *ressourcement* theology was characterised by a goal of applying ancient Christian thought to modern Catholic theology.⁷ The *ad fontes* tendency of *ressourcement* thought may be seen in the number of works in its stream dedicated to reappraisal of patristic and medieval thought, including Etienne Gilson's *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas*,⁸ Marie-Dominique Chenu's *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*,⁹ and, perhaps most significantly, Henri de Lubac's quad-voluminous *Medieval Exegesis*. Though he disavows any advocacy for wholesale re-

⁶ Gabriel Flynn, "The Twentieth-Century Renaissance in Catholic Theology," in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199552870.003.0001>, 1.

⁷ Hans Boersma, "The Rupture Between Theology and Life," in *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery*, ed. Hans Boersma (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199229642.003.0001>, 3.

⁸ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1957).

⁹ M. D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A. M. Landry and D. Hughes (Henry Regnery Company, 1964).

adoption of ancient and medieval methods of biblical interpretation,¹⁰ de Lubac takes Thomas' deeply-engrained belief in the "equivalence of 'theology' and 'Scripture'" (he points to *ST* Ia.q1.a2.ad2) as an exemplar for all Christian theological reflection.¹¹ For de Lubac, the ancient (and medieval) Church's approach to Scripture has the power to unite the ancient and present Church,¹² and he hopes that Scriptural exegesis in the modern Church may recover some of the former's beauty, power and stability.

The work of de Lubac's English contemporary Beryl Smalley complements and contrasts with his own, surveying a vast amount of research on the Latin interpretive tradition, primarily between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries. Near the end of her *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Smalley argues that Thomas' work should be understood as the shining example of a new, marked shift towards a focus on the intention of the human author, as opposed to a focus on that of the divine author operative alongside and independently from that of the former,¹³ a point which de Lubac and Smalley debated

¹⁰ Henri de Lubac, "On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the "Fourfold Sense" in Scripture," in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (Ignatius, 1989), 109–27, 124.

¹¹ de Lubac, "Distich," 125.

¹² Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Volume 1: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Marc Sebanc (Eerdmans, 1998), xxi.

¹³ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Basil Blackwell, 1983), 300, 368. For an assessment of Smalley's concept of the novelty of Thomas, see Alastair J. Minnis, "Figuring the Letter: Making Sense of Sensus Litteralis in Late-Medieval Christian Exegesis," in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, ed. Adele Berlin and Mordechai Z. Cohen (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 159–82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107588554.008>, 163.

for decades.¹⁴ While Smalley sees in the Doctor's biblical interpretation a fixation, novel in the history of Christian biblical interpretation, on the *letter* of the Scriptural text,¹⁵ de Lubac argues for the essential continuity of Thomas' approach to Scripture with earlier approaches.¹⁶ The debate between Smalley and de Lubac was never quite settled. Though later in her career she revised her views in light of de Lubac's work,¹⁷ she nevertheless maintained Thomas' work to be representative of a late-medieval shift in exegetical focus to the literal sense of Scripture, over and against the spiritual senses, spurred on by the growing influence of Aristotelian thought.¹⁸

So, does Thomas' approach to Scripture share more with what came before, as de Lubac argues, or with what came after, as Smalley has it? While Minnis, in his examination of de Lubac's and Smalley's debates, follows Smalley,¹⁹ much scholarship on the history of the interpretation of Scripture in the following decades sides with de Lubac.

¹⁴ Alastair Minnis offers a helpful analysis of this debate in Minnis, "Figuring the Letter", 160-168, upon which the remainder of this paragraph draws.

¹⁵ Smalley, *Study*, 292-293.

¹⁶ "[T]he doctrine of the 'fourfold sense,' which had, from the dawn of the Middle Ages, been at the heart of exegesis, kept this role right to the end." de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 1*, 74. See also Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'Écriture*, vol. 4 (Aubier, 1964), 288. For an assessment of the conservatism of Thomas' work in de Lubac's thought, see Minnis, "Figuring the Letter", 166.

¹⁷ Smalley, *Study*, vii.

¹⁸ Beryl Smalley, "Use of the 'Spiritual' Senses of Scripture in Persuasion and Argument by Scholars in the Middle Ages," *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne Et médiévale* 52 (1985): 44-63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26188860>, 61-63. On the later stages of the debate, see Minnis, "Figuring the Letter", 167-168.

¹⁹ Minnis, "Figuring the Letter", 168.

Following the work of the French *ressourcement* theologians, the scholarship from the latter half of the twentieth century onward has seen a growing dissatisfaction with Enlightenment methods of biblical criticism and numerous calls for a return to pre-modern approaches to the interpretation of Scripture—both within and outside of the Roman Catholic church. Methodist historian David Steinmetz’s 1980 article “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis” epitomises this shift. “The medieval theory of levels of meaning in the biblical text,” Steinmetz writes, “with all its undoubted defects, flourished because it is true, while the modern theory of a single meaning, with all its demonstrable virtues, is false”.²⁰ Steinmetz takes Thomas’ approach to the interpretation of Scripture—which grounds the meaning of the text in the intention of the divine author, thus allowing the possibility of a plurality of meanings—as a stronger standard for biblical interpretation than post-Enlightenment critical methods.²¹ Like de Lubac, Steinmetz does not specifically advocate for a re-adoption of Thomas’ theory of the fourfold sense. However, Steinmetz’s view (like de Lubac’s) displays dissatisfaction with post-Enlightenment approaches to the biblical text, and sees a theologically-inflected view of Scripture such as Thomas’, which is “adequate to the nature of the text which it is interpreting”, as a standard to which modern biblical scholars must aspire.²²

²⁰ David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (April 1980): 27–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004057368003700103>, 38.

²¹ Steinmetz, “Superiority,” 31–32.

²² Steinmetz, “Superiority,” 38.

Following Steinmetz, examinations have proliferated from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives of the value of patristic and medieval approaches to Scripture. Though the works examined below are not undertaken completely with reference to Thomas' writings, yet they, without fail, praise the Angelic Doctor's thought, arguing that modern theology should follow Thomas' characteristically medieval emphasis on the integration of Scripture and theology.²³ In the Protestant corner of recent scholarship stands Michael Allen and Scott Swain's *Reformed Catholicity*, a short work arguing for the necessity of "pursuing a program of retrieval" of historic Christian theological thought "on Protestant principles".²⁴ Comparing Thomas' views favourably with Calvin's,²⁵ Allen and Swain take Thomas' approach to Scripture, in which, as they see it, "Scripture...guide[s] theology",²⁶ as exemplary for the unified task of Protestant biblical hermeneutics and theology. Thomas receives the star treatment in the recent edited volume *Aquinas Among the Protestants*²⁷ (to which Allen and Swain both contribute articles), a proof-of-concept for Protestant retrieval of the friar's thought which both examines Thomas' Protestant reception and engages with his theological thought. Several other recent works focus in particular on biblical hermeneutics, perhaps most notably Craig Carter's *Interpreting*

²³ The following review of the relevant scholarship in Protestant and Catholic corners is necessarily a sketch, intended to trace broad outlines in recent writing.

²⁴ Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise Of Retrieval For Theology And Biblical Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2015), 13.

²⁵ Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 133.

²⁶ Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 131.

²⁷ Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen, eds., *Aquinas Among the Protestants* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018).

Scripture with the Great Tradition. Evoking in equal measure Steinmetz and de Lubac, Carter describes a “Great Tradition” of Christian exegesis, within which stand all faithful interpreters, from Justin Martyr to John Calvin, which “has always allowed for a fuller meaning (*sensus plenior*) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit without opening the door to interpretive anarchy”.²⁸ Carter situates Thomas’ approach to Scripture squarely within his “Great Tradition” and compares his work favourably, again, to that of Luther and Calvin.²⁹ Additionally, a work running counter in many ways to Carter’s argument, Iain Provan’s *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture*, evaluates Thomas’ thought in much the same way.³⁰ As Provan argues, “it is possible in our Bible reading to be appreciative of, and to stand properly in continuity with, much of the pre-Reformation heritage, while at the same time by no means abandoning the attempt to read both tradition and Scripture in accordance with the principles of Reformation hermeneutics”.³¹

A renewal of interest in Thomas’ approach to Scripture in particular is also clear among Catholic scholars. Though treatments of the connection in Thomas’ thought between *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina* (what might be described in modern terms as

²⁸ Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Baker Academic, 2018), 27.

²⁹ Carter, *Interpreting Scripture*, 181.

³⁰ Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Baylor University Press, 2017), 82.

³¹ Provan, *Reading*, 20.

“theology” or “holy teaching”³²) have been common for decades,³³ the new millennium has seen a spate both of works on Thomas’ approach to Scripture in particular and of constructive works on biblical interpretation with continual reference to Thomas’ thought. In the latter category, most notably, is Matthew Levering’s *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, which posits a theory of biblical interpretation based on an understanding of history in which the individual Christian “participates” in the sacred chain of events described in the text.³⁴ Levering takes Thomas’ approach to Scripture as an exemplar of such an understanding of history.³⁵ Much of the focus in present Catholic Thomistic scholarship on Thomas’ approach to Scripture can be traced back to Wilhelmus G.B.M. Valkenberg’s study *Words of the Living God*. There, Valkenberg tabulates and evaluates Thomas’ citations of *auctoritates* (authorities) in sections of the *Scriptum* and the *ST*. In his examination of the “place and function”³⁶ (quantity and quality) of Thomas’ citations of Scripture in both works, Valkenberg argues that Thomas’ theological work is always carried out with

³² Bruce D. Marshall, “Quod Scit Una Uetula: Aquinas on the Nature of Theology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph P. Wawrykow (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 1–35, 3.

³³ See e.g. J. Van Der Ploeg, “The Place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 10, no. 4 (1947): 398–422, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1947.0028>.

³⁴ Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 1.

³⁵ Levering, *Exegesis*, 34.

³⁶ Wilhelmus G. B. M Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, New Series of the Publications of the Thomas Instituut Te Utrecht, VI (Peeters Publishers, 2000), 2.

reference to and conditioned by the words of Scripture—that Scripture is the primary *auctoritas* in Thomas’ thought.³⁷

Following Valkenberg’s work, in recent years, a spate of examinations of Thomas’ approach to the interpretation of Scripture have emerged—examinations, in particular, of Thomas’ *lecturae* (commentaries) on Scripture. Christopher Baglow’s *Modus et Forma* examines Thomas’ interpretive practice as applied in the friar’s commentary on Ephesians.³⁸ The following years saw the production of the critical volume *Aquinas on Doctrine*, with an introductory chapter by the same author discussing the relation between *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina* in Thomas’ thought,³⁹ as well as the volume’s follow-up *Aquinas on Scripture*, offering readings of a portion of Thomas’ commentary material.⁴⁰ The scholarly focus on Thomas’ commentaries on Scripture continued with *Reading John with*

³⁷ Valkenberg, *Words*, 206–209.

³⁸ Christopher T. Baglow, *"Modus Et Forma": A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the Lectura Super Epistolam Ad Ephesios* (Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2002).

³⁹ Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum, eds., *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction* (T&T Clark, 2004). See Christopher T. Baglow, “Sacred Scripture and Sacred Doctrine in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (T&T Clark International, 2004), 1–25.

⁴⁰ Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum, eds., *Aquinas on Scripture: A Critical Introduction to His Commentaries* (T&T Clark, 2005).

St. Thomas Aquinas, a collection of essays on Thomas' commentary on the Fourth Gospel,⁴¹ as well as its 2012 sequel *Reading Romans*.⁴²

I.3 The Present Work

This thesis fills a particular lacuna in recent scholarship. Each examination of Thomas' interpretation of Scripture discussed above tends to follow one of two patterns: either a direct examination of one of Thomas' works, such as his *lecturae* on John,⁴³ or an examination of Thomas' principles of biblical interpretation as addressed in a particular source text (typically *ST* Ia.q1) or set of source texts.⁴⁴ However, with their scope limited to a single work or to a single section of a single work, even those approaches combined do not provide a comprehensive cross-section of Thomas' method of scriptural interpretation as practiced throughout his body of work. The issue with this is simple: every treatment of Thomas' biblical hermeneutics must limit the scope of its examination; the data are simply too widespread to make sense of them otherwise. To provide another perspective, the present thesis takes a different tack by focussing on a single theme explored by the friar throughout his career: the biblical image of the Tree of Life. I examine this particular entity for three main reasons. First, the TOL appears throughout the chronological continuum of

⁴¹ Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, eds., *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁴² Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, eds., *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas* (Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

⁴³ E.g. Dauphinais and Levering, *Reading John*.

⁴⁴ E.g. de Lubac, "Distich," 1989.

Thomas' corpus, from the *Scriptum* to *Psal.* As a result, examining Thomas' treatments of the Tree envelops the entirety of the friar's thought as developed throughout his career. Second, the TOL appears in a wide variety of genres, both in Thomas' corpus (from systematic works to commentaries to sermons) and in Scripture itself (from narrative to wisdom literature to second-Temple Jewish apocalyptic literature), providing a cross-section of Thomas' approaches to Scripture in his own works of different stripes and to different genres of Scripture itself. Third, whenever Thomas refers to the TOL in one of his works, his writing indicates that the friar has in mind one of the places in which the entity appears in Scripture, making Thomas' citations of the Tree instances of interpretive work on his part. Thus, in what follows, I examine Thomas' interpretations of sections of Scripture in which the TOL appears, in order to gain a more comprehensive view of the hermeneutical method behind the individual interpretative forays treated here.

The present work maintains that Thomas' citations of the TOL demonstrate the friar's insistence on the necessity of interpretation of the Scriptures according to both the historical and spiritual senses. In other words, Thomas' treatments of the TOL show his strict adherence to his celebrated statement in *ST Ia.q1.a10* of harmony between the literal and spiritual senses.

I.2.1 Plan of the Present Work

This thesis' argument unfolds over the course of the work's three chapters. Chapter One synthesises Thomas' occasional statements about and discussions of Scripture, describing Thomas' understanding of the concepts of 'literal' and 'spiritual senses', in order to articulate a coherent theory of the interpretation of Scripture according to the Angelic

Doctor. Chapters Two and Three situate Thomas' individual references to the TOL within this theory. Chapter Two more closely examines Thomas' reading of the literal sense of passages of Scripture referencing the TOL, demonstrating that, in the friar's understanding, the literal sense includes a broad range of meaning, including that communicated by metaphor and forward-pointing prophetic speech. Chapter Three examines Thomas' interpretations of the TOL which follow the spiritual senses of Scripture. In this examination, three main tendencies emerge: First, Thomas only interprets the TOL according to the allegorical sense, never, in this context, making use of the moral or anagogical senses. Second, Thomas' interpretations of the TOL according to the spiritual senses are less prevalent across the course of his corpus than his readings of the Tree according to the literal sense, though the reader must take care not to draw unwarranted conclusions from this fact. Third, where interpretations of the TOL according to the literal and the spiritual senses are juxtaposed, the former is given priority.

I.4 Text Sources, Translations, Chronology

The authoritative critical edition for Thomas' works is the Leonine edition, named for its commissioner, Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903). Whenever possible, I have based my research on this edition's Latin texts and on English translations based on those texts. However, the Leonine edition remains incomplete,⁴⁵ requiring me to consult earlier

⁴⁵ See <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/repedleo.html> for an up-to-date list of complete works in the series.

editions of Thomas' works. I have made use of the Marietti, Moos and Parma editions where appropriate.

Digital-age students of the fat friar are graced with a wealth of textual resources, one of the best of which is the work of the Aquinas Institute, which makes freely available online the best Latin texts of Thomas' work currently available, as well as English translations of the majority of his writings.⁴⁶ The Institute provides the text of, and translations based upon, the Leonine edition where available, and works with the next best edition where it is not. In general, I have worked with reference to this source, and my debt is to the editions and translations provided there, with a very few exceptions.⁴⁷ When I quote Thomas' original Latin, I draw from the Latin texts provided by the Institute, unless otherwise noted. When quoting an English translation, I quote the translation provided by the Institute, encasing it in double inverted commas. At points, however, I offer my own translation, which I note in each case, surrounding it with single inverted commas and providing the Latin in a footnote.

The Scriptures, as Thomas encountered them, were not precisely equivalent to any modern Bible. Thomas read a medieval text-form of the Vulgate, which was based on Jerome's work but which, as a result of centuries of manual transmission, certainly

⁴⁶ <https://www.aquinasinstitute.org/>.

⁴⁷ These exceptions are: *De malo*, where I have consulted Brian Davies' translation, in Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, ed. Brian Davies, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2003), and *Germinet terra*, where I have consulted Mark-Robin Hoogland's translation, in Thomas Aquinas, *The Academic Sermons*, trans. Mark-Robin Hoogland, vol. 11, *The Fathers of the Church; Mediaeval Continuation* (Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

possessed its own quirks. The sections of Scripture quoted by Thomas throughout his corpus are, in the main, very similar—though by no means identical—to the text of the Stuttgart Vulgate, a modern critical edition of Jerome’s work. No one possesses a ‘Thomas Bible’ today, and so to represent Thomas’ work as well as possible within the constraints of the present project, when citing a passage of Scripture outside of a quotation from Thomas, my practice is to translate from the Stuttgart Vulgate, bearing in mind that this gives only a fair approximation of the the text with which Thomas worked.⁴⁸

During Thomas’ career, as for most of Latin Christian history, the most common way an educated person would have encountered the Scriptures was in a collection of volumes.⁴⁹ However, during his time in Paris, Thomas may have encountered an innovation—single-volume Bibles of manageable size, known today as “Paris Bibles”.⁵⁰ Though it is possible that Thomas would have had access to such a Bible at some point in his career, it is likely that the multi-volume understanding of the Scriptures most accurately reflects his understanding of the text. Thomas consistently uses the term *scriptura* to describe the divine writings, only very rarely using the term ‘Bible’. I have

⁴⁸ Sections of Scripture with special textual considerations are discussed below. See §3.3.3.

⁴⁹ Patrick McGurk, “The Oldest Manuscripts of the Latin Bible,” in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–23, 2.

⁵⁰ See Laura Light, “French Bibles c. 1200–30: A New Look at the Origin of the Paris Bible,” in *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration and Use*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 155–76, 155–159.

followed suit, refraining from imposing the commonly modern term ‘Bible’, instead retaining ‘Scripture’ or ‘Scriptures’.

There is ultimately no such thing as a strict timeline of Thomas’ writings. Thomas often worked on multiple pieces at once, sometimes even dictating simultaneously to multiple scribes.⁵¹ Many of the dates thus assigned to given works in the literature are scholars’ best guesses. As a result, while one can have a general idea of the order in which Thomas writings were composed, one rarely is fully sure of the order in specific cases. Individual scholars often remain agnostic as to the dates of individual works, giving wide possible date-ranges for individual writings.⁵² Eschmann’s *A Catalogue of St Thomas’s Works* in Gilson’s *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*⁵³ has remained a touchstone for later studies.⁵⁴ Thomas’ two most recent biographers (Torrell and Weisheipl) have drawn heavily from his work in their reconstructions of the dating of Thomas’ writings, appending catalogues to their own works which themselves in large part follow Eschmann’s thought.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Torrell, *Aquinas*, 241–242.

⁵² So Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, eds., “Chronological List of Aquinas’s Writings,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 533–36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.002.0046>.

⁵³ I. T. Eschmann, “A Catalogue of St. Thomas’s Works,” in *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K Shook (Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1957), 381–430.

⁵⁴ So James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 355; Torrell, *Aquinas*, 330.

⁵⁵ See Weisheipl, *D’Aquino*, 355–405; G. Emery, “Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas,” in *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1, The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, vol. 1 (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 330–61, which, following

This study organises Thomas' references to the TOL thematically rather than chronologically, though issues of chronology are noted where relevant. Within the individual categories outlined here, I have sought to preserve the chronology as much as possible, generally accepting Eschmann's dating except where the considerations of other scholars hint at differing dates for individual works. A few points of divergence exist between the catalogues, as do some uncertainties regarding the dates of particular writings; these are addressed below, where relevant.

Torrell's dating, outlines in summary form the reasons for and issues surrounding each proposed date.

Chapter 1: Scripture in Thomas' Thought

1.1 Introduction

Thomas never provides in one place a complete theory of biblical interpretation. Nevertheless, his writings are full of discussions pertaining to the nature of Scripture—what Scripture, precisely, *is*, complaints about others who interpret it wrongly, hermeneutical digressions in the midst of larger works, and so on. However, to examine Thomas' methods of biblical interpretation via his treatment of the TOL requires a robust understanding of Thomas' own understanding of Scripture. Thus, this chapter seeks to synthesise his occasional treatments by asking three heuristic questions of Thomas' corpus:

- 1) What is Scripture?
- 2) What is it for?
- 3) How should the interpreter handle it?

Many readers of Thomas have, to this point, thoroughly analysed Thomas' several in-depth discussions of hermeneutics—most famously, *ST* Ia.q1.a1–10,⁵⁶ as well as *Quod*. VII.q6 and *Gal*. c4.L7,⁵⁷ as well as in *Scriptum* I.q1.a5, though this treatment remains less

⁵⁶ Particularly a9–10.

⁵⁷ Discussions of *ST* Ia.q1 in particular are manifold. See, among others, Marshall, "Una Uetula"; Baglow, "Sacred Scripture"; Van Der Ploeg, "The Place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas", particularly 410–417; Valkenberg, *Words*, 9–18; Thomas Prügl, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph P. Wawrykow (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 392–393; Smalley, *Study*, 300–301; Torrell, *Aquinas*, 58–59. Discussions of Thomas' approach to

thoroughly analysed. This is not news to the scholarly guild, but no in-depth treatment of this section currently exists.⁵⁸

Though these *loci* are vital for understanding Thomas' own understanding of what Scripture is, however, the knowledge which they provide of Thomas' approach to Scripture is incomplete without an examination of the rest of Thomas' writings as well. As a result, this chapter examines Thomas' more occasional discussions before looking to the more well-trodden *loci classici* on the fourfold sense.

To sum up Thomas' view: Thomas understands Scripture as human writings inspired by God's Spirit, set apart by their presence in the canon of the Church, which set forth God's revelation in language intelligible to humans. Scripture exists to lead humans towards salvation by making God known to them. And, finally, for Thomas, Scripture should be read with an interpretive method appropriate to its nature as divine speech—in his understanding, the rubric of the fourfold sense, which allows one to discern both God's role in the formation of the text of the Scriptures and the unique kinds of meaning which may be found in and through it as a result.

Scripture encompassing a wider variety of works include de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, ch.9, §1–2 (262–302); Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 2: From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. James O. Duke (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 185–201; Denys Turner, *Eros And Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies 156 (Cistercian Publications, 1995), 343–358 (translation of and notes on *Quod. VII.q6*).

⁵⁸ de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 285, notes the *Scriptum*'s discussion of biblical interpretation according to the fourfold sense only to add that the section both adds nothing to Thomas' thought on Scripture as expressed elsewhere. de Lubac, 285. The *Scriptum* I.q1.a5, de Lubac adds, is "*peu explicite*". de Lubac, 280.

After discussing Thomas' theoretical understanding of the nature of Scripture in this chapter, I examine Thomas' practical approaches to Scripture using the test case of the TOL in the next.

1.2 The sources of Thomas' thought

Thomas stood within a long tradition of prior students of Scripture, and carried out his own work with continual reference to theirs. "Bible punching entailed *Gloss[a ordinaria]* punching", as Smalley remarks,⁵⁹ and as a result, Thomas would have continually had his *auctoritates'* takes on Scripture in mind as he considered the biblical text.⁶⁰ The chain of students of Scripture who formed Thomas' thought regarding the sacred page is centuries long, and even Smalley and de Lubac, the prime historians on this topic self-admittedly only scratch the surface.⁶¹ However, the work of both remains the best introduction to the history of medieval treatments of Scripture, and the reader would do well to turn to them for an account of Thomas' sources.

1.3 What is Scripture?

Nowhere among his writings does Thomas provide a distinct and unambiguous definition of Scripture. In the *loci classici* for his theological method and its relation to

⁵⁹ Smalley, *Study*, xv.

⁶⁰ The "text is the glossed text", Smalley writes, explaining the work of Robert of Melun and Peter the Chanter. What was true in the twelfth century was also true in the thirteenth. See Smalley, 216.

⁶¹ Smalley, *Study*, xxxviii; de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 1*, xxii.

Scripture,⁶² Thomas never specifically states what he means by the term *sacra scriptura*, seeming to assume that the reader's understanding of the concept. In the opening section of the *Scriptum*, for example, Thomas introduces the Scriptures as a treasury of "enigmas" veiling the mystery of the Trinity, a mystery disambiguated by the revelation of the Son,⁶³ from there discussing the nature of "*divina scientia*" using the concept of *sacra scriptura* as an authority and an explanatory tool, but without giving an explicit definition of Scripture.⁶⁴ In *Quod. VII*, Thomas disputes "concerning the senses of Sacred Scripture", which is to say, concerning how it should be read.⁶⁵ Thus, the *quaestio*, like the prologue of the *Scriptum*, proceeds on the basis of an assumed understanding of what exactly Scripture is. In *Gal. c4.L7*, Thomas' discussion of biblical interpretation is tangential to his larger examination of Paul's argument, focussing, like *Quod. VII.q6*, upon what he calls the "literal" and "mystical" modes of interpretation.⁶⁶ And in the first question of the *prima pars* of the *ST*, Thomas uses 2 Tim. 3:16 as the foundation for his discussion of the nature of "*sacra doctrina*" in general and the role of Scripture in relation to it, leaving the reader to supply a concept of what, materially speaking, constitutes Scripture.⁶⁷

⁶² *ST Ia.q1*; *Scriptum I.q5*; *Quod. VII.q6*; *Gal. c4.L7*.

⁶³ *Scriptum I.pr.*

⁶⁴ *Scriptum I.q1.a2.sc.*

⁶⁵ See *Quod. VII.q6*.

⁶⁶ *Gal. c4.L7.n252–254*.

⁶⁷ See *ST Ia.q1.a1.sc*: "It is written (2 Tim. 3:16): *All Scripture, inspired by God, is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instructing in justice*. Now Scripture, inspired by God, is no part of the philosophical disciplines, which were discovered by human reason".

While one must mine other texts for insight into Thomas' *definition* of Scripture, *Quod. VII* offers a starting point. There, Thomas shows that he sees Scripture as *God's words*: "It must be said that the principal author of Sacred Scripture is the Holy Spirit".⁶⁸ Later in the same *quaestio*, Thomas describes Scripture as writing "of which the Holy Spirit is author, whereas man is only an instrument, according to that line of the Psalmist: *my tongue the reed-pen of a scribe*," citing Psalm 44:2 in the Gallican Psalter.⁶⁹ Scripture is written, even *dictated*, by the Holy Spirit, who works through the human author as a human author (like Thomas) might work through a scribe.⁷⁰

Likewise, in Thomas' prologue to *Psal.*, he describes God as the author of Scripture, dictating as to a scribe.⁷¹ It is thus the divine origin of the words of the Scriptures which

⁶⁸ *Quod. VII.q6.a1.ad5*. Oft-cited, e.g. by Reventlow, *Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 2, 191.

⁶⁹ *Quod. VII.q6.a3.c*.

⁷⁰ Reventlow, *Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 2, 191, rightly notes Thomas' insistence in *Quod. VII.q6.a1.ad5* that God is Scripture's "*auctor principalis*" and that the human author is its "*auctor instrumentalis*". However, following this, Reventlow claims that the "doctrine of [later] Roman as well as Protestant orthodoxy...of the inspiration of Scripture, is not to be found in Thomas in this form (save for the quotation of 2 Tim. 3:16 in [*ST Ia.q1.a10*])". This statement is not borne out by an examination of Thomas' writings. Even the preponderance of scribal imagery noted below and the section of *ST Ia.q1.a1* cited in the preceding paragraph are enough to place Thomas squarely in line with later formulations of the doctrine. For Thomas' use of scribes in composition, see Torrell, *Aquinas*, 241.

⁷¹ "[O]ther kinds of knowledge arise through human reason, but Scripture through the impulse of divine inspiration...So, in Sacred Scripture, the tongue of a man is like the tongue of a child saying the words another provides: ***my tongue is like the pen of a scribe*** (Ps 44:2), and *the spirit of the Lord has spoken through me and his word through my tongue* (2 Sam 23:2)". *Psal.* Prologue.24. (Cited in Thomas Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 44.) See also *Super Isa.* Prologue.1: "For the author of Holy Scripture is the Holy Spirit, as it says below: ***now the Lord God has sent me, and his Spirit*** (Isa 48:16); *for prophecy never came by the will of man, but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Spirit* (2 Pet 1:21)".

primarily distinguish them as “holy” to Thomas. As he writes in *Rom.*: “He [Paul] adds **holy** to distinguish these writings from those of the gentiles. They are called holy, first, because, as it is written: *men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God* (2 Pet. 1:21); *all Scripture is inspired by God* (2 Tim. 3:16)”.⁷² They are “holy”, secondarily, due to their content⁷³ and thirdly due to their effect on the reader.⁷⁴ As Thomas writes, commenting on 2 Tim. 3:16, the Scriptures are set apart by their “principle” (*principium*): while other writings “are given through human reason...Sacred Scripture is divine”.⁷⁵ And as Thomas describes it in *Hic est liber*, one of the two addresses which he gave upon becoming a master of theology at Paris,⁷⁶ “The authority of these Scriptures is shown to be effective...from its origin; because God is its origin”.⁷⁷

A second feature central to Thomas’ understanding of Scripture is *canonicity*. This may seem not to be the case in light of the high value which Thomas places on the saints’ commentary on Scripture—he goes so far as to say in *Quod. XII* that “the expositions of the saints [on Scripture] are from the Holy Spirit”.⁷⁸ However, Thomas’ discussion of this

⁷² *Rom.* c1.L2.n27.

⁷³ “[T]hey contain holy things: *give thanks to his holy name* (Ps. 97:12)”. *Rom.* c1.L2.n27.

⁷⁴ “[T]hey make holy: *make them holy in the truth; your word is truth* (John 17:17)”. *Rom.* c1.L2.n27.

⁷⁵ *II Tim.* c3.L3.n123.

⁷⁶ Randall B. Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris: Preaching, Prologues, and Biblical Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108893084>, 79.

⁷⁷ *Hic est liber* 10–11.

⁷⁸ *Quod. XII*.q16.a1.sc.

matter highlights the fact that a categorical distinction between Scripture and non-Scripture undergirds his thought. In *Quod. XII*, Thomas deals with the question of “whether all things which the holy doctors have said are from the Holy Spirit”, which at the outset seems doubtful, as he admits, due to the fact that the Church’s recognised expositors of Scripture demonstrably err or disagree with each other on numerous points. How can the Holy Spirit contradict himself?⁷⁹ Thomas’ answer to this difficulty is founded on his teleological understanding of Scripture. Thomas holds that the “end” (*finis*) of Scripture, established by the Holy Spirit, is ‘the learning (*eruditio*) of humans’, that is, learning the knowledge of God, knowledge leading to eternal life.⁸⁰ Taking as axiomatic the belief that the same agent who creates an object for a particular goal is responsible for that object’s bringing that goal to completion, Thomas sees the Holy Spirit as responsible for humans’ education brought about through the Scriptures. However, the Scriptures only have the ability to lead humans toward salvation when they are explained “through the expositions of the saints”—and as a result, it is appropriate to say that the saints’ expositions “are from the Holy Spirit”. This, however, does not mean that for Thomas the Scriptures and the saints possess the equivalent kind or degree of authority. Though the expositions of the saints are necessary for understanding the Scriptures, only Scripture demands complete acceptance of its truth. The saints, whose writings do *not* constitute *sacra scriptura*, make no such demand: “the sayings of the expositors do not induce necessity so that it should be

⁷⁹ *Quod. XII.q16.a1.arg1*. The remainder of this paragraph, save where otherwise noted, draws on *Quod. XII.q16.a1.sc*.

⁸⁰ See below.

necessary to believe them, but only canonical Scripture (*solum Scriptura canonica*), which is in the Old and the New Testament”.⁸¹ While the expositors can err, the Scriptures cannot. Though both the Scriptures and the saints’ writings are “from the Holy Spirit”, this is true of each in different ways. The saints’ writings are a necessary explanatory aid for the Holy Scriptures, an aid to the end established for the Scriptures by God, while the Scriptures themselves are given to man by God as to a scribe by an author. The canon is received by the Church, and the expositions are produced within the Church.⁸² Thus, there exists in Thomas’ mind a categorical distinction between Scripture and non-Scripture. Non-Scripture may explain and interpret Scripture, but is always to be read as distinct from the words authored by God, as Thomas affirms in the *tertia pars* of the *ST*: “[M]any words are added [in glosses] by Doctors by way of explanation of the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, it is not lawful to add even words to Holy Scripture as though such words were a part thereof, for this would amount to forgery”.⁸³

In short, Thomas understands Scripture as words inspired by God, designated as such by their inclusion in the canon of the Church.

⁸¹ *Quod*. XII.q16.a1.ad1.

⁸² Thus Thomas writes in his commentary on John, “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* (Prov. 8:7)”. *Ioan*. c21.L6.n2656. The question of whether the Church’s reception of the canon of Scripture subtly places the Church in a position of authority over Scripture was foreign to Thomas. The chicken-and-egg problem was simply not an issue for him. To Thomas, it’s obvious that the canon came from God, and it’s equally obvious that the canon came from writers within the Church. For him, no more needs to be said.

⁸³ *ST* IIIa.q60.a8.ad1.

1.4 What is Scripture for?

Thomas outlines his understanding of the purpose of Scripture near the end of the *Scriptum*: “those who teach Sacred Scripture have the same aim as those who wrote that Scripture...*the writing of Scripture is ordered to leading a man to eternal life*, as is clear from John 20:31”.⁸⁴ Simply put, then, the purpose of Scripture is *human salvation*. More specifically, in Thomas’ thought Scripture provides the necessary conditions for salvation in three main ways: by providing, as the locus of revelation, the knowledge necessary for salvation, by providing a witness to Christ so that the readers of Scripture might be formed in faith, and by leading the reader to salvation by providing a pattern for virtuous action.

Thomas’ claim that “the writing of Scripture is ordered to leading a man to eternal life” is remarkably similar to Thomas’ articulation of the nature and purpose of *sacra doctrina* as a whole as famously expressed in *ST* Ia.q1.a1:

[M]an’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of [the truth about God]. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Scriptum* IV.d19.q2.a2.qa2.ad4. Emphasis added. Thomas’ citation of John 20:31 is original to the Moos text, though modern chapter-verse conventions have been included in the Mortensen translation.

⁸⁵ Cited by Marshall, “Una Uetula”, 4. For fuller discussions of the nature and purpose of the *scientia* of *sacra doctrina*, see in particular Marshall; Peter M. Candlish, “St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York University Press, 2006), 66–69; Baglow, “Sacred Scripture”; and Van Der Ploeg, “The Place of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas”.

Thus, the purpose of *sacra scriptura*, like that of *sacra doctrina*, is to lead humans to eternal life by furnishing them with the knowledge of God necessary for that eternal life.⁸⁶ Where *sacra doctrina* may be understood as the sum total of divine revelation (necessary for salvation), as well as the body of faithful teaching on that revelation, the body of holy teaching,⁸⁷ *sacra scriptura* may be understood as the source of that revelation. This much is clear from Thomas' statement in *Quod. VII*: "it must be said that Sacred Scripture has been handed over from heaven...so that through it the truth necessary unto salvation might be manifested to us".⁸⁸ As the source of *sacra doctrina*, *sacra scriptura* is properly understood as a part of the larger body of *sacra doctrina*.⁸⁹ Thus, if *sacra doctrina* brings about human salvation by providing knowledge of God, *sacra scriptura* enables human salvation by functioning as the locus of revelation from which *sacra doctrina* proceeds.

The Scriptures provide the knowledge necessary for salvation by translating divine truths into language intelligible to humans. In *Scriptum I.q1*, Thomas describes the principles of *sacra doctrina* as the articles of faith,⁹⁰ which, as divine truths, must be

⁸⁶ So Marshall, "Una Uetula", 5: "[S]*sacra doctrina* always has a soteriological purpose"; Baglow, "Sacred Scripture", 7.

⁸⁷ Marshall, "Una Uetula", 6.

⁸⁸ *Quod. VII.q6.a1.c.*

⁸⁹ Marshall, "Una Uetula", 6, notes this and the foregoing: "The Bible itself—the text, and not simply its interpretation—belongs to holy teaching, and indeed scripture forms the basis for the whole of *sacra doctrina*."

⁹⁰ *Sacra doctrina* "has for its first principles the articles of faith, which things when infused by the light of faith are known through themselves to one who has faith, just as principles naturally known to us are also implanted by the light of the agent intellect". *Scriptum I.q1.a3.qa2.ad1.*

revealed by God. However, according to Thomas, human reason is not calibrated to directly receive the principles of faith. Rather, the principles of faith must be ‘translated’ into a ‘language’ which the human intellect can understand. As Thomas understands it, the human intellect works through sensory data, so the Scriptures make divine truths known in the language of sensory experience.⁹¹ In digital-age terms, the Scriptures function like a compiler which translates the ‘code’ of divine revelation into a script which humans can read. Thus, Scripture enables the activity of *sacra doctrina* by revealing divine truths in terms which humans are capable of understanding.

Secondly, in Thomas’ thought, the Scriptures accomplish their purpose of facilitating human salvation by bearing witness to Jesus’ life.⁹² As seen above in *Scriptum* IV.d19.q2.a2.qa2, Thomas takes the Gospel of John’s statement of purpose (“[T]hese are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing, you may have life in his name”, John 20:31, Douay-Rheims) as applying to the entirety of Scripture. Thomas adopts the beloved disciple’s statement of purpose in writing as his own understanding of the *raison d’être* of all of Scripture: to testify specifically to Christ, and by

⁹¹ “[B]ecause these principles are also not proportioned to human reason according to the state of the earthly path—reason being accustomed to receiving from sensible things—therefore it is necessary that, through the likenesses of sensible things, we be led by the hand to know these [divine] things”. *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c. See also *De Div. Nom.* c1.L3.n96: “Scripture condescending to us has handed on to us those things that are above us, according to our mode. And this mode of knowledge indeed is that by which we can know God in the present life”. See also *Pot.* q6.a7.c.

⁹² Marshall, “Una Uetula”, 5, notes the necessity of the knowledge of Christ as the second person of the Trinity for salvation. However, he does not note the importance of the witness to Jesus’ life which the Scriptures bear, focussing instead on the knowledge of Christ as the second person of the Trinity.

means of this testimony to lead the reader to eternal life. Thus, commenting on the same verse in *Ioan.*, Thomas further describes this ability of the Scriptures: “Now he [John] mentions the benefits given by this Gospel. It is useful for producing faith...Indeed, all Scripture, both of the Old and New Testaments, is for this purpose: *the beginning of the book writes about me* (Ps 40:7); ***search the Scriptures . . . they give testimony about me*** (John 5:39).⁹³ The Scriptures, then—all of them!—exist to lead those who read them to eternal life by creating faith by means of testifying to Christ.

This point is also visible earlier in *Ioan.*, where Thomas asserts that God provided the Scriptures to bring many to faith in Christ who were not granted to meet him during his ministry. According to Thomas (borrowing from Origen) Christ performed miracles as a witness to his authority as the divine Word, but those miracles could only be a witness to those who saw them in person. The testimony of the Scriptures, however, can lead readers throughout time to knowledge of the Word (*ad cognitionem Verbi*).⁹⁴ The Scriptures include accounts of miracles as well as extended forays into the nature of wisdom—furnishing them with ‘something for everyone’ for the sake of creating faith.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Ioan.* c20.L6.n2568.

⁹⁴ “[B]ecause [Christ’s miracles] were performed in time, they passed away with time and did not reach everyone. But the words of the prophets, preserved in Scripture, could reach not only those present, but could also reach those to come after. Hence the Lord willed that men come to a knowledge of the Word through the testimony of the prophets”. *Ioan.* c1.L4.n119.

⁹⁵ “[T]he Lord, in order to show the path of salvation to all, willed...that those who would not be brought to the path of salvation by the miracles of the Old and New Testaments...might be brought to a knowledge of the truth by the path of wisdom, as in the prophets and other books of Sacred Scripture.” *Ioan.* c1.L4.n119.

That the Scriptures as a whole bear witness to the person of Christ is borne out throughout *Psal.*, where Thomas adds another dimension to his understanding of the Scriptures' relation to the person of Christ. In his commentary on Psalm 21, Thomas, following the practice of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, interprets the psalm in light of Christ's passion. On 21:15 ("My heart is become like wax melting in the midst of my bowels"), he provides as one of several interpretations the idea that "by the **heart** of Christ should be understood the Sacred Scriptures which manifest the heart of Christ".⁹⁶ After the Passion, Christ is revealed as the true referent of all of Scripture, foretold in and through the Old Testament, as well as spoken of directly in the New. "This was closed before the Passion, since it was obscure, but is open after the Passion, since the intelligent understand and discern how the prophets should be explained".⁹⁷ Near the end of the work, Thomas introduces the idea that Christ himself is the one, not only to whom the Scriptures point, but who himself speaks through all of the Scriptures. Commenting on Psalm 49:7, "Hear, O my people, and I will speak: O Israel, and I will testify to thee: I am God, thy God," Thomas writes, "And so these can be Christ's words instructing the people...*I will testify to you by miracles...Likewise: search the Scriptures...and the same are they that give testimony of me* (John 5:39). And so I speak through miracles and through the Scriptures, that is, it will become apparent through the Scriptures that I speak truth and am true".⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Psal.* 21.n186.

⁹⁷ *Psal.* 21.n186. On the prophetic nature of the Psalms, see Ryan, *Reader*, 16, citing *Psal.* Prologue.43.

⁹⁸ *Psal.* 49.n493.

Additionally, Thomas views the Scriptures as a unity centred upon Christ insofar as each individual part of the Scriptures bears witness to the Logos in his identity as God's wisdom.⁹⁹ In this emphasis, Thomas is not referring to the nature of all of the Scriptures as a witness to God's plan of salvation, but as a witness to God's wisdom, incarnate in Christ, to whom the Scriptures all point.¹⁰⁰

Finally, for Thomas, the Scriptures have the ability to lead the reader to salvation by providing a template for good works. In *Rom.*, following from Rom. 15:4 (Douay-Rheims: "For what things soever were written, were written for our learning: that through patience and the comfort of the scriptures, we might have hope"), Thomas describes the Scriptures as being written to teach the reader, guiding the reader's actions by providing the examples of Christ and the saints.¹⁰¹ And in *II Tim.*, Thomas describes the "effects of Sacred Scripture" on the one who studies it as leading the reader to righteous action.¹⁰² The "final effect" of

⁹⁹ "Indeed, the Son of God is deservedly called the subject matter of the Holy Scriptures, which reveal the divine wisdom, as Deuteronomy declares: *this will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all the peoples* (Deut 4:6). For the Son is said to be the Word and wisdom begotten: *Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24)". *Rom.* c1.L2.n29.

¹⁰⁰ For Christ as God's Wisdom, see e.g. *In Threnos* Pr.11: "She [Wisdom] was sent most eminently in the Incarnation where invisible wisdom appeared before bodily eyes". See also *Scriptum* I.pr: "Therefore, it is correctly said in the person of the Son: ***I, Wisdom, have poured out rivers***".

¹⁰¹ "Then when he says, ***for whatever things were written***, he shows that we must imitate this example of Christ, saying: ***for whatever things were written*** in Sacred Scripture about Christ or his members ***were written for our learning***. There was no need to write this except for our instruction." *Rom.* c15.L1.n1146.

¹⁰² These are "to teach the truth, to reject falsity, as far as the speculative intellect is concerned; to snatch evil and induce to good, as far as the practical intellect is concerned." *II Tim.* c3.L3.n127.

Scripture, Thomas holds, following 2 Tim. 3:17 (Douay-Rheims: “That the man of God may be perfect (Vulgate: *perfectus*, ‘perfect’ or ‘complete’), furnished to every good work.”), is to “lead men to the perfect good (*ad perfectum*)”.¹⁰³ Here, Thomas sees the Scriptures as leading the reader to completion in the Christian life, which extends to all his works: “[A] man is perfect when he is **furnished**, i.e., prepared, **to every good work**, not only to those that are necessary for salvation, but even to those that are of supererogation: *and in doing good let us not fail* (Gal. 6:9)”.¹⁰⁴

1.5. How should the interpreter handle Scripture?

These first two questions point to a third: what does one *do* with Scripture? If Scripture is the word of God, oriented toward human salvation, how does one handle it? Is there a right or a wrong way to read it?

1.5.1 How not to interpret Scripture

Thomas is firmly convinced that both right and wrong ways of reading Scripture exist. Throughout his writings, he describes what it looks like to read Scripture rightly, as well as polemicising against improper interpretations of Scripture, particularly those promulgated by heretics.

Thomas’ thoughts on heretical interpretation of Scripture are especially on display in his commentary on Matthew, where, true to his Dominican heritage, Thomas returns to

¹⁰³ *II Tim.* c3.L3.n128.

¹⁰⁴ *II Tim.* c3.L3.n128.

the question of heresy again and again, hoping to protect the Scriptures from heretical co-option.¹⁰⁵

Thomas is concerned that the method of interpreting Scripture according to the spiritual senses may be abused, and takes heretics to task for falsely interpreting the Scriptures. Specifically, Thomas argues against the use of non-canonical texts and against arcane spiritual interpretations. Commenting on Matthew 24:26, Thomas writes:

And sometimes they [heretics] wish to confirm their teaching through apocryphal Scriptures, sometimes through a hidden sense of Scripture (*per occultos sensus Scripturae*). When through apocryphal Scriptures, they say that he is ***in the desert***; when through a hidden sense, they say that he is ***in the closets***.¹⁰⁶

Thomas complains that heretics do violence to the Scriptures both by interpreting them falsely, “through a hidden sense”, and by adding spurious works to the canon. *Matt.* in the wake of the secular-mendicant controversy at the University of Paris which raged throughout Thomas’ entire career,¹⁰⁷ brought on in large part by the perceived influence of Joachim of Fiore’s work among the Franciscan masters at the University of Paris.¹⁰⁸ Joachim was notable for his development of a new, “spiritual” mode of interpretation of Scripture, in which both Old and New Testaments together signified a coming spiritual age in which, as

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. Thomas’ comment on Matthew 16:18: “And who are the gates of hell? Heretics, because just as one enters into a house through a gate, so one enters into hell through these.” *Matt.* c16.L2.n1385.

¹⁰⁶ *Matt.* c24.L3.n1951.

¹⁰⁷ Weisheipl, *D’Aquino*, 371, dates *Matt.* between 1256–1259, while Emery, “Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas”, 339, dates the work to 1269–1270. Either of these dates situates *Matt.* near a flare-up of the controversy in Thomas’ life. See Torrell, *Aquinas*, 76–90.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (Yale University Press, 2015), 252.

Smalley describes it, “the letter [of Scripture] will be altogether cast aside and spiritual men will have perfect spiritual understanding of Scripture”.¹⁰⁹ This hermeneutic bears a strong resemblance to the idea of a “hidden sense” of Scripture which Thomas complains about above, and Thomas took great pains to defend himself and the other mendicants from accusations of heresy, distancing his own writing from ‘heretical’ viewpoints such as Joachim’s.¹¹⁰ Even if Thomas is not directly thinking of Joachimism in *Matt.* c24.L3.n1951, his concern with right interpretation is clearly shaped by the struggles brought on by the movement.

Another way to interpret Scripture incorrectly, according to Thomas, is to interpret it atomistically. Thomas states later in *Matt.* that no proper interpretation can stand without reference to all of Scripture:

[D]o not seek hidden doctrine...truth of doctrine always has harmony from beginning to end: for true teaching accepts the whole Scripture. Some do not accept the Old Testament, and some do not accept the prophets, and thus they cannot be strengthened by the other Scriptures; but true teaching shall have confirmation from the beginning of the Church’s arising all the way to the end.¹¹¹

No interpretation, says Thomas, may contradict any other part of Scripture. The guideline of the canon brings consistency which heretics reject. So, to draw together Thomas’ quarrels with false interpretations of Scripture, to handle Scripture *wrongly* is to interpret

¹⁰⁹ Smalley, *Study*, 288.

¹¹⁰ See e.g. *Contra impugnantes* c24.2: “it is not true to say that the doctrine of Joachim...however reprehensible it may be, is the doctrine which will be preached by antichrist.” For Thomas, writing like Joachim’s is no new phenomenon: “For from the earliest days of the Church there has never been a time in which heretical teaching has not been disseminated”.

¹¹¹ *Matt.* C24.L3.n1954.

without reference to the larger canon, and/or to interpret according to a “hidden sense” which undercuts the unified teaching of the Church.

1.5.2 How to read Scripture, according to Thomas

Thomas’ understanding of the proper approach to Scripture rests on his belief that the Scriptures, since they are authored by God,¹¹² must be interpreted according to a method able to take account of their status as divine speech. However, rather than providing a step-by-step approach for interpretation as might an author of a modern hermeneutics textbook, Thomas appeals at several points throughout his body of work to the doctrine of the fourfold sense of Scripture.

As described by Thomas, the doctrine of the fourfold sense holds that an entity or an event described in the text of Scripture may possess theological significance or meaning which goes beyond that which is communicated by the grammatical sense of the words on the page. The words on the page signify things—entities, actions or even concepts—and these things have the ability to further signify *other* things. The world contained within the text becomes a text of its own, with its own meanings.¹¹³ As Thomas describes it, “truth is

¹¹² *ST Ia.q1.a10.c.*

¹¹³ Thomas’ use of the Augustinian distinction between signs and things is commonly noted; see e.g. See de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 273, and Smalley, *Study*, 300: “Human writers express their meaning by words; but God can also express his meaning by ‘things’, that is by historical happenings”. However, a caution is necessary with Smalley’s reading of Thomas. Thomas at no point identifies the literal/historical sense solely with the author’s intention to refer to *events*, thus, Smalley’s description of things in this framework as “historical happenings” fails to accurately describe what Thomas is doing. Rather, Thomas clearly envisions the spiritual meanings of the text as being based not only on the events signified by the text, but also on non-historical concepts such as ‘the mountains’ and ‘the waters’ in Psalm 45. See e.g. *Psal. 45.n462–463*. This point is explored in greater depth

manifested in two ways in Sacred Scripture: in one way, according as things are signified through words, and in this consists the literal sense; in another way, according as things are figures of other things, and the spiritual sense consists in this”.¹¹⁴ The spiritual sense in turn has a potential threefold division, a division between three possible kinds of meaning: the *allegorical* sense, the *moral* sense (also known as the *tropological* sense) and the *anagogical* sense.¹¹⁵ In short, a ‘sense’ of Scripture is a kind of meaning inherent in the Scriptural text or in the things signified by the Scriptural text. Thus, Thomas writes, “Many layers of meaning are hidden in the same words of Sacred Scripture”.¹¹⁶

1.5.2.1 A brief history of the fourfold sense

This hermeneutical method, however, existed long before its adoption by Thomas, and its intellectual roots stretch back much further, to early interpreters of Homer and other Greek poets, who saw beneath the words of the poets’ writings about the doings of the gods timeless teachings about the nature of the world.¹¹⁷ This kind of interpretation,

below. de Lubac’s formulation cited above better takes account of this fact than does Smalley’s.

¹¹⁴ *Quod.* VII.q6.a1.co. Cited in de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 273.

¹¹⁵ de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 282, describes these as three kinds of meaning discernible in (or through) the text. Despite the possibility of there being more than one literal, allegorical, moral or anagogical meaning, there nevertheless remain only four possible kinds or categories (“*sortes*” or “*catégories de sens*”).

¹¹⁶ *Scriptum* IV.d21.q1.a3.qa2.ad3.

¹¹⁷ Dirk Obbink, “Early Greek Allegory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Peter T. Struck and Rita Copeland, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15–25, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521862295.002>, 16–19.

described throughout the tradition as ὑπονοία,¹¹⁸ is visible in and beyond the first century, including in later thinkers such as Philo¹¹⁹ and Plutarch.¹²⁰ Plutarch, for his part, further defines ὑπονοία with the term ‘allegory’ (from ἀλλά, ‘other’ + ἀγορεύω, ‘I speak’),¹²¹ speaking as if he is elucidating an archaic term by providing a more recent equivalent word.¹²² Possibly preceding Plutarch’s usage is that of Paul in Galatians 4:24: “[T]he son [Ishmael] of the slave [Hagar] was born according to the flesh, while the son [Isaac] of the free woman [Sarah] was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically (literally, “these things may be allegorised”: ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα): these women are two covenants” (ESV).¹²³ Elsewhere, Paul uses the terms τυπικῶς and τύπος to describe correspondences between the Hebrew Scriptures and the post-Christ reality, referring to the events in the Scriptures in the sense of “pattern[s]” which the post-Christ reality follows due to God’s ordering of history (as in 1 Corinthians 10:6–11).¹²⁴ What exactly Paul

¹¹⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (Ignatius Press, 1989), 131.

¹¹⁹ Smalley, *Study*, 6–7.

¹²⁰ de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, 130.

¹²¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament & Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd edition (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 46.

¹²² de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, 130.

¹²³ de Lubac claims that Paul is “probably” the first to use this term. This cannot be proven, though his statement that Paul “authorized its entry into the vocabulary of Christian exegesis” is reasonable. de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, 130.

¹²⁴ Usages of τυπικῶς and τύπος noted in Bauer, *Greek–English Lexicon*, 1019–1020; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11 listed as an example on 1020. Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: the Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Eerdmans, 1982), 146, describes Paul’s usage of τυπικῶς and τύπος in 1 Cor. 10:6–11 as “refer[ring] to the fact that future events are represented in redemptive history”. In Goppelt’s assessment, in

understood by what he was doing in these places, particularly in Galatians 4, is difficult to say today. Did Paul see his use of ‘allegory’ there as something akin to parabolic teaching, where a story (in this case the story of Abraham’s fraught family life) is used as a teaching tool? Did he see the individuals and events in the Genesis narrative as pointing to some further spiritual meaning, only now visible in light of the new covenant? Though it is difficult to say now, many influential Christian readers took the latter approach, understanding Paul’s interpretive method to be that of exegeting a spiritual significance behind and beyond the words of the Old Testament, and taking this method as normative for their own interpretation of Scripture.

This idea resurfaces and grows in the work of Origen of Alexandria (c.185–c.253), without reference to whom it is impossible to discuss the history of Christian biblical interpretation. “To write a history of Origenist influence on the west would be tantamount to writing a history of western exegesis”, Smalley holds.¹²⁵ Origen borrows Paul’s term “allegory” in the fourth chapter of Galatians and applies the method elsewhere, seeking to

this section of 1 Corinthians, Paul understands God to be shaping history for the benefit of his people who live after Christ: “By his dealings with...the forefathers...God reveals to the people of God who are living at ‘the fulfillment of the ages’ what they may expect from him...The type has been ordained by God to point to the future antitype” (146). Goppelt’s understanding of Paul’s view of God’s tendency to shape the events behind Scripture to communicate something to Scripture’s readers bears some resemblance to Thomas’ understanding of the workings of the spiritual senses as expressed in *ST Ia.q1* and elsewhere. Goppelt seems to be aware of this: he briefly mentions Thomas’ thought, (7), but does not elaborate on the matter.

¹²⁵ Smalley, *Study*, 14. Space prohibits a full treatment of Origen’s hermeneutics. For more in-depth examinations of Origen, see Smalley, 6–14 and de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 1*, 142–150. For an examination of Origen’s reception in later centuries, see de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 1*, 150–224.

further interpret the Old Testament in light of the New. As Rufinus' Latin translation of Origen's *Peri Archōn* reads, "The splendour of Christ's advent, therefore, illuminating the law of Moses by the light of truth, has taken away that veil which had been placed over the letter (of the law), and has unsealed, for every one who believes upon Him, all the blessings which were concealed by the covering of the word".¹²⁶ The most significant distinction between Origen's specifically Christian method of biblical interpretation and the earlier pagan practice of ὑπονοία (or even the work of his Alexandrian predecessor, Philo) was, as Smalley notes, the fact that "both the sign and the thing signified are conceived as historical and would have no significance if they were not".¹²⁷ It is this theoretical foundation of allegory upon historicity (mirroring a tendency already present in Paul) which remains so important a millennium later in Thomas' hermeneutical work.

Though Origen is roundly censured throughout the intervening centuries, and Thomas seldom quotes him, this idea is the heartbeat of Thomas' hermeneutical theory. In large part, Thomas owes his reliance upon this idea to Augustine (354–430 AD), who taught it vociferously (though he was no friend of Origen's), and whose thought was massively influential upon Thomas, particularly his thought on hermeneutics.

Two Augustinian distinctions in particular inform Thomas' theory of biblical interpretation: the distinction between *signs* and *things* and the distinction between the *literal* or *proper* meaning and the *figurative* meaning of a section of Scripture. As Augustine

¹²⁶ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (Eerdmans, 1972), 354.

¹²⁷ Smalley, *Study*, 7.

describes it in his *De doctrina christiana*, where he outlines his theory of semiotics and applies it to the interpretation of Scripture, a sign is an entity which “has the effect of making something else come to mind”.¹²⁸ A thing, on the other hand, is that which is “not mentioned in order to signify something”, but which is the reality (whether physical or conceptual) which the sign has the power to bring to mind.¹³⁰ Augustine further divides signs between “natural” and “conventional”, providing smoke (pointing to the existence of a fire) as an example of the former.¹³¹ A written or spoken word pointing to an extra-textual reality, or perhaps a wedding ring pointing to the intangible reality of a marriage, would be an example of “conventional” signs and their respective things.

Augustine applies his thought on “conventional” signs to the practice of biblical interpretation to modify the idea, present in Origen and hinted at by Paul before him, that entities in the Old Testament have the ability to signify entities in the New. In Augustine’s theory, things signified by the words of the Scriptures have the ability to themselves serve as signs pointing to other realities: “[T]hat piece of wood which we read of Moses throwing into the bitter water...that stone which Jacob placed under his head...that animal which Abraham sacrificed instead of his son...are things in such a way as also to be signs of other things”.¹³² Where these things serve as signs, Scripture has what Augustine calls a “figurative sense”, to be distinguished from its “literal” or “proper” meaning: “[A]ll the

¹²⁸ *DDC* II.1,1 (133).

¹³⁰ *DDC* I.2,2 (110).

¹³¹ *DDC* II.1,1–1,2 (133)

¹³² *DDC* I.2,2 (110).

doings, or practically all of them, which are contained in the books of the Old Testament, are to be taken not only in their literal sense, but also as having a figurative sense”.¹³³ That is, the things signified by the words of the Old Testament themselves have the ability to serve as signs which point to other realities.

Augustine fleshes this idea out in his *De Genesii ad litteram* (another text which Thomas often quotes), where he repeatedly hammers home his conviction that the historical events narrated in Scripture may possess figurative significance.¹³⁴ In Augustine’s thought, the historical realities signified in Scripture themselves have figurative significance: “All these things,” referring to the TOL, Hagar and Sarah and the rock of 1 Cor. 10:4, “stood for something other than what they were, but all the same they were themselves bodily realities. And when the narrator mentioned them he was not employing figurative language, but giving an explicit account of things which had a forward reference that was figurative”.¹³⁵ This figurative forward reference Augustine sees as the way in which the people and events described in the Old Testament supernaturally point forward to Christ. That this is a possibility is, as will be seen, a central part of Thomas’ theory of biblical interpretation.

The identity of the first thinker to outline the now-familiar four senses of Scripture—the literal, the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical—remains unclear. The

¹³³ DDC III.22,32 (191).

¹³⁴ See Hill’s introduction to *DGL*, Edmund Hill, “Introduction,” in *On Genesis: A Refutation Of The Manichees, The Unfinished Literal Meaning Of Genesis* (New City Press, 2004), 158.

¹³⁵ *DGL* VIII.4,8 (351).

principal historians of biblical interpretation refrain from making any bold claims, and it may be impossible to ever know precisely who first stuck these four words together. The first attestation of these four senses in the histories is in discussion of the work of John Cassian (c.360-c.435), who describes the interpretation of Scripture according to four separate senses: “historical exposition” as well as the “tropological, allegorical, [and] anagogical” senses.¹³⁶ The sources are hazy, and it is possible that a thinker used these four terms before Cassian. At any rate, however, after Cassian’s time, the theory is used over and over, gradually, throughout the medieval period, morphing into the form which became the standard framework in Thomas’ day.

1.5.2.2 Thomas’ application of the theory

Thomas’ principal discussions of the theory of the fourfold meaning of Scripture (*Scriptum* I.q1.a5, *Quod*. VII.q6, *Gal.* c4.L7 and *ST* Ia.q1.a10) are prime places to turn for insight into Thomas’ understanding of how Scripture should be interpreted. As Thomas’ earliest articulation of the interpretation of Scripture and the relationship between the four senses, and despite the clear distinctions between *Scriptum* 1.q1.a5 and the later *loci*, examining the latter *loci* in light of the former is informative.

¹³⁶ In Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 11, 2nd Series (Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1995), 437. Cited in de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, Vol. 1, 137 (cf. de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, 1989, 112); Smalley, *Study*, 28; Reventlow, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2:73.

The *Scriptum* hails from the very beginning of Thomas' career, written (mostly) in Paris between 1252–1256.¹³⁷ Due to *Scriptum* I.q1.a5's situation at the start of the work proper, after the later-composed prologue,¹³⁸ it is likely that Thomas' discussion of the interpretation of Scripture was written towards the beginning of that period, placing it several years before any of his other discussions of the fourfold sense. Though this is youthful work, distinct among Thomas' several discussions of the interpretation of Scripture, Thomas' notion, expressed here, of the senses as the result of distinct "ways of explaining" (*modi exponendi*) informs his later discussions.

At the start of the *Scriptum*, Thomas comments on Peter Lombard's prologue to the *Sentences*—yet Thomas transposes Peter's prolegomenon into terms more current for Thomas' own context. Thus, Thomas there sets the stage for the remainder of the work by discussing the nature of the *scientia* of *theologia*,¹³⁹ anticipating his later and better-known discussion of *sacra doctrina* at the start of the *ST*, though his discussion in the former is distinct from that in the latter.

Thomas discusses the interpretation of *sacra scriptura* in a5, where he discusses the *modi* (methods of proceeding) of *theologia*. Thomas holds that the *scientia* of *sacra doctrina*

¹³⁷ Torrell, *Aquinas*, 54.

¹³⁸ Torrell, 42.

¹³⁹ *Scriptum* I.q1.a1–5. It should be noted that nowhere in this section of the *Scriptum* does Thomas describe the subject of his enquiry as *sacra doctrina*, preferring to use the term *doctrina theologiae* (*Scriptum* I.q1.a1.sc), or *divina scientia* (I.q1.a2.sc). Whether Thomas' conception of *theologia* as expressed here is identical to his later expression of the concept of *sacra doctrina* is not readily apparent. Cp. Marshall, "Una Uetula", 6.

rests on principles which may only be known through revelation, and as a result that *theologia* itself must proceed on the basis of revelation—which is to say, in a way of operating which deals with revelation, a revelatory *modus*.¹⁴⁰ However, Thomas notes, the work of the practitioner of *theologia* is also to teach and to explain this revelation, and so *theologia* must proceed on the basis of teaching: “the mode (*modus*) of this science (*scientia*) must also be narrative of signs, which serve to confirm the faith”.¹⁴¹ Additionally, because the human intellect is not calibrated to directly receive divine revelation, *theologia* must proceed in human language, using images and concepts drawn from ordinary human sense-experience. “Whence,” says Thomas, “the mode (*modus*) of this science must be metaphorical, or symbolic, or use parables”.¹⁴²

The importance of the Scriptures is due in particular to this last point. Since the truths of *theologia* are not normally accessible to human reason, the Scriptures translate them into ‘the likenesses of sensible things’,¹⁴³ the language of sense-experience, so that humans are able to understand the truths constitutive of divine revelation. And, Thomas continues, the words of Scripture function as a conduit for the application of these principles to life in three ways: “Now, in Sacred Scripture one advances (‘it is advanced’, *proceditur*) from such principles to three things,” he says: “the destruction of errors”,

¹⁴⁰ “Now, the principles of this science are received through revelation, and therefore the mode of receiving the principles themselves ought to be revelatory, [both] on the side of the one infusing them...and...on the side of the one receiving them.” *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

¹⁴¹ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

¹⁴² *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

¹⁴³ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

“instruction about moral conduct”, and “contemplation of the truth in the questions about [the] Sacred Scriptures”.¹⁴⁴ Thomas’ language of ‘advancement’ or ‘procession’ (*procedere*) is worth noting here, as it paints a picture of a step-by-step procedure, a growth in understanding in *theologia* facilitated by the Scriptures. Corresponding to these three uses of *sacra scriptura*, Thomas lays out ‘a fourfold *modus* of expounding *sacra scriptura*’ (*quadrupliciter modus exponendi sacram Scripturam*). This ‘fourfold *modus*’ Thomas describes in connection with the familiar terms ‘historical, moral, allegorical and anagogical’. As Thomas describes it in the *Scriptum*, these four *modi exponendi*, when applied to the text of Scripture, yield the four *sensi* (meanings) of Scripture. The *modi exponendi* are like four lenses through which the interpreter may examine the text of Scripture, each of which makes visible a certain kind of meaning in Scripture which corresponds to one of the uses of Scripture described above. These *sensi* are not themselves the *modi exponendi*; rather, they are the distinct meanings uncovered when one interprets Scripture through the lenses of the *modi exponendi*.

Through the first *modus* for interpreting Scripture, one receives ‘the truth of the faith itself’ (*ipsa veritas fidei*). This, Thomas describes, leads to one’s uncovering the ‘historical sense’ (*sensus historicus*), later described as the ‘literal sense’ (*sensus litteralis*). This historical or literal sense is useful for the “destruction of errors”, uniquely among the *modi* for the interpretation of Scripture. This is because, Thomas implies, one is able to use it as a basis for argumentation, because it is not based on symbolism, and “argumentation”,

¹⁴⁴ *Scriptum* 1.q1.a5.c.

he says, “cannot be drawn from manners of speaking based on likenesses”. This is true despite the fact that Scripture itself, by nature, communicates the principles of *theologia* through likeness, by means of “sensible things that have been received” (*sensibilia accepta*) and “narrative of signs, which serve to confirm the faith”. Thomas’ logic here relies on the notion that Scripture, despite its status as likeness, communicates the *veritas fidei* in such a way that it can be the basis of argumentation. Where Scripture is received as doing this, one interprets according to the literal sense.

Thomas does not offer a fully-fleshed out definition of the literal sense in this section, other than to say that it is the only *modus* of biblical interpretation upon which argumentation may be based, and through which “the destruction of errors” may proceed. This *modus* Thomas connects to the first use of Scripture which he previously described, “the destruction of errors”. Note the *procedere* language used again by Thomas: one only advances from the principles of faith to the destruction of errors through this *modus*.¹⁴⁵

The different kinds of understanding to which one is able to progress through different ways of interpreting Scripture are constituted by the other three *modi exponendi*, which pertain to the moral, allegorical and anagogical senses. When “one advances from these things,” that is, from the principles of *theologia*, “to instruction about moral conduct, there is a *moral sense*”. In other words, as Thomas describes it here, when one examines Scripture through the lens of looking for guidance concerning how one ought to act, one discovers the moral meaning of Scripture. When “one advances to the contemplation of the

¹⁴⁵ *Ad destructionem autem errorum non proceditur nisi per sensum litteralem. Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

truth about things that belong to the path here below, there is an *allegorical sense*". As Thomas describes it here, when one interprets actions or entities in Scripture through the lens of the way in which they shed light on present elements of the Christian life, one discovers the allegorical sense. And when "one advances to the contemplation of the truth about things that belong to the heavenly fatherland, there is an *anagogical sense*". In other words, actions or entities in Scripture examined with an eye to the realities of the Christian life yet to come point to the anagogical sense of Scripture. Here, as before, Thomas speaks of these three *modi* in procedural language, as ways in which one moves from the principles of *theologia* to some kind of understanding of truth. One always 'is advanced' (*proceditur*) from the revealed principles of *theologia* to another kind of understanding.¹⁴⁶

Thomas' argument in *Scriptum* I.q1.a5 focuses on the detection and destruction of error, perhaps due to his status as a young Dominican at the time of writing.¹⁴⁷ Thus Thomas' description of the purpose of the *Sentences* runs: "First, [Peter Lombard] lays down the final cause as regards two uses: the one is the destruction of error...the other is the manifestation of truth".¹⁴⁸ Thus, Thomas anchors his description in the prologue to the *Scriptum* of how Scripture should be read upon the destruction of error. Thomas' outline of the fourfold *modus* for interpreting Scripture bears this out: he links the "historical sense"

¹⁴⁶ Thomas' exposition of the fourfold sense here is distinct from that in his other works. The allegorical sense is not particularly Christological in nature, and in his list, the moral sense precedes the allegorical. It is intriguing to think of what de Lubac would make of this, and it is curious that he never addresses it in his work.

¹⁴⁷ Torrell, *Aquinas*, 8.

¹⁴⁸ *Scriptum* I.q1.

with the “destruction of errors”, the “moral sense” with “instruction about moral conduct” and the “allegorical” and “anagogical” senses with the “contemplation of truth”.¹⁴⁹ Thus, in the *Scriptum* Thomas associates the different uses to which the interpreter might put the text with the four senses.

Thomas’ discussions of the fourfold sense following that in the *Scriptum* differ in purpose from the former text. Rather than to show the *usefulness* of Scripture in argument, these texts provide a crash course in how to interpret Scripture. In *Quod. VII.q6, Gal. c4.L7* and *ST Ia.q1*, Thomas discusses the relationship between the senses.

If Weisheipl’s assessment is correct, what exists today as *Quod. VII.q6* was included in the body of *Quod. VII* by a later editor, but should be dated to the ceremonial debates at Thomas’ inception as a master at the university at Paris in 1256.¹⁵⁰ As is commonly noted, Thomas’ treatment here anticipates his later discussions of the fourfold sense.¹⁵¹ In contrast, the discussion of the fourfold sense in *Gal. c4.L7* is a part of Thomas’ larger commentary on Galatians, which hails from sometime between 1259–1268, depending

¹⁴⁹ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

¹⁵⁰ Weisheipl, *D’Aquino*, 105–106. A note on the numbering of the *quaestii* in *Quod. VII*: Different editions differ on how they number the *quaestii* and *articuli* of this *Quodlibet*. Some count each unit of *disputatio* as a separate question (totalling 18 *quaestii* in *Quod. VII*), while some organise the separate topics into *quaestii*, which are further sub-divided into *articuli* (totalling 7 *quaestii*). (See Weisheipl, 105.) The section pertaining to the interpretation of Scripture, is q6.a1–3 in the first numbering system, but is q14–16 in the second.

¹⁵¹ Weisheipl, *D’Aquino*, 106.

upon the biographer consulted.¹⁵² There, occasioned by Paul's allegorical interpretation of the figures of Hagar and Sarah and Ishmael and Isaac, Thomas launches into a discussion of the interpretation of Scripture according to the four senses. Finally, Thomas' famous discussion of the fourfold sense in *ST* Ia.q1.a10 is very similar to *Scriptum* I.q1.a5. Both are situated in the prologues of their respective systematic-theological works, and both show Thomas setting up the reader with an understanding of the basis of his theological work: the interpretation of Scripture. The *prima pars* is fairly uncontroversially dated between 1265/6–1268,¹⁵³ but it is unclear whether Thomas delivered his commentary on Galatians before or after beginning the *prima pars*.

Thomas' discussions of the fourfold sense in these three places are logically in agreement with each other.¹⁵⁴ To elucidate Thomas' thought on the matter of the interpretation of Scripture according to the fourfold sense, rather than re-treading the scholarly path of outlining the argument of each *locus* here, here I examine Thomas' definitions of the literal and spiritual senses and his articulations of the relationships between them. I also provide examples of Thomas' applications of each of the senses.

¹⁵² See Weisheipl, 372–373; Emery, “Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas”, 340.

¹⁵³ So Emery, “Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas”, 333; Weisheipl, *D'Aquino*, 361.

¹⁵⁴ So de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, 275.

1.5.2.3 The literal sense and the spiritual senses

As Thomas described it in the *Scriptum*, the literal sense, also known as the historical sense, may be reached through the *modus exponendi* geared towards receiving the *veritas fidei*. In *Quod. VII*, he describes it as “the manifestation...of truth...according as things (*res*) are signified through words (*per verba*)”.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, in *Gal.* the literal sense is the “signification whereby the words signify something (*voces significant aliquid*)”.¹⁵⁶ Thus follows, also, Thomas’ articulation in *ST Ia.q1*: “[T]hat first signification whereby words signify things (*voces significant res*) belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal”.¹⁵⁷

The classic rhyme (which, incidentally, Thomas never cites) has “*littera gesta docet*” (‘the literal/letter teaches what was done’).¹⁵⁸ However, more properly for Thomas’ articulation, the literal sense may be characterised as an answer to the question ‘what is *said* in the text of Scripture?’ than ‘what was done in history?’ Though it is true that the historical character of Scripture is vital to Thomas,¹⁵⁹ for Thomas it is not only the events related in Scripture, but what the words on the page signify which are included under the heading of the ‘literal sense’. This much is clear from Thomas’ discussion of the genealogy

¹⁵⁵ *Quod. VII.q6.a1.c.* This emphasis of Thomas’ is commonly noted by scholars, e.g. de Lubac, 275.

¹⁵⁶ *Gal. c4.L7.n254.*

¹⁵⁷ *ST Ia.q1.a10.c.*

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, 1989, 109.

¹⁵⁹ As de Lubac characterises the medieval conception of the literal sense in general, “It has nothing atemporal about it”, Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Volume 2: The Four Senses Of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 2000), 44.

of Christ provided at the beginning of Matthew. There, Thomas argues that the Old Testament has the ability to speak directly about Christ in the literal sense, citing Luke 24:44 in support of his claim. Thomas writes, “in the Old Testament there are certain things which are referred to Christ and are said only of him”, providing Isaiah 7:14 and Psalm 21:2 (22 in Hebrew) as examples.¹⁶⁰ This literal sense is one, and where the literal sense speaks of Christ, Christ is its primary referent, as Thomas forcefully argues: “[I]f someone were to set down another literal sense, he would be a heretic”.¹⁶¹ Thomas denounces the “error” of Theodore of Mopsuestia here, who denied the ability of any part of the Old Testament, even prophetic literature, to speak about Christ in the literal sense.¹⁶² Rather, if God sought to speak about Christ through the signification of the words on the page, then the literal sense speaks of Christ.

This is where Thomas distinguishes the spiritual senses from the literal. Where the literal sense communicates meaning via words, the spiritual senses communicate meaning through the realities signified by the words. Thomas is crystal clear that the literal sense must be understood as the product of the author’s intention, as he famously notes in the *ST*: “[T]he literal sense is that which the author intends, and...the author of Holy Writ is God”.¹⁶³ However, as he makes clear, since God is the author of the *world* as well as the

¹⁶⁰ *Matt.* c1.L5.n148.

¹⁶¹ *Matt.* c1.L5.n148.

¹⁶² Thomas addresses this “error” in a few other places. See the prologue to *Psal.* (see discussion in Ryan, *Reader*, 17 on the Psalms’ nature as prophecy in connection with Theodore), as well as *Psal.* 21.n176.

¹⁶³ *ST* Ia.q1.a10.c.

author of Scripture, the one who shapes the actions, events and even concepts to which the Scriptures refer,¹⁶⁴ the Scriptures can communicate meaning through both the words in the text and the realities signified by those words. As Thomas says, “[T]ruth is manifested in two ways in Sacred Scripture: one way is how things are signified through words, and in this consists the literal sense; another way is how things are figures of other things, and the spiritual sense consists in this”.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, as Thomas describes the spiritual senses in *Gal.*, “[T]he signification whereby the things signified by the words further signify other things pertains to the mystical sense”.¹⁶⁶ For Thomas, God is properly understood as the author both of the text of Scripture and as the author of the world whose language and imagery the Scriptures use, and as a result the interpreter may rightly discern significance in both.¹⁶⁷

This is the fundamental distinction, in Thomas’ mind, between the literal and spiritual senses. The literal meaning of the text of Scripture is based upon a single level of signification—the words on the page (signs) refer directly to a person, an object, an event

¹⁶⁴ *Quod.* VII.q6.a1.c: “[T]he author of Scripture, namely the Holy Spirit, is not only the author of words but also of things”.

¹⁶⁵ *Quod.* VII.q6.a1.c.

¹⁶⁶ *Gal.* c4.L7.n254.

¹⁶⁷ In Smalley’s estimation, for Thomas, “The literal sense of Scripture...is what the human author expressed by his words; the spiritual senses are what the divine author expressed by the events which the human author related”. Smalley, *Study*, 300. This does not do justice to Thomas’ theory, however. While Smalley is correct to note that the human author, in Thomas’ thought, is not responsible for the meaning discerned through interpretation according to the spiritual senses, she neglects to note that Thomas locates the divine author’s intention in both the literal and spiritual senses.

or an idea (things). The spiritual meaning(s) of Scripture, on the other hand, are based upon two levels of signification. The words on the page (signs) refer to things. These things themselves refer to other things.

A few examples bear this out. First, a comment on Psalm 15 shows Thomas identifying the text as speaking about something of which the human author could have had no understanding save through God's action. Commenting on the psalm's superscript ("*Tituli inscriptio, ipsi David*" in the Gallican Psalter), Thomas states, "In the literal sense, it designates that this was written particularly about those things which pertain to the person of David".¹⁶⁸ However, Thomas then expands the content of the literal sense to include not only David, but David's heir, Christ: "since David produced the person of Christ who would be born from his seed, what is said about David can be said about Christ".¹⁶⁹ Thomas alternately reads the words of the Psalm as spoken by David and as spoken by Christ.¹⁷⁰ Thus, Thomas sees this psalm, particularly the closing verses, as referring directly to Christ's death and resurrection,¹⁷¹ going so far as to say that "[t]his is spoken properly about the Resurrection of Christ, and not about David," claiming that this Psalm is written

¹⁶⁸ *Psal.* 15.n108.

¹⁶⁹ *Psal.* 15.n108.

¹⁷⁰ By Christ: "[T]his is read as though from the person of Christ". *Psal.* 15.n109. By David: "even though having been given what any earthly man would hope in—the power of a strong army—David says, ***I have put my trust in you, O Lord*** (Ps 30:15)". *Psal.* 15.n109.

¹⁷¹ "[I]t is said, on the part of the body, that ***you will not give your holy one***, that is, my body sanctified by you, ***to see corruption***, that is, putrefaction or dissolution, which he did not suffer. But he did suffer the corruption of death". *Psal.* 15.n114.

about *New Testament* history!¹⁷² Here, then, Thomas holds that the divine author wrote about Christ in the literal sense. The words on the page refer directly to Christ, who is the ‘thing’ to which the sign directly points. Only one level of signification is operant here.

Elsewhere, however, Thomas distinguishes between the significances of the literal and the spiritual senses. Commenting on Psalm 26, Thomas sees the psalm as referring to a specific event in David’s life: “according to the literal sense, this is about what is described in 1 Samuel 24 when David fled to safety in the place of Engedi and hid himself there”.¹⁷³ On verse 5 (“For he hath hidden me in his tabernacle; in the day of evils, he hath protected me in the secret place of his tabernacle”, Douay-Rheims), Thomas explains that, “according to the literal sense, the tabernacle was the place in which those praying were protected by divine help...and so they called the tabernacle of God the defense”.¹⁷⁴ Based on the literal sense, Thomas offers two interpretations following the spiritual senses: “mystically (*mystice*), the tabernacle is said about the assumed humanity or the flesh of Christ in which he hides us through faith and hope...Or in another way, the tabernacle is said to be the whole order of the Church, and the just man is hidden in both of these”.¹⁷⁵ These mystical interpretations build upon the literal sense, further expounding the protection provided by the tabernacle in terms of that provided to the faithful by Christ and by the Church. In this

¹⁷² *Psal.* 15.n108.

¹⁷³ *Psal.* 26.n236.

¹⁷⁴ *Psal.* 26.n236.

¹⁷⁵ *Psal.* 26.n236.

way, the “spiritual sense is based on the literal, and presupposes it”.¹⁷⁶ In Thomas’ estimation, while the words on the page (signs) signify the tabernacle (a thing), the tabernacle itself signifies Christ and/or the Church (both things)—thus, two levels of signification are operant.

The same logic of the relationship between the literal and spiritual senses is present at the opening of Thomas’ commentary on Matthew. Commenting on the Davidic genealogy of Christ which opens the gospel, Thomas provides a hermeneutical principle borrowed from Gregory the Great: “Note this also...sometimes a thing done literally (*litterale*) is bad and the thing signified is good; while sometimes the thing done (*vero facto*, ‘the truth of the fact’) is good and the thing signified is bad”.¹⁷⁷ Following this, Thomas provides spiritual interpretations of the figures of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. In the literal sense, according to Thomas Bathsheba was a “sinner” (*peccatrix*), implying that she sinned against her husband Uriah.¹⁷⁸ However, following two glosses,¹⁷⁹ Thomas provides two spiritual interpretations of these figures: Uriah he reads as the devil, Bathsheba as the Church and David as Christ, who “took her away from him, and joined her to himself, and killed the devil”.¹⁸⁰ Alternatively, Thomas reads Uriah as the Jewish people and Bathsheba as the

¹⁷⁶ *ST Ia.q1.a10.co*.

¹⁷⁷ *Matt. c1.L3.n58*.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas makes no mention of David’s role in the matter.

¹⁷⁹ The editors of the Aquinas Institute text hint that Thomas is referring to the *Glossa ordinaria* by capitalising “Gloss” in translation. However, the latter, in the section on 2 Samuel 12, mentions neither Bathsheba nor the Church, and thus, I believe, the text there would be improved by reading ‘a gloss’ rather than *the* “Gloss”.

¹⁸⁰ *Matt. c1.L3.n58*.

Law. “But David, i.e., Christ,” he says, “took the law away from the Jews, when he taught that it should be understood spiritually (*spiritualiter*)”.¹⁸¹ Despite seeming to run in the opposite direction, in Thomas’ thought the spiritual sense here remains “based on the literal”. The words of Scripture speak of David, Bathsheba and Uriah, yet the figures and actions referred to by those words have themselves further significance.

1.5.2.4 Metaphor

In Thomas’ understanding, metaphor appears when “by words things are signified properly and figuratively”, locating not “the figure itself, but that which is figured” within the literal sense.¹⁸² He describes the use of metaphor in Scripture more specifically as “put[ting] forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things”.¹⁸³

As is evident from his numerous citations of the latter, Thomas bases his discussion of metaphor on the thought of (Pseudo-) Dionysius (c. 5th/6th century). For Dionysius, the Scriptures reveal divine truths, which transcend human language, in human language. Though more and less true and false descriptions and predications may be formed of God, in some sense, no language or reason is truly applicable to God—not even that contained within “the conceptual Scriptures, which”, he says, “are compared to dew, to water, to

¹⁸¹ *Matt.* c1.L3.n58.

¹⁸² *ST Ia.q1.a10.ad3.*

¹⁸³ *ST Ia.q1.a9.c.*

milk”, rather than to solid food.¹⁸⁴ All words, all thought must be derived from sense-perception, which means that any thought applied to God, who is totally beyond sense-perception, does not and cannot ultimately stick. Dionysius describes it in this way: “[The One] falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is...There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it...It is beyond assertion and denial”.¹⁸⁵

For Dionysius, then, all language applied to God, whether in the Scriptures or otherwise, is necessarily metaphorical or symbolic, “contrived symbols” both masking and pointing to deeper truth.¹⁸⁶ And as for Dionysius, so for Thomas, who notes that both *theologia* and poetry use language *symbolically* rather than properly. While reason cannot circumscribe poetry,¹⁸⁷ *theologia* deals with things that are above reason. “And therefore,” Thomas says, “the symbolic mode is common to both, since neither is proportioned to reason”.¹⁸⁸ And as the revelatory basis for the *scientia* of *theologia*, all language in the Scriptures, in the same way, is necessarily symbolic language.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ *Letter to Titus* (IX), 1112A (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. Paul Rorem, trans. Colm Luibheid (Paulist, 1987), 286.)

¹⁸⁵ *The Mystical Theology* 5, 1048A–B (Pseudo-Dionysius, 141.)

¹⁸⁶ *Letter to Titus* (IX), 1105C (Pseudo-Dionysius, 283.)

¹⁸⁷ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.ad3.

¹⁸⁸ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.ad3.

¹⁸⁹ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.co.

This apophaticism at the heart of Thomas' theology implies that all meaning found in and through the Scriptures, even that in the literal sense, is metaphorical or symbolic, in a sense. One could say that when Scripture is read according to the literal sense (where a word signifies a thing), one degree of likeness is operant. Since the spiritual senses must be based on the likeness signified in the literal sense (in which a word signifies a thing, which itself signifies a further thing), *two* degrees of likeness are operant. This is what Thomas refers to when he writes that "argumentation cannot be drawn from manners of speaking based on likeness" with reference to the spiritual senses, as opposed to the literal sense.¹⁹⁰

The distinction drawn by Thomas between the literal sense and the spiritual senses according to authorial intention is clear in the beginning of Thomas' commentary on Job. Discussing the scene in the throne room of Heaven in the first chapter of Job, Thomas digresses upon the way in which Scripture reveals truths about God. There, the mystery of God's providence, Thomas says, is described 'symbolically and under the guise of enigma (*symbolice et sub aenigmate*)'. This is "according to the usual practice of Holy Scripture, which describes spiritual things using the images of corporeal things", as Thomas says, providing as examples Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1.¹⁹¹ However, and crucially, Thomas holds that the *author's intention* determines the content of the literal sense, and thus that even symbolic speech is included under the literal sense: "even though spiritual things are conceived using the images of corporeal things, nevertheless, what the author intends to reveal about spiritual things through sensible images do not pertain to the mystical sense,

¹⁹⁰ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.co.

¹⁹¹ *Iob* c1.L2.n10.

but to the literal sense, because the literal sense is what is first intended by the words, whether properly speaking or figuratively”.¹⁹² Likewise, discussing metaphorical speech, Thomas says in *Isa.*, “in metaphorical speech the literal sense is not that which is signified by the words, but that which the speaker wishes to signify by the words”.¹⁹³

1.5.2.5 The three spiritual senses

Though Thomas often describes an interpretation as simply according to the spiritual or “mystical” sense, Thomas’ framework divides the spiritual sense into three, according to the traditional framework mentioned above: the allegorical sense, the moral sense, and the anagogical sense.

As Thomas characterises it in the *Scriptum*, the allegorical sense is found by one’s expounding of Scripture with the goal of understanding “the truth about things that belong to the path here below”.¹⁹⁴ Thomas’ other discussions of the four senses show that, in his understanding of the allegorical sense of Scripture, Thomas has in mind the relation between the past phase of salvation history and the present phase. In *Quod. VII*, Thomas describes the allegorical or “typical” sense as “founded upon that mode of figuring by which

¹⁹² *Iob* c1.L2.n10.

¹⁹³ *Isa.* c6.L1.n206. Thomas’ direct association of the literal sense of Scripture with the intention of the divine author calls into question Smalley’s assessment that “The literal sense of Scripture...is what the human author expressed by his words; the spiritual senses are what the divine author expressed by the events which the human author related”. (Smalley, *Study*, 300) In Thomas’ thought, the literal sense is understood primarily as what the *divine* author expressed by his words, through the agency of the human author.

¹⁹⁴ *Scriptum* I.q1.a5.c.

the Old Testament figures the New”.¹⁹⁵ *Gal.* and the *ST* elaborate on this description: as the former has it, “insofar as the things of the old law signify things of the new law, it is the allegorical sense”.¹⁹⁶ Where the literal sense of the old law, or the old covenant, or the people, things and concepts in the Old Testament books may be shown to signify things in the New, one may interpret according to the allegorical sense. In Thomas’ thought, the allegorical sense is *historical* in character—illustrating this, de Lubac provides Bede’s definition of allegory, which certainly holds true for Thomas: “Allegory exists when the present sacraments of Christ and the Church are signed by means of mystical words or things”.¹⁹⁷

According to the *Scriptum*, the moral (or tropological) sense may be found by the interpreter through the *modus exponendi* of “instruction about moral conduct”¹⁹⁸—the interpreter must approach the biblical text with the purpose of discerning the moral teaching disseminated through the text’s description of people, entities and concepts. In *Quod. VII*, Thomas describes the moral sense as that “through which the instruction of morals is assumed from the likeness of some events accomplished: for thus the moral sense is part of the spiritual sense”.¹⁹⁹ *Gal.* and the *ST*, again, elaborate on Thomas’ earlier thought, describing those actions and things which may be interpreted according to the

¹⁹⁵ *Quod. VII.q6.a2.c.*

¹⁹⁶ *Gal. c4.L7.n254*; cf. *ST Ia.q1.a10.c.*: “[S]o far as the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law, there is the allegorical sense”.

¹⁹⁷ de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 2*, 91.

¹⁹⁸ *Scriptum I.q1.a5.c.*

¹⁹⁹ *Quod. VII.q6.a2.ad3*

moral sense as those things which were “done in Christ”—which simply, it seems, refers to the events and things described in Scripture, the history behind which was shaped by God. Thomas writes, “so far as the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do, there is the moral sense”.²⁰⁰

For Thomas, then, the moral sense is to be understood as the moral teaching implied by the people, entities and events described in the biblical text. de Lubac notes as characteristic of interpretation according to the moral sense a movement of individualisation, of application to the particular believer.²⁰¹ Additionally, the fact that the moral sense is a *spiritual* meaning is significant, because it necessitates that the moral sense can only be that meaning, providing instruction in right action, which is signified by the things themselves signified by the literal sense. Thus Thomas distinguishes between places where the literal sense of Scripture provides moral instruction from the moral sense, properly understood: “the moral and the literal sense are never the same”.²⁰²

Finally, the anagogical sense, as Thomas describes it in the *Scriptum*, may be found through the *modus exponendi* of the “contemplation of the truth about things that belong to the

²⁰⁰ *ST Ia.q1.a10.c.* Thomas’ description in *Gal.* is limited to New Testament interpretation: “insofar as the things which in the new law were done in Christ and done in things that signify Christ are signs of things we ought to do, it is the moral sense”. *Gal.* c4.L7.n254.

²⁰¹ “It is by the tropological sense...that Scripture is fully *for us* the Word of God, this Word which is addressed to each person, *hic et nunc* [“here and now”] as well as to the whole Church, and telling each that which is of interest to his life”. de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, Vol. 2, 140.

²⁰² *Quod.* VII.q6.a2.ad3.

heavenly fatherland”.²⁰³ This Thomas describes in *Quod. VII* as “founded upon that mode of figuring by which New and Old [Testaments] simultaneously signify the Church triumphant”.²⁰⁴ The idea of eschatological extrapolations from the text of Scripture is underscored in Thomas’ discussion of anagogy in the *ST*: “so far as they [”things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ”] signify what relates to eternal glory, there is the anagogical sense”.²⁰⁵

An example will bear out Thomas’ use of interpretation according to the four senses in the wild. Thomas wields all four senses as he expounds the significances of circumcision, which Thomas regards as a “sacrament of the Old Law”, in *Scriptum IV.d1.q2.a1.qa1.co*. These “sacraments” Thomas describes as “significations of the consecrations mentioned”, due to the fact that they point forward to the future reality of the work of Christ, rather than pointing to the results of Christ’s work as a present reality, as do the sacraments of the New Law.²⁰⁶ As a result, the true significances of the sacraments of the New Law are found when interpreted spiritually, rather than literally.

Thomas describes circumcision in the Old Law as an outward indication of the inward reality of faith in God, a sign enacting “the distinction of a faithful nation from unbelievers, on account of the faith for which circumcision was given”.²⁰⁷ This is the historical (or

²⁰³ *Scriptum I.q1.a5.c*.

²⁰⁴ *Quod. VII.q6.a2.c*.

²⁰⁵ *ST Ia.q1.a10.c*.

²⁰⁶ *Scriptum IV.d1.q1.a1.qa1.co*.

²⁰⁷ *Scriptum IV.d1.q2.a1.qa1.co*.

literal) significance of circumcision, the extra-textual meaning of the action. However, on top of this significance, Thomas describes a threefold “mystic signification”:

a moral signification, because it was a sign of the chastity to be kept; an allegorical signification, inasmuch as it signified future purgation by Christ; and an anagogical signification, as it were, inasmuch as it signified the laying aside of corruptible flesh and blood in the resurrection.²⁰⁸

The “moral signification” taught those who underwent circumcision about the pattern their individual actions should follow—the pattern of chastity. The “allegorical signification” of circumcision pointed forward to the removal of original sin as a result of Christ’s Passion.²⁰⁹ Despite not being the literal sense of circumcision, this is clearly the most important significance of the sacrament to Thomas, as he spends the majority of the *quaestiuncula* expounding it. The “anagogical signification” Thomas takes as circumcision’s prefiguring of the future resurrection.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter laid the groundwork for an examination of Thomas’ approach to the interpretation of Scripture across his body of writing. Here, the work was in the main definitional, with the goal of describing in detail the meaning of the concept of Scripture to Thomas. In particular, the chapter zoomed in on Thomas’ usage of the terms “literal sense” and “spiritual senses” of Scripture, finding that in the friar’s thought, the “literal sense” is

²⁰⁸ *Scriptum* IV.d1.q2.a1.qa1.co.

²⁰⁹ Interestingly, not until *ST* IIIa.q70.a4.c does Thomas concretely connect circumcision with baptism. This may be because in the *Scriptum*, Thomas does not view grace as being conferred in circumcision, a view which he revises in the *ST*.

that kind of meaning communicated through signs, which themselves refer to “things” (following Augustine’s use of the term). This kind of meaning is communicated in the same way by both the words of Scripture and by ordinary human texts. The spiritual (or “mystical”) senses of Scripture, on the other hand, are those kinds of meaning which are communicated through the *things* referred to by the signs which make up the text of Scripture. Unique to the Scriptures, the spiritual senses are, in Thomas’ understanding, post-textual meaning which is nevertheless the product of authorial intention.

Thomas’ practice of biblical interpretation rests upon his application of the doctrine of the fourfold sense. The following two chapters examine Thomas’ application of the doctrine with regard to passages of Scripture which reference to the biblical entity of the TOL. Chapter 2 examines instances in which Thomas interprets such passages according to the literal sense, while Chapter 3 examines those in which Thomas has recourse to the spiritual senses.

Chapter 2: The Literal Sense

2.1 Introduction

To help the present-day reader to understand Thomas’ practice of Scriptural interpretation, the present chapter provides a cross-section of Thomas’ practice of interpretation according to the literal sense by examining his readings, which follow the literal sense, of sections of Scripture which reference the TOL. The chapter sorts these readings by category, taking account of the chronology of Thomas’ works within each category. In the case of each of Thomas’ references to the TOL, I explain how it is that

Thomas makes use of the literal sense, rather than one of the spiritual senses, and I give an account of his reading. Together, Thomas' readings treated in this chapter give a fuller picture, replete with examples, of the possible content of the Scriptures' literal sense in Thomas' understanding. For Thomas, the literal sense may include not only the historical happenings described by the text, but also the content of metaphor and other figurative speech and—even—the future reality referred to in prophetic speech.

As discussed above (§1.5.2.3), the primary distinction in Thomas' thought between the literal sense and the spiritual senses of Scripture is where the meaning resides. The meaning communicated in the literal sense comes from the words on the page referring directly to the entity described. The meaning communicated in the spiritual senses, on the other hand, comes from the things referred to by the words on the page themselves referring to other things. The former is the result of both the human and the divine authors' intention; the latter is solely to be ascribed to the divine.²¹⁰

Based upon this distinction, a good rule of thumb for determining whether Thomas understands himself to be interpreting a given passage of Scripture according to the literal sense or the spiritual senses is whether he grounds his interpretation in the human author's intention or whether he purports to interpret solely the divine author's intention by going beyond what the human author could have meant to say. If the former, then Thomas most likely understands himself to be interpreting according to the literal sense of the passage. If the latter, then most likely the spiritual senses.

²¹⁰ See Smalley, *Study*, 300, with caveat as cited above.

Thomas' readings following the literal sense of sections of the Scriptures referencing the TOL may be grouped into two main categories: those in which Thomas engages with the TOL in its capacity as a component of the primeval Paradise, and those in which Thomas interprets the passage in question as metaphorical speech on the part of the author. This chapter first treats Thomas' discussions of the TOL in its capacity as an historical entity (§2.3) before moving on to his discussions of sections of the Scriptures in which he reads the TOL as an instance of metaphorical speech (§2.4).

2.2 The TOL in the Old and New Testaments

Before examining Thomas' interpretations, however, a brief overview of the role of the TOL in the biblical texts themselves is necessary.²¹¹

The significances attached to the TOL evolve as the Scriptural story progresses. At its root, the TOL, as described throughout Scripture, signals the blessing of God, which leads to eternal life, which rests upon his people. This blessing is first given to humans in Genesis 2:9, when God creates the garden of Eden, placing alongside its river (2:10) the TOL and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After the man and the woman disobey God and eat the fruit of the latter tree, the blessing is lost. God expels them from the garden,

²¹¹ This overview takes on board the work of a few modern commentators, not because they are somehow 'right' while Thomas is 'wrong' or 'outdated', but in order to begin examining the TOL using the terms of modern biblical studies, with which the modern reader is likely to be comfortable, before moving to Thomas' less familiar medieval treatment.

removing them from access to the TOL, lest they “reach out their hands and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever” (Gen. 3:22 NRSV).

The book of Proverbs associates this lost tree of life, the sign of God’s life-giving blessing, with wisdom. Knowledge brought death; wisdom brings life. So it is that in its encomium of ‘Lady Wisdom’, it applies to her the life-giving capacities of the TOL:

“[Wisdom] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy” (Prov. 3:18 NRSV).²¹² Some aspect of what was lost in Paradise—life—is now accessible by cleaving to Wisdom.²¹³ And, throughout Proverbs (e.g. 11:30, 13:12, 15:4), the TOL is associated with dispositions and occurrences which satisfy desire and bring wholeness, or life. Additionally, several Psalms, without explicitly invoking the tree *of life* as such, trade on associations between trees and righteousness which likely stem from Genesis 2:9 (e.g. esp. Psalm 1:3;²¹⁴ also 52:8, 92:12; cp. Psalm 37:35). The upshot always remains the same: wisdom and righteousness are described by the image of God’s blessing: the TOL.

²¹² Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1996), ix.

²¹³ So Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Baker Academic, 2006), 137: “One obtains life if one embraces this woman and holds her tight”.

²¹⁴ So Jerome, *Homily 1*: “[Y]ou see too that the just man, that blessed man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked...is like the tree that is planted near running water”. Quoted in Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1-11*, vol. 1, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 55.

In the New Testament, the book of Revelation recapitulates the role of the TOL as a sign of and an image for God's blessing. In Revelation 2:7, the Son of God writes to the church in Ephesus, "to everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God". As G.K. Beale describes it, this is "a picture of forgiveness and consequent experience of God's intimate presence" brought about by the cross.²¹⁵ At the opening of Revelation, the TOL, and the paradise in which it resides, remain far off. However, this changes in 22:2, where the "tree of life" (singular) grows "on either side of the river" in the heavenly Jerusalem. In an image drawing upon the image of the trees alongside the river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel 47,²¹⁶ God's people re-enter Paradise, regaining the state and the realm of righteousness and life, of God's blessing. Revelation continues to associate the TOL with this blessing, as the Tree is described as being given to those whose robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb (22:14, cf. 7:14),²¹⁷ and withheld from those who pervert God's words (22:19).²¹⁸

2.3 The TOL as a component of the primeval Paradise

Thomas interprets the TOL as it appears in Genesis 2:9 and 3:22–24 according to the literal sense in two main ways, each of which I examine in turn. First, I examine Thomas' readings of the TOL in which he is concerned with the Tree's ability to extend human life. I

²¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 1999), 234–235.

²¹⁶ So Beale, 1106.

²¹⁷ Beale, 1138–1139.

²¹⁸ Beale, 1153.

then turn to those readings of the same in which Thomas takes the Tree as described in Genesis as thematically appropriate for describing the loss of grace experienced by all humanity in the fall of Adam and Eve.

2.3.1 The ‘medical’ Tree

The simplest form of Thomas’ interpretations of the TOL according to the literal sense is his examinations of the hypothetical effects of its fruit on the bodies of Adam and Eve. Thomas’ understanding of the physical powers of the TOL is contingent upon his anthropology, and so his discussion of the Tree appears in the context of his larger discussions of Genesis 1–3. Thomas uses these texts to teach on the nature of the growth and life (and the possibility or impossibility of reproduction and death²¹⁹) of humans before the Fall, interpreting Gen. 2:9 and 3:22 in terms of contemporary biological research.

That Thomas sees himself as explaining the literal sense of the sections of Genesis mentioning the TOL (2:9, 3:22) is clear. Thomas is doing nothing other than seeking to explain the historical reality of the Tree, attested to by the text, according to his understanding of how nature functions. Such an interpretation precisely fits Thomas’ understanding of the literal sense—Thomas is further explaining the historical reality of the TOL, which the original author was concerned to communicate, in Thomas’ understanding.

²¹⁹ See *Scriptum* II.d20; *ST* Ia.qq98–101.

Because Thomas' interpretations in each of these sections of his corpus remain constant, this section examines together Thomas' readings of the TOL in *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a4, d29.q1.a5 and *expositio textus*, III.d16.q1.a3, *ST* Ia.q97.a4, q102.a1, IIaIIae.q164.a2, IIIa.q49.a5 and *De malo* q5.a5.²²⁰

The idea that before the Fall, man was both "in a certain way mortal, inasmuch as he was able to die, and in a certain way immortal, inasmuch as he was able not to die"²²¹ recurs throughout Thomas' discussion of humans' prelapsarian state. Human immortality was contingent upon humans' remaining in an upright state. As a result, when Adam and Eve sinned, they incurred the necessity of death. But what if Adam and Eve had *not* sinned? Would they have lived forever in the Garden? In that case, how would their sin-free bodies have differed from ours? Thomas argues that, even before the Fall, humans were *naturally mortal*, as creatures who are (and were) "not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body".²²² For Thomas (following Aristotle), man's ensouled nature does not distinguish him from other living creatures, however; indeed, to have a soul (*anima*) of some sort is fundamental to what it means to be an *anima*-l (a 'living being', from the Latin *anima*, 'soul' or 'life'). What makes humans distinct, says Thomas, is the kind of soul that they possess,

²²⁰ This section treats Thomas' interpretations of the TOL as presented in these works more or less interchangeably. Though Thomas' thought certainly evolves throughout his career, his readings of the TOL remain constant in these sections. The relevant portions of the *ST* depend heavily upon the *Scriptum*, and Emery dates Question 5 of *De Malo* to no later than 1270 (and possibly earlier), placing it chronologically close to the *prima pars*. See Emery, "Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas", 333.

²²¹ *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a2.co.

²²² *ST* Ia.q75.a4.co.

the rational soul, uniquely composed of soul (*anima*) and spirit (*spiritus*).²²³ As a result, as *anima*-l corporeal beings, humans are like all other creatures in their need for food to stave off death, as well as in their capabilities of growth and reproduction, both before and after the Fall.²²⁴ In this sense, for Thomas there is not a great deal of difference between Adam's and Eve's condition and ours today: "'mortal' is a difference of man. Therefore, man's quality of being mortal arises from natural principles. Therefore, since the nature of the species is the same before sin and after it, it seems that he was naturally mortal before sin as well".²²⁵ Thomas adds in *De malo* that "death and dissolution are natural to human beings by reason of a necessity of matter, but immortality would befit them by reason of the form's nature".²²⁶

Crucially, the immortality enjoyed by humans in Paradise was not natural to them, but was a "gift" of God (*beneficium*) which was lost when Adam and Eve sinned.²²⁷ As Thomas describes it in the *ST*, "man's body was indissoluble not by reason of any intrinsic vigor of immortality, but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption as so long as it remained

²²³ See *ST* Ia.q97.a3.co.

²²⁴ *ST* Ia.q97.a3.co.

²²⁵ *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a4.sc.

²²⁶ *De malo* q5.a5.co.

²²⁷ *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a4.co.

itself subject to God”.²²⁸ The soul received the power to continually in-form the body as long as it remained subject to God.²²⁹

Thus, for Thomas, the principal cause of human immortality before the Fall was a gift of grace to the soul, an instance of grace superadded to nature. This is the *sine qua non* of humans’ prelapsarian immortality, but it does not tell the entire story: in the *Scriptum* Thomas identifies four separate ways in which the human body can disintegrate (which may be described as ‘corruption₁₋₄’), and describes how God staved them off in the prelapsarian state.

First, according to Thomas, “material things have a finite power for being. Hence they must be corrupted within a certain period”, following Aristotle.²³⁰ The Philosopher holds that the lifespan of all material things are governed by the “order controlling all things”,²³¹ and Thomas adopts this idea, positing a maximum span of existence for any physical object. This inevitable decay can be called corruption₁. The second kind of corruption (corruption₂) arises from the fact that all material objects are composed of the four basic elements: water, earth, fire and air, in varying amounts. Inequality in individual things of their contrary elements (water is contrary to fire and earth to air) leads to

²²⁸ *ST* Ia.q97.a1.sc.

²²⁹ *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a2.co.

²³⁰ This section draws throughout upon *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a4.co.

²³¹ Aristotle, “On Generation and Corruption,” trans. H.H. Joachim (http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/gener_corr.1.i.html, n.d.), accessed January 9, 2024, 2.10.

disintegration.²³² Thomas saw God's protection against corruption₁ and ₂ in the prelapsarian state through a gift of grace, which allowed the soul to continually and perpetually in-form the body.²³³

Corruption₃ is more specific to living creatures, pertaining to animals' metabolic heat. The human body tends towards decay because, as Thomas phrases it, "the heat that is the instrument of the soul (*anima*, in the sense of 'principle of life') consumes the moisture in which there is life". Here, Thomas draws upon an idea current in European natural philosophy during his career—that of the 'radical moisture' (*humidum radicale*).²³⁴ According to Avicenna and those who followed him (including Thomas), the *humidum radicale* was the principle of physical life, derived at conception from the seed of both parents.²³⁵ Depleted by the body's heat, the *humidum radicale* could not be replaced,

²³² The only exception is the heavenly bodies, "which are not subject to generation and corruption, since contraries are not found in them". *Comp.* 74. Thomas' view is by no means the only view espoused among his contemporaries; both Alexander of Hales (c.1185–1245) and Richard Fishacre (c.1200–1248) denied the existence of corruption₂ in the cases of Adam and Eve, holding that God created their bodies in perpetual elemental equilibrium. See Joseph Ziegler, "Medicine and Immortality in the Terrestrial Paradise," in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, York Studies in Medieval Theology 3 (York Medieval Press, 2001), 201–42, 216, 228.

²³³ So *ST* Ia.q97.a1.co: "a supernatural force given by God to the soul, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself subject to God".

²³⁴ Though originally hailing from Aristotle's and Galen's thought, this concept was adopted by Avicenna and ultimately worked its way into Latin scholarship in the years before Thomas' lifetime. See Gianna Pomata, "Innate Heat, Radical Moisture and Generation," in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Lauren Kassell, Nick Hopwood, and Rebecca Flemming (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 195–208, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107705647.020>, 195–199.

²³⁵ Pomata, "Innate Heat, Radical Moisture and Generation", 198–199.

though its exhaustion could be delayed by consumption of food, which replenished the ‘nutrimental moisture’ (*humidum nutrimentale*).²³⁶ In Thomas thought, since the prelapsarian humans were naturally mortal, they had to eat (from the other trees in the garden, see Gen. 2:16) in order to replenish the lost *humidum radicale* with *humidum nutrimentale*.²³⁷ However, because *nutrimentale* cannot replace lost *radicale*, this would have led to a ‘dilution’ of the *radicale*, as it does for humans today—in both the *Scriptum* and the *ST* Thomas invokes Aristotle’s analogy of repeatedly topping up a cup of wine with water. Eventually, the wine becomes too diluted to be properly called wine.²³⁸ To prevent this, according to Thomas, God provided the TOL, whose fruit directly replenishes the *humidum radicale*, granting humans who repeatedly consumed it the potential for indefinite life.²³⁹

Corruption₄ is any violent damage to the body, of which Thomas gives the examples of “the cutting of a sword or burning by fire and things of this sort”. Here, Thomas envisions this impassibility not as a quality of the prelapsarian human body, but as resulting from the

²³⁶ Joseph Ziegler, “Ut Dicunt Medici: Medical Knowledge and Theological Debates in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73, no. 2 (1999): 208–37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44445978>, 217–219.

²³⁷ “[T]o prevent the entire consumption of the humor, man was obliged to take food.” *ST* Ia.q97.a4.co. “[T]he reason why we partake of food is to avoid the corruption that might result from the consumption of the natural humidity.” *SCG* IV.83.

²³⁸ Aristotle, “On Generation and Corruption”, 1.5. Thomas is not the first to do so. See Ziegler, “Medicine and Immortality in the Terrestrial Paradise”, 229n.82.

²³⁹ For this role of the TOL, see also *ST* Ia.q97.a4; *De malo* q5.a5.ad9. Since corruption₃ depends on the action of metabolic heat, it is unclear how Thomas would apply the principle of corruption₃ in the case of, say, a lizard, but this is beside the point.

un-fallen state of the intellect as well as from God's grace. As he describes it in the *ST*, man could be protected from harm "partly by the use of his reason, whereby he could avoid what was harmful; and partly also by Divine Providence, so preserving him, that nothing of a harmful nature could come upon him unawares".²⁴⁰

In theory, the TOL would have possessed ability to indefinitely postpone death, even *after* the Fall. Indeed, Thomas says (offhand, and shockingly!) that the fruit of the Tree *does currently* keep some humans from death: "Even if man after sin had eaten of the tree of life, he would not have been able to escape death, though he would have been able to defer death such that by the help of the tree his life would be prolonged, as is believed of Enoch and Elijah".²⁴¹ Thomas, however, sees God's barring of fallen humanity in general from access to the Tree of Life as a mercy: "it was not expedient for man that he should remain so long in this wretched life".²⁴² It should be noted that this is *not* immortality, properly speaking: "Man, if after sin he had eaten from the tree of life, would not because of this have recovered immortality, but by that beneficial food would rather have been able to extend [his] life".²⁴³ Due to the withdrawal of the grace which sustained humans in their immortal state, corruption₁₋₄ would have operated unchecked, with only corruption₃ halted by the action of the TOL. Though he doesn't specify this, Thomas hints that a life supernaturally

²⁴⁰ *ST* Ia.q97.a2.ad4.

²⁴¹ *Scriptum* II.d29.q1.a5.ad4.

²⁴² *Scriptum* II.d29.q1.a5.ad4.

²⁴³ *ST* IIaIIae.q164.a2.ad5. My translation: *homo, si post peccatum de ligno vitae comedisset, non propter hoc immortalitatem recuperasset, sed beneficio illius cibi potuisset vitam magis prolongare.*

extended by virtue of the Tree of Life and yet subject to corruption_{1, 2} and ₄ would be awful, a sort of living death, with the body always tending towards decay and dissolution (corruption₁ and ₂), and always able to be harmed by its environment (corruption₄), yet never dying. It is clear, then, why Thomas considers the loss of the Tree of Life not only as a fitting punishment for human sin, but also “more to be understood by way of compassion than insult”.²⁴⁴

Thomas is sceptical of an element of Peter’s reading of the TOL, however, disputing the *magister’s* teaching (which follows Augustine’s authority) that Adam and Eve “took of the tree of life before sin, since they had been commanded to eat of every tree of paradise, other than the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.²⁴⁵ Rather, Thomas remains agnostic as to whether Adam and Eve ate of the TOL: “[W]e cannot settle on which is...true, since Scripture does not settle the matter and it cannot be proved by reason”.²⁴⁶

Elsewhere in the *Scriptum*, Thomas applies his thought on the physical capabilities of the TOL to that on the Incarnation. Echoing *Scriptum* II.d19 and *De malo* q5, Thomas holds that humans necessarily tend towards death, not only because of sin, but partly because they are naturally (*ex natura*) mortal beings.²⁴⁷ Thomas thus holds that that Christ, though sinless, had “necessity of dying” (*necessitas moriendi*) on account of his human

²⁴⁴ *Per modum compassionis quam insultationis. Scriptum* II.d29.q1.a5.ad4.

²⁴⁵ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 2: On Creation*, trans. Giulio Silano, 2nd ed., vol. 2, *Medieval Sources in Translation* (PIMS, 2008), XXIX.6.1 (190), p. 145.

²⁴⁶ *Scriptum* II.d29.expositio textus.

²⁴⁷ *Scriptum* III.d16.q1.a1.c.

nature, because, as he says, “human nature, with respect to the state of its possibility (in which state Christ assumed it), does not have the power of not dying”.²⁴⁸ This reverses Thomas’ earlier statement that prelapsarian humans (one of which Christ, though sinless, was *not*²⁴⁹) had both the ability to die and the ability not to die.²⁵⁰

The TOL appears in *articulus* 3, in discussion of the ability of Christ’s human will to preserve his body from death, where the *argumenta* advance the case that Christ’s human will *could* have preserved his body from death. The fifth *argumentum* maintains that, since “a greater power (*virtus*) was in Christ’s soul than was in any other created thing”, and since the example of the Tree of Life shows that “the power (*virtus*) of something created can preserve the [or a] body from death”, *a fortiori*, Christ’s soul must have been able to keep him from death.²⁵¹ However, Thomas does not allow the objection, holding that no created *virtus* has the ability to “change a divinely imposed law of nature”, and so says that “the necessity of dying within Christ was not subject to his human will, but only to his divine will”.²⁵² So, he maintains, as elsewhere, that the TOL was not the primary cause of immortality, but helped, rather, to maintain the human body in its incorrupt state.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ *Scriptum* III.d16.q1.a2.c.

²⁴⁹ *Scriptum* III.d15.q1.

²⁵⁰ In contrast, for Thomas, in the eschaton, “it will be impossible for [man] to die. *Scriptum* II.d19.q1.a5.sc. Cf. Thomas’ citation of Augustine in *Caloan.* c21.l2: “The bodies of the just, when they rise again, shall need neither the [tree] of life...nor any bodily nourishment.

²⁵¹ *Scriptum* III.d16.q1.a3.arg5.

²⁵² *Scriptum* III.d16.q1.a3.co.

²⁵³ *Scriptum* III.d16.q1.a3.ad5.

In these sections, Thomas treats the biblical writings as serious history. Because they are trustworthy and accurate, he seeks to conform his understanding of the world, including that of human nature, which is derived from natural philosophy to what is revealed in Scripture. This is an outgrowth of Thomas' conviction that *sacra doctrina* has the power and duty to evaluate all other *scientiae*.²⁵⁴

2.3.2 The TOL as a thematic emblem for lost Paradise

We've seen Thomas analysing, in great detail, the role of the TOL in humans' prelapsarian immortality. However, in *Matt.* chapter 3 and in *ST* IIIa.q49.a5, Thomas reads the historical reality of the TOL, attested to in the Scriptural text, as a thematic emblem for the blessing lost following Adam's and Eve's fall from grace. These readings of the TOL trades on Genesis 3:24: "And he [God] cast out Adam; and placed before the paradise of pleasure Cherubims [*sic*], and a flaming sword, turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Douay-Rheims).

In these sections of his corpus, Thomas does not so much proffer an interpretation of Genesis 3:24 as use the text of Genesis to explain the event, much later in salvation history, of the baptism of Christ. Thomas simply cites Gen. 3:24 in its capacity as a record of events which occurred at the dawn of human history. Thus, in the same way that Thomas' interpretations of the TOL described in the previous section deal with the literal sense of the passage in question, in his understanding, so do his readings described in this section.

²⁵⁴ On Thomas' "theological coherentism", see Marshall, "Una Uetula", 14–25.

In *Matt.*, Thomas reads Gen. 3:24 in this way as he comments on Jesus' baptism. The statement that "the heavens were opened to him" (Matthew 3:16) Thomas takes to imply that "heaven was closed to the human race by sin",²⁵⁵ citing Gen. 3:24 as a proof-text. Here, Paradise in general, and the TOL in particular, are what Adam and Eve lose as a result of their sin. Thomas concludes that in Genesis "It is said that he placed Seraphim, but it was opened by Christ".²⁵⁶ Thomas adds that "by the merit of his baptism the heavens were opened to us".²⁵⁷

Thomas puts a finer point on this claim elsewhere in his corpus. Multiple discussions clarify that, for Thomas, it is Christ's *passion*, rather than his baptism, which opens the gates of heaven to humanity.²⁵⁸ In the *tertia pars* of the *ST*, Thomas writes, "the heavens were opened at Christ's baptism...in order to signify that heaven is opened to the baptized, through Christ's baptism, which has its efficacy from His Passion".²⁵⁹ Supporting the thesis that Heaven, which was shut to humans due to sin, is opened to humans through

²⁵⁵ *Matt.* c3.L2.n298.

²⁵⁶ *Matt.* c3.L2.n298. This reading is according to the Marietti text (presently the best text of the work). My translation: *Dicitur quod posuit Seraphim, sed apertum est per Christum*. The text's mention of seraphim rather than cherubim may result from scribal error, but may also be a reference, original to Thomas, to the fiery associations of the former class of angels, and thus their relation by kind to the flaming sword of Gen. 3:24. See *ST* Ia.q108.a4.ad2.

²⁵⁷ *Matt.* c3.L2.n298.

²⁵⁸ That Thomas held this view from the beginning of his career, long before *Matt.* was composed, is clear from *Scriptum* III.d18.a6.qa3.

²⁵⁹ *ST* IIIa.q49.a5.ad3. Incidentally, this is a good example of interpretation according to the spiritual senses, due to the fact that Thomas perceives the historical reality signified by the Scriptural text (the opening of the heavens) as itself signifying something else (that baptism allows one to enter heaven).

Christ's passion, Thomas cites Hebrews 10:19.²⁶⁰ Christ's passion, Thomas continues, deals with two aspects of the problem of human sin: the sin "common to the whole race", which "our first parents' sin", and the individual sins committed by all humans after that point.²⁶¹ It is the first which closed the gates of heaven, Thomas writes, and he explains this by citing Genesis 3:24: "God placed Cherubim, along with a flaming, revolving sword, to guard the way of the tree of life".²⁶² Again, here Thomas cites this passage as representative of humans' loss in their Fall of the primeval Paradise.

2.4 The 'metaphorical' Tree

When Thomas interprets the appearances in Genesis of the TOL according to the literal sense, he tends to discuss the Tree's effect upon prelapsarian human biology (§2.3.1), or to speak of it more generally as an element of the primeval blessing lost after the Fall (§2.3.2). However, at several points, Thomas reads the Tree's appearances in Rev. 2:7 and 22:2 as instances of metaphorical speech on the part of the biblical authors. Thomas' interpretations trade on an association between the figure of Wisdom and the TOL in Prov. 3:18 and on a literary connection which he perceives between the TOL and Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23.

²⁶⁰ *ST IIIa.q49.a5.sc.*

²⁶¹ *ST IIIa.q49.a5.co.*

²⁶² My translation: *collocavit Deus cherubim, et flammeum gladium atque versatilem, ad custodiendam viam ligni vitae.*

Thomas' insistence that the rhetorical device of metaphor is included under the literal sense of Scripture²⁶³ indicates that, in these cases, despite the strangeness of his readings to the modern mind, he envisions himself as interpreting the text of Scripture according to the literal sense.

2.4.1 The TOL as a metaphor for Wisdom or for Christ

In *SCG* IV.83 and *De potentia* q5.a9, Thomas examines the appearances of the TOL in the book of Revelation in the context of a discussion of eschatology, which shapes and colours his metaphorical interpretation of the TOL in these sections.

In Thomas' vision of the final condition of humanity and the cosmos, the entire material creation has fulfilled its ultimate purpose: leading man to his own last end, that of contemplation of God face-to-face.²⁶⁴ As a result, in the eschaton the material creation need not exist in the form it does in the present. In the eschaton, says Thomas, the entire corporeal creation will exist without the potency for corruption of any kind—in other words, corruption² will no longer be operant. Thus all “mixed bodies” (*corpora mixta*),²⁶⁵ besides the human bodies of the blessed and the damned, as well as the heavenly bodies,

²⁶³ E.g. *ST* Ia.q1.a10.ad3. See Chapter 1.5.2.4.

²⁶⁴ “[T]he whole of corporeal nature exists for man...[a]nd so the consummation of [it] depends...on man's consummation. Man's consummation consists in the attainment of his last end...the vision of God”. *Comp.* §148–149.

²⁶⁵ Thomas uses this term in *Pot.* q5.a9 to refer to created material things which are composed of differing combinations of the four elements, which thus tend toward dissolution.

will exist in their simplest form, so to speak: divided into their constitutive elements (water, earth, fire and air).²⁶⁶

Thomas argues throughout *SCG* IV.83 that “men will have no use of sex or food after rising again” for a few reasons.²⁶⁷ First, the processes of nutrition and reproduction, according to Thomas, befit humanity’s present condition, in which their bodies are able to fall apart and cease to exist, and need to be repaired and eventually replaced. There is no use for either food or sex, however, when the human body is unable to deteriorate or die. In the present state, humans eat in order to provide for growth and replenishment in light of the body’s breaking down (offsetting the effects of corruption₃). However, Thomas declaims, without corruption breaking down the body, if man ate he would “become of immoderate size”, which he sees as unfitting for the resurrected life. Additionally, the act of sex cannot occur in the eschaton, because “after the resurrection there can be no emission of seed from a man’s body, nor from his substance, since...it would involve corruption and a subtraction from man’s nature, so that it could not be a principle of nature”. Since neither eating nor sex, though enjoyable acts, serve a necessary purpose in the eschaton, they will not occur in the resurrection, because “to do these things with the sole object of pleasure is altogether out of order and unbecoming”.

However, as Thomas notes, “[t]here are...some texts which would seem to promise the use of food to men in that state”, which include Isaiah 25:6,8; 65:13,17; Matthew 26:29;

²⁶⁶ Thomas outlines this succinctly and clearly in *Comp.* §170. The heavenly bodies can continue to exist due to their preservation from corruption, even in the present state.

²⁶⁷ This section draws on *SCG* IV.83 throughout.

Luke 22:29–30 and Revelation 20:4–5, as well as 22:2 (“In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”). Arguing against the notion that this indicates that the new creation includes a corporeal TOL with fruit which humans will eat, Thomas holds, “The texts that seem to promise the use of food after the resurrection should be understood *spiritualiter*”. A misunderstanding should be avoided here. Thomas is *not* stating that these texts should be interpreted according to the spiritual senses at the expense of the literal. Instead, he offers an interpretation of these texts which follows the literal sense as he outlines it elsewhere, reading this mention of the TOL and the other descriptions of food as instances of metaphorical speech: “Sacred Scripture sets before us intelligible truths under the guise of sensible objects, in order that our mind, from the things which it knows, may learn to love the things which are beyond its knowledge”.²⁶⁸ Thomas argues that all discussions of food in the texts cited should be understood as figurative language, referring to the eschatological delight of the blessed in Wisdom. “[T]he delight afforded by the contemplation of wisdom, and the acquisition of intelligible truth by our understanding, tends to be indicated in Sacred Scripture by the use of food”. To support his argument, Thomas cites Prov. 9:2, 4–5 and Sirach 15:3, quoting Prov. 3:18 (“[Wisdom] is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her: and he that shall retain

²⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. *ST Iallae.q4.a7.co*, concerning the ultimate happiness of the saints: “All those material promises contained in Holy Scripture, are to be understood metaphorically, inasmuch as Scripture is wont to express spiritual things under the form of things corporeal, in order *that from things we know, we may rise to the desire of things unknown*, as Gregory [the Great] says”.

her is blessed”) as the linchpin to his case. Thus, in *SCG* IV.83, Thomas applies the metaphorical semantic value of the TOL in Proverbs 3 to the TOL in Revelation 22.

Similar logic appears in *Pot.* q5.a9, where Thomas again examines the nature of the eschaton.²⁶⁹ There, Thomas makes the argument, similar to that outlined above, that “in that renewal of the world, no mixed body will remain except the human body”.²⁷⁰ Again, Rev. 22:2 appears in an *argumentum*, where Thomas writes, “Since...the text refers to the final consummation of the beatitude of the saints, it would seem that in that state the plants will remain”.²⁷¹ As in *SCG* IV.83, Thomas interprets the TOL in Rev. 22 as metaphorical language. “The tree of life is being taken there metaphorically (*metaphorice*) for Christ, or for Wisdom, of which Proverbs 3:18 [says], [*she*] is a [*or the*] tree of life to the one who grasps her’.²⁷² Thomas again connects the TOL, metaphorically, with Wisdom, but adds in an additional reference to the person of Christ. That Thomas intends to put the figures of Christ and Wisdom on the same level in this reference is clear from the fact that many other readings across Thomas’ corpus trade on his connection between the biblical figure of Wisdom (*sapientia*) and the person of Christ. The name “Wisdom” is, for Thomas, nearly

²⁶⁹ Emery, “Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas”, 332, 335 sees these two works as separated by approximately one year.

²⁷⁰ *Pot.* q5.a9.co.

²⁷¹ *Pot.* q5.a9.arg6.

²⁷² *Pot.* q5.a9.ad6. My translation. *lignum vitae accipitur ibi metaphorice pro Christo, vel pro sapientia, de qua Proverb. cap. III, 18: lignum vitae est his qui apprehenderint eam.*

another name for Christ, and reappears in numerous other places in connection with the TOL.²⁷³

Thomas again interprets the TOL as it appears in Proverbs 3:18 as a metaphor for both Wisdom and Christ in his commentary on John. Specifically, Thomas here reads Proverbs as referring, using TOL-language, to Christ's body and blood as localised in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Thomas' citation of Proverbs 3:18 occurs in the larger context of his commentary on the sixth chapter of the gospel of John, in the section commonly known as the 'bread of life discourse'.

Throughout his exposition of the chapter, Thomas repeatedly refers to the figures of Wisdom and of Christ as if the two concepts signify to one and the same person, and his equating of the two, attested in many of Thomas' other works, plays a major role in Thomas' argument in this section. Michael Dauphinais has argued that in Thomas' treatment of the Bread of Life discourse (and particularly in John 6:35–58), the friar sees in Jesus' self-description as the "bread of life" two connected meanings: Jesus as "the

²⁷³ The connection between Christ and Wisdom is present across the chronological span of Thomas' thought. In the prologue to the *Scriptum*, Thomas expounds Sir. 24 and 1 Cor. 1:24 to describe the Son's identity with the Wisdom personified throughout the Scriptures. For Thomas, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are "one wisdom", but Christ's identity as the Word spoken by the Father, as the one who discloses God's wisdom to the world, means that the title of Wisdom is particularly appropriate to him. (*Scriptum* I.prologue.) The figure of Wisdom remains identified with Christ in Thomas' following works. See e.g. *ST* IIIa.q3.a8.co. Cf. also Sir. 24:3.

revelation of God, the true wisdom”,²⁷⁵ and Jesus as the life-giving bread of the Eucharist.²⁷⁶ Dauphinais holds that, for Thomas, “the sapiential and Eucharistic elements of John 6...each presuppose...the other”.²⁷⁷ In other words, in Thomas’ estimation, an understanding of Jesus’ being God’s Wisdom is necessary for an understanding of Jesus’ description of himself as the bread of life, and vice versa.

Thomas drives home this connection throughout *Ioan.* c6. Jesus not only teaches God’s wisdom, he *is* God’s Wisdom. As early as the first *lectura* in *Ioan.* c6, Thomas hints that Jesus is “the true Wisdom, which restores”.²⁷⁸ That Jesus, as Wisdom, restores by virtue of his being the bread of life, Thomas hints by citing Sir. 15:3, which reads, in his text, “[Wisdom] fed this one with the bread of life (*pane vitae*) and understanding (*intellectus*)”.²⁷⁹ The connections between Christ and Wisdom do not stop there, however. Commenting on Jesus’ flight from the coronation-happy mob in John 6:15, Thomas explains his actions as follows: “it would have detracted from his dignity to have accepted a kingdom from men”.²⁸⁰ Indeed, Christ’s rule might be characterised as the form of kingship:

²⁷⁵ Michael Dauphinais, “‘And They Shall All Be Taught by God’: Wisdom and the Eucharist in John 6,” in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 312–17, 314–315.

²⁷⁶ Dauphinais, “‘Taught by God,’” 316.

²⁷⁷ Dauphinais, “‘Taught by God,’” 317.

²⁷⁸ *Ioan.* c6.L1.n849. My translation. *vera sapientia, quae reficit*.

²⁷⁹ *Ioan.* c6.L1.n849.

²⁸⁰ *Ioan.* c6.L2.n871.

“for he is so great a king that all other kings are kings by participating in his kingship”.²⁸¹

To support this, Thomas cites Proverbs 8:15, which, in Proverbs, is spoken by Lady Wisdom. Thomas, however, places the words in the Son’s mouth: “through me kings rule”.²⁸²

Thomas continues to connect the Word with Wisdom by reading Sir. 15:3 also as the Son’s words, describing the ‘spiritual food’ of the bread of life as “God himself, insofar as he is the truth which is to be contemplated and the Goodness which is to be loved, which nourish the spirit”.²⁸³ The friar cites Proverbs 9:5, “[Wisdom says,] you [pl.] must eat my bread” and, again, Sirach 15:3 in support of his point.²⁸⁴ Later, Thomas characterises Jesus’ being the bread of life as contingent upon his being God’s Wisdom. After citing Sir. 15:3, Thomas adds, “the soul begins to live because it adheres to the word of God (*verbo dei*)...Therefore, since every word of wisdom is derived from the only begotten Word of God—the fountain of wisdom is the only begotten of God (Sir 1:5)—this Word of God (*verbo dei*) is especially called the bread of life”.²⁸⁵ The connection between Christ and Wisdom here is thus clear. Thomas views the words spoken by Wisdom as spoken by Christ, because the two figures are one in his mind.

²⁸¹ *Ioan.* c6.L2.n871.

²⁸² *Ioan.* c6.L2.n871. My translation: *per me reges regnant.*

²⁸³ *Ioan.* c6.L2.n895.

²⁸⁴ *Ioan.* c6.L2.n895. My translation: *comedite panem meum.*

²⁸⁵ *Ioan.* c6.L4.n914.

The metaphorical connection in Thomas' writings between the figure of Wisdom and the TOL has already been noted in this section. At several points, Thomas describes Wisdom using the semantic value of the TOL, with Proverbs 3:18 as the turning point of his case. And, as noted above, in *Pot.* q5.a9 Thomas explicitly connects Christ with the figure of Wisdom by inserting him into the metaphor of Proverbs 3:18. Christ, as Wisdom, is 'the tree of life for the one who grasps her'.²⁸⁶ Thomas thus reads Prov. 3:18 as referring to Christ in the literal sense. This logic returns in this section of Thomas' commentary on John, as Thomas explains Jesus' statement in 6:54, "unless you [pl.] eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you", as a reference to the Eucharist.²⁸⁷ Thomas describes Jesus' flesh and blood as "spiritual food" (*cibus spiritualis*), which provides "eternal life", unlike "material food" (*cibus corporalis*).²⁸⁸ This food provides eternal life "because one who eats this bread has within himself Christ, who is *the true God and eternal life*, as John says (1 John 5:20)".²⁸⁹ Because of this, according to Thomas, the food of Christ's flesh and blood, received in the Eucharist, is "compared to the tree of life (*comparatur ligno vitae*)", which Thomas supports with the now-familiar Proverbs 3:18. Thomas buttresses this statement with the also now-familiar Sirach 15:3: "whence it is called 'the bread of life':

²⁸⁶ Prov. 3:18. My translation: Vulg: "*lignum vitae est his qui adprehenderint eam*".

²⁸⁷ My translation. Vulg.: *nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis et biberitis eius sanguinem non habetis vitam in vobis.*

²⁸⁸ *Ioan.* c6.L7.n972.

²⁸⁹ *Ioan.* c6.L7.n972.

[Wisdom] fed that one with the bread of life and understanding”.²⁹⁰ In this section, Thomas thus reads Proverbs 3:18 and Sirach 15:3 as speaking directly about Christ using metaphorical language. Thus, Thomas reads the TOL, as well as metaphorically referring to Wisdom, as metaphorically referring to Christ’s flesh as received in the Eucharist. Following from the above discussion, in Thomas’ framework such an interpretation follows the literal sense of Proverbs and Sirach.

At one other point in *Ioan.*, Thomas reads the literal sense of Prov. 3:18 as referring to Christ in metaphorical language. This point makes up a part of Thomas’ commentary on John 11, which narrates Jesus’ raising of the four-days-dead Lazarus. Jesus’ statement, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’,²⁹¹ forms the central focus of the present section of Thomas’ commentary.

Thomas cites Proverbs 3 as he expounds Martha’s words to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’,²⁹² describing how these words demonstrate both Martha’s partial understanding of Jesus’ power and her ‘especial affected devotion’²⁹³ to him. In the friar’s estimation, Martha rightly perceived that Jesus had power over death, citing Matthew 9:20 to point out that Martha would have seen Jesus heal a woman even

²⁹⁰ *Ioan.* c6.L7.n972. My translation: *unde dicitur panis vitae; Eccli. XV, 3: cibavit illum pane vitae et intellectus*”.

²⁹¹ John 11:25, Vulg. My translation: *ego sum resurrectio et vita*.

²⁹² John 11:21, Vulg. My translation: *Domine si fuisses hic frater meus non fuisset mortuus*.

²⁹³ *Ioan.* c11.L4.n1511. My translation: *Affectus...devotionis...praecipuus*.

through a touch of his clothing.²⁹⁴ Martha's belief that Jesus possesses the power to preserve others from death, Thomas continues, aligns with reality. As Thomas puts it, in syllogistic form, 'life is opposed to death. Now Christ is life, and [he is] the tree of life.' [As Proverbs 3:18 says, he/it] *is a tree of life to them who grasp her*'. Therefore, if the tree of life was able to preserve from death, to a much greater extent is Christ'.²⁹⁵ Defending the premise that 'Christ is life', Thomas invokes Proverbs 3:18, which describes Wisdom—which, as has been shown, Thomas equates with Christ at numerous points—metaphorically as 'a', or 'the', TOL (there is no difference between the two in Latin). Here, Thomas follows this with an additional step. While in his estimation, as is clear from the numerous other sections of his corpus discussed in this section, Proverbs 3:18 refers to the TOL metaphorically, as a description of Wisdom or Christ rather than as a reference to the primeval Tree, here Thomas adds in a reference to that primeval Tree. Without any reference to a spiritual or mystical interpretation of the TOL in Genesis, Thomas builds an *a fortiori* argument maintaining that if the TOL in the garden could have kept the one who ate its fruit from death, then so much more could Christ have preserved Lazarus from death. Thus, Thomas reads Proverbs 3:18 much as he has in the other sections outlined above: as metaphorical speech referring to Christ in the literal sense.

²⁹⁴ As a side note, despite the fact that Martha never appears in Matthew's gospel, Thomas is comfortable citing this event to explain Martha's actions. This is a good example of Thomas' habitual treatment of the fourfold gospel, reading it more as one work than four.

²⁹⁵ *Ioan.* c11.L4.n1511. My translation: *vita contrariatur morti; Christus autem vita est, et lignum vitae; Prov. III, 18: lignum vitae est his qui apprehenderint eam. Si ergo lignum vitae poterat praeservare a morte, multo magis Christus.*

2.4.2 The TOL as a metaphor for the fruit of the Spirit

Two ambiguous cases remains to be treated beneath the heading of metaphor: Thomas' mentions of the TOL in *Gal.* c5.L6 and in *ST IaIIae.q70.a3*, where he discerns a connection between the twelve kinds of fruit borne by the TOL in Rev. 22:2 and the twelvefold fruit of the Spirit listed Galatians 5:22–23. Yes, the *twelvefold* fruit, or, as Thomas writes, “twelve fruits”.²⁹⁶ Thomas' citation of the Vulgate text provides twelve *fructus* where most modern Bibles (and indeed, the Stuttgart Vulgate) list nine.²⁹⁷ The numerical correspondence between Revelation and Galatians leads Thomas to associate the fruit of the TOL in Revelation with the fruits Galatians. In *Gal.*, he writes, “Of these fruits it is said in Revelation: *on both sides of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits* (Rev 22:2)”.²⁹⁸ Following this,²⁹⁹ in the *ST*, Thomas hedges his claim a bit more: “the number of the twelve fruits enumerated by the Apostle is fitting, and they may be signified

²⁹⁶ For clarity, I follow Thomas here in speaking of twelve fruits. Thomas holds that Paul refers to the list which he puts forward in Galatians in the singular because the fruits are “generically one, though divided into many species”. *ST IaIIae.q70.a3.ad1*.

²⁹⁷ Thomas discusses the following twelve *fructus*: *caritas, gaudium, pax, patientia, longanimitas, bonitas, benignitas, mansuetudo, fides, modestia, continentia, and castitas*.

²⁹⁸ *Gal.* c5.L6.n329.

²⁹⁹ Weisheipl, Emery and ten Klooster all date *Gal.* before *ST IaIIae*. See Weisheipl, *D'Aquino*, 361, 372; Emery, “Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas”, 333, 340; Anton ten Klooster, “Aquinas on the Fruits of the Holy Spirit as the Delight of the Christian Life,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, no. SI2 (May 2019): 80–94, 86.

by the twelve fruits of which it is said in Revelation 22:2, *on both sides of the river [was] the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits*".³⁰⁰

In these locations, it is not immediately clear whether Thomas sees himself as reading the literal sense of Revelation 22 or as interpreting the TOL according to a spiritual sense. It is possible that Thomas views his association of the twelve *fructus* with the TOL as an interpretation of the latter according to one of the spiritual senses. If this is the case, Thomas' interpretive logic runs as follows: the sign (the words *lignum vitae* and *duodecim fructus* in Rev. 22:2) signifies a thing (the extra-textual eschatological entity of the TOL and its twelve kinds of fruit), which in turn signifies another thing (the concept of the twelvefold *fructus* of the Spirit).

However, in light of Thomas' other interpretations of Rev. 22:2 (outlined above in §2.4.1), it is more likely that Thomas understands himself to be reading the literal sense of Rev. 22:2 in *Gal.* c5.L6 and in *ST* IaIIae.q70.a3. Recall that in *SCG* IV.83 and in *Pot.* q5.a9, Thomas interprets the mention of the TOL in this verse as metaphorical speech, signifying Wisdom and/or Christ *in the literal sense*. In Thomas' thought in these works, Rev. 22:2 has no external entity in view. Thomas is concerned to argue that the sign *lignum vitae* refers directly, in the literal sense, to Wisdom, or to Christ, under another name. In light of these earlier texts, I find it more likely that in *Gal.* and in *ST* IaIIae, Thomas is reading the TOL in

³⁰⁰ *ST* IaIIae.q70.a3.co. My translation. *numerus duodecim fructuum ab apostolo enumeratorum, conveniens est, et possunt significari per duodecim fructus de quibus dicitur Apoc. ult., ex utraque parte fluminis lignum vitae, afferens fructus duodecim.*

Rev. 22 as an instance of metaphorical speech, this time referring to the fruit of the Spirit. On this reading, Thomas' interpretation of Rev. 22 is according to the literal sense.

Like the metaphorical significance of the TOL involving Wisdom which Thomas discerns in *SCG* IV.83 and in *Pot.* q5.a9, Thomas' association between the fruits and the TOL trades (in part) on the notion of 'fruit' as a symbol for pleasure or delight. In *Gal.*, Thomas describes the fruits technically as the particular acts shaped by the virtues understood according to the way in which they give delight to the one who acts.³⁰¹ When "the act of virtue" is "a source of delight...it is a fruit".³⁰² These acts result from God's planting seeds in our nature, which is freed by grace to bring forth virtuous acts without being prevented by sin.³⁰³ Further, in the *ST* Thomas describes the fruits as man's actions which proceed from "the power of the Holy Spirit...as [from] a Divine seed."³⁰⁴ Here, also, Thomas connects the fruits with the idea of delight: "the fruits are any virtuous deeds in which one delights".³⁰⁵ As the TOL in Rev. 22, in Thomas' mind, signals one's delight in the acquisition of wisdom, so here the TOL in the same place signals one's delight in virtuous action which is enabled by the Holy Spirit.

³⁰¹ For a more detailed description of the fruits of the Spirit in *Gal.* and the *ST*, see ten Klooster, "Fruits", 87.

³⁰² *Gal.* c5.L6.n328. Cited in ten Klooster, 87.

³⁰³ *Gal.* c5.L6.n328.

³⁰⁴ *ST* IaIIae.q70.a1.co.

³⁰⁵ *ST* IaIIae.q70.a2.co. See ten Klooster, "Fruits", 89: "it is proper to [the fruits] that they are delightful".

Why these particular twelve fruits, though? Thomas sees in these fruits a logical order for how one is perfected (i.e. made complete), “inwardly or outwardly”,³⁰⁶ or how “the mind of man is set in order”, whether with regard to itself or to other things.³⁰⁷ Thomas traces this logical flow from one fruit to the next, in both *Gal.* and the *ST*, though he does acknowledge that this order is slightly arbitrary. Citing Augustine, Thomas notes that “either more or fewer fruits might have been mentioned”, though he holds that the acts described are representative of all acts of virtue: “all the acts of the gifts and virtues can be reduced to these by a certain kind of fittingness, insofar as all the virtues and gifts must needs direct the mind in one of the above-mentioned ways”.³⁰⁸

2.4.3 The TOL as a metaphor for the reward promised to the righteous

In *SCG* IV.91 and in *Heb.* c10.L2.n502, Thomas cites Rev. 2:7 (“To him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God”) in the course of commenting on the eschatological state of the blessed. In both of these places, Thomas’ citation of the verse is peripheral to his larger argument, coming in as a supporting point, and as a result Thomas offers very little in the way of interpretation. The Doctor’s student is left to read between the lines to understand what these citations of sections of Scripture which reference the TOL mean to him. In both cases, however,

³⁰⁶ *Gal.* c5.L6.n330.

³⁰⁷ *ST* IaIIae.q70.a3.co.

³⁰⁸ *ST* IaIIae.q70.a3.ad4.

Thomas most likely reads the mention of the TOL in Rev. 2:7 as an instance of metaphorical speech referring to an element of the eschatological reward of the just.

In *SCG* IV.91, in the midst of arguing that “the reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked are not delayed until the reunion of soul and body”,³⁰⁹ Thomas cites Rev. 2:7 amongst a group of proof-texts relating to the punishment and reward of the blessed and the damned *before*, as well as after, the resurrection of the body. Thomas writes, “Thus our Lord, while hanging on the cross, said to the thief: *Today you will be with me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43); and by paradise is meant the reward that is promised to the just: *To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God* (Rev. 2:7)”.³¹⁰ Thomas takes Luke 23:43 to mean, in other words, ‘Today (i.e., before the resurrection), you will receive the reward promised to the just’. His citation of Rev. 2:7 supports this characterisation of Paradise by showing Christ rewarding the just (‘the one who conquers’) with entry into Paradise. The TOL itself is peripheral in this citation, but Thomas’ use of this text is established as a part of the reward promised to the just, a capacity in which the Tree appears again in Thomas’ corpus.

The likelihood that Thomas sees this as an instance of metaphor is supported by the Doctor’s insistence in *SCG* IV.91 that the heavenly reward of the blessed is a spiritual, rather than a physical, good, able to be received by the soul before the soul is re-united

³⁰⁹ *SCG* IV.91. Thomas clarifies that the former is delayed, however, until the completion of Purgatorial cleansing.

³¹⁰ *SCG* IV.91.

with the body.³¹¹ Additionally, just a few chapters before, in *SCG* IV.83, Thomas characterises Rev. 22:2's mention of the TOL as metaphorical speech, to the exclusion of the Tree's existence as a corporeal entity, and Thomas seems to do likewise here. Such an interpretation follows the literal sense. Thomas is concerned with the meaning of the text, rather than with any additional spiritual meaning signified by the things signified in the text.

Thomas' reading of Rev. 2:7 as metaphorical speech referring to the reward of the just reappears in the tenth chapter of his commentary on Hebrews. However, a brief explanation of the relevant section is necessary in order to explain Thomas' citation of the TOL.

In this section of *Heb.*, Thomas examines Paul's admonishment of the Jewish believers to "draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith" (Hebrews 10:22), in light of their "confidence in the entering into the holies by the blood of Christ; [a] new and living way which he hath dedicated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:19–20).³¹² Thomas reads Paul's statement as a commendation of the excellency of Christ's priesthood and an exhortation to the believer to leave behind "the ceremonies of the law"

³¹¹ "[A]s soon as the soul departs from the body, it is capable of seeing God, which it could not do so long as it was united to a corruptible body, and man's ultimate happiness, which is the reward of virtue, consists in seeing God". *SCG* IV.91.

³¹² Though aware of traditions doubting Pauline authorship, Thomas saw Hebrews as being written by that apostle, maintaining that Paul did not append his name to the beginning of his epistle due to his notoriety, and that Paul initially wrote the epistle in Hebrew, which Luke subsequently translated into Greek. See *In Heb.* prologue.n5. For clarity, I follow Thomas' attribution here.

and to cling to Christ.³¹³ Thomas then explains what it means to ‘enter the holy places by the blood of Christ’: it is to follow the path, the ‘new way’ opened into heaven for us by Christ. In short, it is to go to heaven: “Christ by his blood³¹⁴ **has dedicated**, that is, opened, **a new and living way** for us...This, therefore, is the way to go to heaven. It is new because before Christ no one had found it: *no man has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven* (John 3:13)”.³¹⁵ For Thomas, however, one is only able to ascend like and with Christ by being incorporated into him: “For this reason [following from John 3:13], whoever wishes to ascend must be attached to his head, as it were, [as] a member”. Thomas supports this assertion with citations of Revelation 2:7 and 3:12: “*to the one who conquers I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God. And chapter 3:12: and [I will] write upon him a new name, and the name of the city of the new Jerusalem*”.³¹⁶

Thomas’ text does not immediately make clear how his insistence of the necessity of membership beneath the headship of Christ connects to Rev. 2:7 and 3:12. This paucity of description is unlike Thomas, who is usually nothing if not thorough when discussing fine points such as this one. Why is his text so murky, then? Recall that Thomas’ commentaries

³¹³ *Heb.* c10.L2.§501.

³¹⁴ For Thomas, “by his blood” refers to Christ’s Passion. See *ST* IIIa.q49.a5.sc, co, where Thomas cites Heb. 10:19 as his base text for discussion of the Passion.

³¹⁵ *Heb.* c10.L2.n502.

³¹⁶ My translation. *Heb.* c10.L2.n502. *Et ideo qui vult ascendere, debet ipsi tamquam membrum capiti suo adhaerere. Apoc. II, 7: vincenti dabo edere de ligno vitae, quod est in paradiso Dei mei. Et c. III, 12: et scribam super eum nomen novum, et nomen civitatis novae Ierusalem.*

on Paul exist in *reportatio* form. As a result, at points the precise wording and content of references to *auctoritates* in particular are uncertain.³¹⁷

It might be added that the quality of the *reportatio* varies wildly from work to work, likely due to the skill (and level of alertness) of the scribe involved—and this section of *Heb.* fares poorly in the rankings, in my view. Smalley's description of a *reportatio* of Stephen Langton's work is appropriate here: "It always leaves one with a sense of something missing".³¹⁸

As a result of this, there are two possibilities for explaining this citation: Possibly, Thomas cited Rev. 2:7 in his lecture, and likely elaborated further on the connection between membership beneath the head of Christ and the TOL in Revelation, but this elaboration was not recorded. Alternately, Thomas did not mention Rev. 2:7 or the TOL, and a scribe interpolated the reference.

³¹⁷ Thomas' commentaries on Paul, as well as those on many other sections of Scripture, were delivered as *academic lectures*, (Torrell, *Aquinas*, 54–55.) and the surviving records of those lectures are, for the most part, the fruit of scribal note-taking. (See Anton ten Klooster, "The Two Hands of Thomas Aquinas: The Reportationes of the Commentary on Matthew," *Angelicum* 91, no. 4 (2014): 855–80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26392481>, 864.) As ten Klooster describes it, "A *reportatio*...gives us an impression of central themes, the general line of thinking and Thomas' style of teaching". (ten Klooster, "Two Hands", 879.) Additionally, Thomas' use of *auctoritates* is not always accurately reflected in *reportationes*: a likely citation can be elided or interpolated by the scribe. (ten Klooster, "Two Hands", 872–874.) This does not mean that the texts are worthless, but it does mean that they should be treated with caution. As ten Klooster warns, one should not place too great a weight on the wording of any single section of a *reportatio*, focusing instead on the higher-level structure of the work, where the lecturer's intention is more likely to remain perceptible. See ten Klooster, "Two Hands", 878.

³¹⁸ Smalley, *Study*, 207.

If the latter possibility reflects the reality, then this datum sheds no light on how Thomas interprets this section of Scripture. On the other hand, if the first possibility reflects what happened, then contextual clues within *Heb.* and similarities with other texts may shed light on Thomas' understanding of Rev. 2:7, but only with a degree of uncertainty.

Assuming, for the sake of examination, that the first possibility fits the reality, then a few things may be said about Thomas' reference to Rev. 2:7. First, Thomas only cites this passage at one other point in his corpus, in *SCG* IV.91, where he sees understands the TOL to be functioning as a metaphor for "the reward that is promised to the just".³¹⁹ Thomas' citation of the same passage in *Heb.* seems to follow similar logic, providing content to the idea of 'going to heaven'.

Second, if the text's reference to Rev. 2:7 is indeed original to Thomas, the context of the reference suggests that it is intended to explain the preceding statement, "whoever wishes to ascend must be attached to his head, as it were, [as] a member".³²⁰ To "ascend", here, is to follow the "new and living way" opened by Jesus into heaven. And as Thomas describes it, this "way" is Jesus' flesh: "[Paul] shows what that way is when he says, ***through (per) the veil, that is to say, his flesh***".³²¹ The preposition *per*, "like the English 'through,' can be used both locally and instrumentally. It can refer to passing 'through' a

³¹⁹ *SCG* IV.91. See above in the present section.

³²⁰ *Heb.* c10.L2.n502.

³²¹ *Heb.* c10.L2.n502.

place...[and] the means ‘through’ which something is done”,³²² and thus, Thomas compares the incarnate Son’s flesh to the temple veil, which both hid God and allowed access to him³²³: “just as the priest entered into the holy of holies through (*per*) the veil, so we...must enter through (*per*) Christ’s flesh, which was a veil of his divinity”.³²⁴ Thomas also compares the accidents of the bread in the Eucharist to the veil, both obscuring and making edible the essence of the flesh of Christ: “**through** (*per*) **the veil**, i.e., through (*per*) his flesh given to us under the veil of the appearance of bread in the sacrament. He is not offered to us under his own form because of dread and to obtain the merit of faith”.³²⁵ Thus, Christ’s flesh, whether as edibly present under the accidents of bread in the Eucharist or as visible and tangible in his Incarnation *is* the “new and living way”.

But how does one follow this “way” into heaven? The present section of *Heb.* is silent on the matter. However, it should be noted that in *Heb.*, any mention of Christ’s headship or of membership in him is always ecclesiological language. At the opening of his commentary, Thomas describes the subject matter of the letter as grace “inasmuch as it pertains to the head, namely, Christ...from whom life flows to all the members” of the mystical body

³²² Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 2011), 471. Cockerill notes the correspondence between ‘through’ and the Greek διὰ, which stands behind the Vulgate’s *per*. The semantic value of *per* is more or less equivalent to that of διὰ, meaning that the ambiguity of the Greek carries over into the Latin, appearing in Thomas’ interpretation.

³²³ A reading noted by Cockerill, 469.

³²⁴ *Heb.* c10.L2.n502.

³²⁵ *Heb.* c10.L2.n502.

(*corpus mysticum*).³²⁶ And at the beginning of the *lecturae* on the epistle, Thomas describes faith as “what unites the members to the head”.³²⁷ Faith, in other words, is the prerequisite for membership in Christ, whose ultimate end is the gaining of Paradise, which Thomas describes as the fulfilment of Rev. 2:7: “To him, that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God”. Here, then, the TOL plays the role of metaphorical speech describing the final result and reward of faith.

Later in *Heb.*, the TOL reappears, this time as it appears in Proverbs 11:30 rather than in Revelation. Thomas interprets this passage according to similar logic to that described above, reading the TOL as it appears in this section of Proverbs as an instance of metaphorical speech, again referring to the eschatological blessing of the just. The Tree appears as Thomas comments on Hebrews 12:11: “Now all chastisement for the present indeed seemeth not to bring with it joy, but sorrow: but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice (*fructum pacatissimum...iustitiae*)”. Thomas interprets this as referring to the eschatological reward gained by those have been shepherded by God’s discipline. Though Hebrews itself does not mention or draw a direct connection to the TOL, Thomas explains this with a citation Prov. 11:30: “The fruit of the righteous man is a tree of life” (Vulg. *fructus iusti lignum vitae*).

³²⁶ *Heb.* Prologue.n4. For a fuller discussion of the role of Christ’s headship in Thomas’ ecclesiology, see George Sabra, *Thomas Aquinas’ Vision of the Church: Fundamentals of an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, Tübinger Theologische Studien 27 (Matthais-Grünwald-Verlag, 1987), 86–87.

³²⁷ *Heb.* c1.L1.n6.

In the twelfth chapter of Thomas' commentary on Hebrews, the Doctor again reads a Scriptural reference to the TOL as an instance of metaphorical speech for an eschatological blessing. Expounding Hebrews 12:11 ('Now, in the present all *disciplina* certainly seems to be not a joy but a grief, yet afterwards it yields the most peaceful fruit of *iustitia* to the ones who have been trained by it')³²⁸, Thomas cites Proverbs 11:30 ('The fruit of the *iustus* is a/the tree of life, and whoever takes up souls is wise')³²⁹ Here, Thomas interprets the TOL in Prov. 11:30 as metaphorical language for the eschatological reward for the disposition of righteousness, which is gained in the present through divine *disciplina*, which Thomas understands as God's corrective action, visited on his "sons" (*fili*)³³⁰ for their benefit.

In this section, Thomas takes *disciplina* in a punitive sense, following the Vulgate's interpretation of elements of the New Testament Greek. In 12:5–11 in the Greek, Hebrews uses παιδεία and its verbal form παιδεύω to describe what God visits upon his children,³³¹ both of which can carry connotations of punishment, but not necessarily—he terms can also describe formative instruction towards maturity, "cultural nurture", as BDAG has it.³³² The Vulgate translates these verbs with punitive terms, including *castigat* (12:6) and

³²⁸ My translation. Vulg.: *omnis autem disciplina in praesenti quidem videtur non esse gaudii sed maeroris postea autem fructum pacatissimum exercitatis per eam reddit iustitiae.*

³²⁹ My translation. Vulg.: *fructus iusti lignum vitae et qui suscipit animas sapiens est.*

³³⁰ *Heb.* c12.L2.n678.

³³¹ The only exception is μαστιγοῖ in Heb. 12:6, which the Vulgate translates with *flagellat*.

³³² Bauer, *Greek–English Lexicon*, 748–749.

corripit (12:7), as well as with educative terms, including *eruditores* (12:9) and *erudiebant* (12:10). The nouns, however, the translation renders with *disciplina* (12:5, 8, 11).

In Thomas' understanding, the Latin noun *disciplina* carries both educative and punitive senses, though he interprets the term according to the latter sense in this section. '[D]isciplina', he says, "is sometimes taken for *scientia*".³³³ He cites a Latin translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, whose use of *disciplina* Thomas elsewhere defines as "the reception of knowledge from another"—in other words, the act of learning.³³⁴ Thomas states that this sense is conveyed by the Greek ἐπίστημος.³³⁵ However, Thomas also notes that "*disciplina*...is sometimes taken for correction", which, in his estimation, is communicated by the Greek παιδεία.³³⁶

Thomas' interpretation leans toward the latter of the senses he outlines, but includes both. After stating that *disciplina* derives from *discere* ('to learn'), Thomas adds, "But boys/children who learn are taught by the lash".³³⁷ Thus, Thomas understands *disciplina* in Hebrews 12:11 as referring to punishment, defining the term accordingly:

³³³ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681. My translation: *disciplina aliquando sumitur pro scientia*.

³³⁴ *Post.* I.L1.n9.

³³⁵ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681. Though Thomas could not have known this, *disciplina* in his translation of *Posterior Analytics* renders not ἐπίστημος but γίγνεται γνώσεως. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics. Topica*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and E.S. Forster, Loeb Classical Library 391 (Harvard University Press, 1960), 24 (71a1).

³³⁶ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681. My translation: *Aliquando autem sumitur pro correctione*.

³³⁷ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681. My translation: *Pueri autem, qui addiscunt, flagellis erudiuntur*.

“*disciplina*, of course...is instruction through lashings and troubles”.³³⁸ This *disciplina*, delivered by God, has the purpose of “sanctification”: “for he instructs us in something useful for eternity, namely, to receive the holiness which he himself is”.³³⁹

The result of this *disciplina*, in Thomas’ estimation, is the *fructus iustitiae* of Hebrews 12:11. This “fruit” is both eternal and a source of enjoyment: “In glory, indeed there will be no inward gnawing of conscience, no inclination to sin, no outward affliction...the fruit will be most peaceable: peaceable in the tranquility of conscience”.³⁴⁰ As Thomas continues, he further describes the *fructus iustitiae* as the fruit ‘which is merited by righteousness’.³⁴¹ In other words, this blessing of “delight in the end now achieved”³⁴² is the reward gained for one’s righteous living—the sort of life resultant from God’s *disciplina*, visited upon his children. In support of this interpretation, Thomas cites Prov. 11:30: “The fruit of the righteous man is a tree of life” (Vulg. *fructus iusti lignum vitae*)“. In Thomas’ citation, in light of its context, the TOL is interpreted as metaphorical language for the reward for righteousness gained by the righteous man. In the immediate context of this section of *Heb.*, this is an eschatological reward. Though Thomas cites a different passage than that in *Heb.* c10.L2.n502, the same logic obtains: the Doctor takes the words *lignum vitae* as veiled

³³⁸ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681. My translation: ***disciplina***, *scilicet...est eruditio per flagella et molestias*.

³³⁹ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681.

³⁴⁰ *Heb.* c12.L2.n682.

³⁴¹ *Heb.* c12.L2.n681. My translation: *quem meretur iustitia*. Thomas also provides an alternate interpretation of the *fructus* simply as righteousness, considered in itself.

³⁴² *Heb.* c12.L2.n682.

language for a blessing received by the righteous. Again, this reading of Prov. 11, in Thomas' method, follows the literal sense of the passage.

2.5 Conclusion

Thomas' various interpretations of sections of Scripture referencing the TOL examined in this chapter demonstrate the nuance of the friar's understanding of the content of the literal sense of Scripture. As shown above, Thomas does not see his examination of the physical nature of the TOL as it appears in Genesis 2 and 3 as the limit to his interpretation of Scriptural mentions of the TOL according to the literal sense. Alongside these readings, at numerous points Thomas interprets references in Scripture to the TOL (such as those in Revelation 22:2) as examples of figurative speech employed by the author. These interpretations, however, Thomas understands to be according to the literal sense of Scripture, all the same. These sections demonstrate how for Thomas, the literal sense of Scripture can include not only history (the 'what happened?' of the text), but also the includes the Scriptural author's use of figurative speech.

Chapter 3: The Spiritual Senses

3.1 Introduction

After Chapter 1 described Thomas' understanding of how the Scriptures should be interpreted, Chapter 2 examined Thomas' application of that understanding by observing the friar's interpretations according to the literal sense of passages of Scripture including references to the TOL. These interpretations of the literal sense of the text of Scripture, in Thomas' understanding, are those which Thomas reads as what the authors—both human and divine—intended to communicate by means of the significance of the words on the page.³⁴³

Distinct from these are Thomas' scriptural interpretations according to the spiritual senses, which he also refers to as the “mystical” senses. The *sine qua non* of interpretation according to the spiritual senses, in Thomas' understanding, is the interpreter's reading of the thing or the concept referred to in the literal sense of the text as possessing at least one additional kind of meaning.

This chapter examines Thomas' interpretations of Scriptural passages referencing the TOL which treat the Tree as possessing some kind of figurative or mystical meaning in addition to that contained within the literal sense. The chapter shows that, in the case of his readings of sections of Scripture referring to the TOL, Thomas' practice bears out his famous pronouncement in the *ST*: “That signification whereby things signified by words

³⁴³ See §1.5.2.3 above.

have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, *which is based on the literal, and presupposes it*".³⁴⁴

No systematic or overarching pattern exists of Thomas' readings of the TOL which follow the spiritual senses. In light of this, as a heuristic tool, this chapter organises Thomas' readings of the TOL thematically. §3.2 discusses Thomas' interpretations which read the physical TOL as signifying Wisdom, or which follow similar logic as those which do so, yet without so much specification. §3.3 addresses Thomas' interpretations which read the physical TOL as signifying either the Eucharist or Christ himself. §3.4 examines those readings which take the TOL as a figure for other elements of salvation history. As in the previous chapter, writings examined in the same sub-section of this thesis are arranged in chronological order.

3.2 The TOL read as signifying Wisdom

In the *Scriptum* and the *ST*, Thomas reads Genesis 2 and 3 with a focus on both the physicality of the TOL and on its possession of further spiritual significance. Thomas' principle of founding any interpretation according to the spiritual senses upon the literal is particularly clear here, when he deals with what he understands to be a narrative of historical events. Thomas, following the example of Augustine, reads the primeval narrative of Genesis as an historical account in which the things signified in the account themselves point to other things, posterior to the text. It is likely that Thomas is so concerned with this point, laying it down in the *Scriptum* and returning to it in the *ST*, because he saw his

³⁴⁴ *ST* Ia.q1.a10.co. Emphasis added.

approach to interpretation, in which the spiritual senses of Scripture complement the foundational literal sense, as a corrective against what he saw as heretical readings (such as those of Joachim of Fiore, or perhaps Origen) which would proffer spiritual interpretations of the texts of the Scriptures with no reference to their literal meanings.

Though the question of whether the Paradise described in Genesis 2–3 should be read as a physical, historical place or whether the ‘garden’ language used in that section of Scripture is solely to be interpreted metaphorically has been live throughout the history of the interpretation of Genesis. Across most of the history of interpretation, few argue against the idea that the Paradise described in Genesis should be understood to possess some kind of figurative significance. The question at issue, rather, is whether behind this figurative interpretation stands an understood historical reality. Augustine’s complaint about other (possibly contemporary) views on the historicity of the opening chapters of Genesis is informative: “It is indeed astonishing, and scarcely to be borne, how people will have Paradise to be a figurative story, and will not have it to be a figurative fact”.³⁴⁵ Peter Lombard adopts a similar reading, and as a result this approach to Genesis becomes a stock interpretation drawn upon (though not universally accepted) throughout Latin theology following his work.³⁴⁶ It is against the backdrop of such debates that Thomas tackles the question of the corporeality of Paradise.

³⁴⁵ *DGL* VIII.5,10 (p.353).

³⁴⁶ Lombard, *The Sentences*, 5 (100), p.74.

3.2.1 *Scriptum* II.d17.q3.a2

In *Scriptum* II.d17.q3.a2, Thomas is concerned to show (alongside Peter Lombard) that Paradise, as described in Genesis, was a physical place. Thomas argues his case positively, on the strength of Church tradition and of Peter's position,³⁴⁷ an approach befitting the *Scriptum's* status as a dissertation on the *Sentences*. Thomas cites and contests Origen's teaching that "Paradise is not a corporeal place, but rather that everything said of Paradise should be interpreted allegorically (*allegorice*) of a spiritual Paradise",³⁴⁸ rejecting this reading on the basis of Church tradition.

Thomas addresses some of the hermeneutical issues connected with his argument in the *argumenta* and replies in the *quaestio*. *Arg.*6 against his own position takes the association between wisdom and the TOL drawn in Proverbs 3:18 as basic to the argument that the TOL in Genesis (and therefore the entire primeval Paradise) has no physical existence: "the tree of life is wisdom, as Proverbs...says. Therefore, since wisdom is not a corporeal thing, it seems that neither this nor other things that are said of Paradise are to be taken in a corporeal sense".³⁴⁹ In response, Thomas argues that the TOL can have significance according to both the spiritual *and* the literal senses. "Just as Jerusalem

³⁴⁷ *Scriptum* II.d17.q3.a2.sc.

³⁴⁸ *Scriptum* II.d17.q3.a2.co.

³⁴⁹ *Scriptum* II.d17.q3.a2.arg6. The reference, attested in the Parma edition, to Proverbs 13 rather than to Proverbs 3 is clearly in error, though whether this citation error goes back to Thomas is impossible to say.

signifies the present Church³⁵⁰ as well as our heavenly homeland,³⁵¹ though in the literal sense Jerusalem was a definite city, so also, even though wisdom is signified by the tree of life, this does not prevent the tree of life from being understood literally as a definite tree”.³⁵² Here, Thomas seeks to ground his spiritual interpretation solidly upon the literal sense of the text. The former does not exist in abstraction from the latter.

3.2.2 *ST Ia.q102.a1*

This logic becomes clearer and more explicit in *ST Ia.q102.a1*. In the relevant section of this later work, Thomas’ burden remains the same—to show the physicality of the primeval Paradise described in Genesis—though his method of argument shifts. Rather than simply dismissing, as he does in the *Scriptum*, the purely figurative understanding of Paradise on the strength of the tradition, Thomas, following both Augustine’s thought and his own hermeneutical principles, argues for a reading of the Paradise of Genesis as both physical *and* figurative. As in the *Scriptum*, Thomas’ case still rests upon the authority of the Fathers; he cites a statement of Augustine’s to the effect that any spiritual interpretation of the primeval paradise must be based upon a supposition of the historical truth—and the implied physicality—of the events described.³⁵³ Thomas transposes his argument into

³⁵⁰ Literally, ‘through Jerusalem is signified the present Church’, *per Hierusalem significatur praesens Ecclesia*. This interpretation follows the allegorical sense, as evidenced by its reference to the present Church. See *Quod. VII.q6.a2.ad5*.

³⁵¹ This interpretation follows the anagogical sense, as evidenced by its eschatological reference. See *Quod. VII.q6.a2.ad5*.

³⁵² *Scriptum II.d17.q3.a2.ad6*.

³⁵³ *ST Ia.q102.a1.co*. Thomas cites Augustine’s *De civitate dei*, XIII.21. Jörgen Vijen notes that Thomas, in the *ST*, no longer mentions Origen, but inexplicably says that “the

terms compatible with his own understanding of the relation between the literal and the spiritual senses. As he writes, “whatever Scripture tells us about paradise is set down as matter of history; and wherever Scripture makes use of this method, we must hold to the historical truth of the narrative as a foundation of whatever spiritual explanation we may offer”.³⁵⁴ Based on the assumption of the trustworthiness of Scripture’s ability to accurately represent history, Thomas stresses the importance of genre-consciousness. When Scripture purports to relate historical events, one must suppose the historicity of said events.

As in the *Scriptum*, the TOL appears in the *argumenta pro* and *contra* Thomas’ point in *ST Ia.q102.a1. Arg. 4* maintains that the TOL, in Genesis, is to be read as a spiritual entity to the exclusion of its corporeality: “the tree of life is described as growing in paradise. But the tree of life is a spiritual thing, for it is written of Wisdom that *She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her* (Prov 3:18). Therefore paradise also is not a corporeal, but a spiritual place”.³⁵⁵ In response, Thomas argues that the TOL, as described in Genesis is a corporeal tree, which nevertheless bore further spiritual significance: “The tree of life is a material tree, and so called because its fruit was endowed with a life-preserving power (literally, ‘was possessing the power of maintaining life’, *habebat virtutem conservandi vitam*)...Yet it

juxtaposition of the historical and the spiritual...disappears in favor of a more nuanced reading, under the influence of Augustine” (Jörgen Vijgen, “Aquinas’s Reception of Origen: A Preliminary Study,” in *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger Nutt (Sapientia Press, 2019), 30–88, 52). As should be clear from the section of the *ST* cited below, however, Thomas still places the historical and the spiritual alongside each other, founding the latter upon the former.

³⁵⁴ *ST Ia.q102.a1.co.*

³⁵⁵ *ST Ia.q102.a1.arg4.*

had a spiritual signification (literally, ‘And nevertheless it was signifying something spiritually’, *Et tamen aliquid significabat spiritualiter*); as the rock in the desert was of a material nature, and yet signified Christ”.³⁵⁶ Thomas thus argues against two interpretations of the TOL in Genesis: against both an interpretation which *either* reads Paradise (and the TOL within it) as a metaphor and against an interpretation which would bypass the historicity required by the genre of narrative in an attempt to ascribe spiritual significance to the Tree. Rather, Thomas reads the TOL as an historical, tangible entity which also possesses spiritual significance. Though he never concretely lays out its meaning here, it is clear that Thomas envisions the Tree as being connected to Wisdom. As a final note, Thomas’ argument involving the Tree here is in many ways the opposite of that in *SCG* 4.83. While there he seeks to correct readings which erroneously ascribe physicality to the TOL in Revelation 22, here he aims to correct readings which erroneously reject the physicality of the Tree in Genesis. In *SCG* 4.83, Thomas views the Tree as it appears in Revelation as a metaphor, in the literal sense, for a spiritual reality. In *ST* Ia.q102.a1, Thomas reads the literal sense as describing a physical tree which possesses additional meaning when read according to the spiritual senses.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ *ST* Ia.q102.a1.ad4.

³⁵⁷ The TOL also appears in Thomas’ discussion of the relationship between the literal and the spiritual senses in *ST* IaIIae.q102.a1. Though in an *argumentum*, Thomas mentions the “*prohibitionem ligni vitae*, this example (reproduced faithfully in the Leonine Edition, viewable at <https://archive.org/details/operaomniaiussui07thom/page/228/mode/2up?view=theater> (p.268)), likely indicates a mistake on the part of a scribe or an editor of the *ST*, or possibly even of Thomas himself. It is most likely that Thomas intended to reference the tree of knowledge of good and evil rather than the TOL, not least due to the fact that no prohibition was given in Genesis concerning the TOL.

3.3 The TOL read as signifying the Eucharist or Christ

3.3.1 *Scriptum* IV.d13.q1.a2

Not only does Thomas discern spiritual significance in the simple existence of the TOL, however. The friar also finds spiritual meaning to the Tree's location *in medio paradisi*, 'in the middle of Paradise', as the Vulgate translates Genesis 2:9. Thomas first draws significance from this in *Scriptum* IV.d13.q1.a2. This section forms a part of Thomas' larger treatment of sacramentology in the *Scriptum*, and sits within his discussion, in particular, of the Eucharist. At the point at which the TOL appears, Thomas addresses the question of whether the Church should celebrate the Eucharist daily. To provide an answer, Thomas draws on the liturgical writings of Innocent III (1161–1216), who holds, as Thomas relates, that 'Mass is daily celebrated in the Church', among other reasons, 'so that the tree of life (*lignum vitae*) might always be in the midst of Paradise'.³⁵⁸

Building upon the historical reality of the tree of life *in medio paradisi*, as the Vulgate has it, here Thomas describes the TOL as signifying the Eucharist, or perhaps Christ, who is "contained" within the sacrament.³⁵⁹ And if the TOL signifies the Eucharist, then, by

³⁵⁸ *Scriptum* IV.d13.q1.a2.qa3.co. My translation: *quotidie Missa in ecclesia celebratur...ut lignum vitae semper sit in medio paradisi*. Note: The work in question is likely Pope Innocent III's *De celebratione Missae*. See editorial note in Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd. Edition (2017), IIIa.q83.a2.ad5, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

³⁵⁹ *Scriptum* IV.d10.q1.a1.co.

extension, Paradise signifies the Church, in the midst of which the Eucharist is consecrated and resides.

At this point, Thomas makes no comment about the historical TOL itself. Rather, he discerns spiritual meaning in the Tree's existence, meaning additional to and beyond that described in the text of Genesis. This interpretation follows the logic of the allegorical sense, as Thomas describes it in *Quod. VII*, "according to which those things which occurred in the Old Testament are expounded concerning Christ and the Church".³⁶⁰

3.3.2 *Ioan. c6.l6.n955*

In the sixth chapter of his commentary on John, Thomas interprets the TOL as described in Genesis 3 as possessing, alongside its historical reality, an additional reference to Christ, the bread of life. Following Thomas' terminology, this interpretation follows the allegorical sense, due to the fact that Thomas reads an entity in the text of Scripture as possessing additional extra-textual meaning referring to Christ. In its large-scale context, this section comprises a part of Thomas' commentary on the so-called 'bread of life discourse'. Here, Thomas cites Genesis 3 in the context of his interpretation of what it means for Jesus to be the 'bread of life', as the concept is described in John 6:47–52.³⁶¹ Though it may be surprising, in Thomas' understanding the present section of John 6 is *not* a discussion of sacramentology, but rather of the life-giving capabilities of Christ resultant

³⁶⁰ *Quod. VII.q6.a2.co.*

³⁶¹ The Vulgate versification at this point differs from that in many modern Bibles, including the KJV. In most modern Bibles, what the Vulgate lists as 6:51–52 all exists within 6:51.

from his nature as the Word of God.³⁶² Here, Thomas references the TOL in his explication of the latter, not of the former.

Thomas contends in this section that in John 6:47–51 Jesus makes a syllogistic argument whose conclusion is the opening of 6:51: ‘I am the bread of life which descended from heaven’.³⁶³ As Thomas describes it, “This is the way he reasons: the bread which gives life to the world descended from heaven (the major premise); but I am the bread that gives life to the world (the minor premise): therefore, I am the bread which descended from heaven” (the conclusion).³⁶⁴

According to Thomas, Jesus first explains the minor premise of his own argument, in which “[h]is intention is to show that he is the bread of life”.³⁶⁵ Thomas reads this statement as a metaphor describing how precisely Christ communicates eternal life: by being taken into the Christian, ‘eaten’, by means of the Christian’s faith. “Now one who believes in Christ takes him within himself, according to: *Christ dwells...in our hearts through faith* (Eph. 3:17). Therefore, if he who believes in Christ has life, it is clear that he is brought to life by eating this bread. Thus, this bread is the bread of life”.³⁶⁶ Thus, Thomas

³⁶² Noted by Dauphinais, “‘And They Shall All Be Taught by God’”, 316. Thomas begins to discuss sacramentology proper as he comments on the end of 6:52 (Vulg.: *et panis quem ego dabo caro mea est pro mundi vita*), “what [Jesus] said above, ***I am the living bread***, pertained to the power of the Word; but what he is saying here pertains to the sharing in his body, that is, to the sacrament of the Eucharist”. *Ioan.* c6.L6.n959.

³⁶³ John 6:51. My translation. Vulg.: *Ego sum panis vivus qui de caelo descendi*.

³⁶⁴ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n949.

³⁶⁵ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n950.

³⁶⁶ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n950.

adds, since “Christ is eternal life”, citing 1 John 5:20 and John 1:4, “we can infer that whoever believes in Christ has eternal life”.³⁶⁷ Thus, to eat of the bread of life is to bring Christ into oneself, ‘feeding’ on him through faith.

Next, writes Thomas, Jesus explains the major premise of his argument: “the bread that descended from heaven ought to have the effect of giving life”.³⁶⁸ As Thomas reads it, Jesus uses the discussion of the manna described in the book of Exodus, ‘bread from the air’ (*panem de...aereo*) which does not in itself give eternal life, to contrast with himself, the true bread from heaven, who *does* give eternal life.³⁶⁹ Thomas adds that both the manna of the Hebrews could and the Christians’ Eucharist may be eaten with a knowledge of Christ, who is signified by each of them. In this way, the manna could save from spiritual death.³⁷⁰ However, the Eucharist remains greater than the manna: “those who eat the Eucharist spiritually, both live spiritually now without sin, and will live physically forever”.³⁷¹ Finally, Thomas adds, the Eucharist, uniquely, “contains in itself that of which it is the symbol”—

³⁶⁷ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n950.

³⁶⁸ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n952.

³⁶⁹ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n953. Thomas notes above that taking Christ into oneself by faith brings spiritual life now, and eternal life in the eschaton: “whoever believes in Christ has eternal life. He has it, I say, in its cause and in hope, and he will have it at some time in reality”. *Ioan.* c6.L6.n950.

³⁷⁰ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n953.

³⁷¹ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n954.

Christ.³⁷² Thus, both the manna and the Eucharist have the ability to give life due to the fact that both signify Christ, the bread of heaven.

Finally, Jesus explains the conclusion of his argument, in Thomas' understanding: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven'.³⁷³ The friar notes that the statement immediately preceding this verse in the discourse, 'this is the bread which comes down from heaven',³⁷⁴ refers to the manna, which may or may not provide eternal life. Thomas holds that Jesus immediately follows this statement with a reference to himself: he is both the bread of life (as argued above), and he is 'bread' which came down from heaven, because he himself descended from heaven.³⁷⁵ To those who feed on him by faith, then, Jesus is 'heavenly food' (*cibus...caelestius*), the bread of life, which provides life in perpetuity, without degrading as does material food.³⁷⁶

Thomas references the TOL in a side comment following from this point, in which Thomas cites Genesis 3:22 in order to explain the concept of the bread of life. 'And thus this bread [the bread of life] was signified by the tree of life which was in the middle of Paradise, how it gave life perpetually'.³⁷⁷ To flesh this out, Thomas quotes Genesis 3:22:

³⁷² *Ioan.* c6.L6.n954.

³⁷³ John 6:51 Vulg. My translation: *Ego sum panis vivus qui de caelo descendi.*

³⁷⁴ John 6:50 Vulg. My translation: *hic est panis de caelo descendens.*

³⁷⁵ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n957.

³⁷⁶ *Ioan.* c6.L6.n955.

³⁷⁷ My translation. Vulg.: *Et ideo panis iste significatus est per lignum vitae quod erat in medio Paradisi, quomodo dans vitam in perpetuum.*

‘now therefore, lest he send out his right hand and also take from the tree of life, and eat, and live eternally...’³⁷⁸ Though the TOL had an historical reality, Thomas is not here particularly concerned with that reality. Instead, Thomas reads the historical Tree as having a spiritual meaning, signifying Christ, the bread of life.³⁷⁹ Thomas’ interpretation here of the entity of the TOL is according to the allegorical sense, which, as Thomas describes it in *Quod. VII*, is “founded upon that mode of figuring by which the Old Testament figures the New...according to which those things which occurred in the Old Testament are expounded concerning Christ and the Church”.³⁸⁰

3.3.3 *Psal. 45*

In Thomas’ commentary on the Psalms, the friar again interprets the position of the TOL *in medio paradisi* as possessing significance beyond that included in the literal sense. Commenting on Psalm 45,³⁸¹ Thomas interprets the Tree’s position according to the allegorical sense, taking it to signify God’s stance towards the individuals who make up the Church. While Thomas reads the Tree according to the allegorical sense, he does so in the midst of interpreting Psalm 45, in the main, according to the literal sense.

³⁷⁸ My translation. Vulg.: *nunc ergo ne forte mittat manum suam et sumat etiam de ligno vitae et comedat et vivat in aeternum*.

³⁷⁹ Cf. *ST Ia.q102.a1.ad4*: “The tree of life is a material tree...Yet it had a spiritual signification”.

³⁸⁰ *Quod. VII.q6.a2.co*. Cf. §1.5.2.5.

³⁸¹ Psalm 46 in Hebrew.

At the outset of his *lecturae* on the Psalter, delivered near the end of his career, Thomas holds that the Psalms, as a whole, are *prophetic* in nature, referring directly to Christ (and, by extension, to the Church) in the *literal sense* as well as in the spiritual senses—both the divine author and the human author sought to speak about Christ through the words on the page, not only through the secondary relationship constitutive of the spiritual senses.³⁸² Thomas excoriates any interpretation of the Psalms which fails to see Christ in the literal sense, such as Theodore of Mopsuestia’s that “the literal sense [of Psalm 21:19, Psalm 22 in Hebrew] was not about Christ but David”.³⁸³ As Thomas writes, “anyone who insists that Scripture must be explained this way is a heretic”.³⁸⁴ Thus, for Thomas the *literal sense* of the Psalms speaks of Christ just as much as do the spiritual senses.

Thomas demonstrates his focus on the literal sense in interpretation of the Psalms throughout his commentary on Psalm 45. The TOL (as it appears in Genesis 2:9) appears in this *lectura* in a passing reference, interpreted according to the spiritual senses, rather than the literal, buttressing a claim which Thomas makes about the relation of God to the members of the Church. However, examining this reference in light of the larger context of Thomas’ commentary on this Psalm sheds light on Thomas’ interpretive practice throughout the *lectura*, in which he discerns the presence of Christ in the *literal sense* of the Psalm. Here, examining Thomas’ commentary on Psalm 45 as a whole (though, by

³⁸² Ryan, *Reader*, 16. See §1.5.2.3 above.

³⁸³ *Psal.*, prologue. Noted in Ryan, 16.

³⁸⁴ *Psal.*, Prol. Cited in Ryan, 16.

necessity, by making use of broad brush-strokes), with a special focus on the role of the TOL within the *lectura*, helps to show how the literal and spiritual senses interact in Thomas' mature thought.

In keeping with his insistence that the literal sense of the Psalter refers to Christ and to things related to Christ, Thomas describes the role of Christ within the text of Psalm 45. First, Thomas describes the immediate context of the Psalm within the Psalter. While the preceding Psalms “ask...for the divine help against...trials” and “having been heard, describe...the king’s glory”, in the present Psalm, “having been heard on behalf of the people, [David] describes the favor given to the people”.³⁸⁵ In keeping with the Psalms’ nature as prophecy, however, in speaking of the king, David spoke of Christ. Thus, Thomas adds: “And just as the preceding psalm described Christ’s glory, so this psalm describes the favors extended to Christ’s faithful”.³⁸⁶ In Thomas’ interpretation, then, the literal sense of this Psalm describes both the afflictions and the consolation experienced by the Church.

As Thomas comments on 45:2, ‘God is our refuge and strength, an aid in trouble’,³⁸⁷ the friar describes what it means for God to be a helper amidst trouble. Thomas discerns two sorts of trouble in which God offers aid: “spiritual” troubles and “bodily” troubles, and explains how God provides help in the midst of both. “The spiritual troubles are sins”,

³⁸⁵ *Psal.* 45.n462.

³⁸⁶ *Psal.* 45.n462.

³⁸⁷ In *Psal.*, Thomas generally interprets from the text of the Gallican Psalter, rather than the standard Vulgate text. Accordingly, in citation of the Psalms I draw from the text of the Gallican Psalter, as preserved in the Gutenberg Bible: ‘*Deus noster refugium et virtus: adiutor in tribulationibus*’. Text source: <https://vulsearch.sourceforge.net/html/Ps.html>.

Thomas writes, with a particular focus on “the pain of repentance”. “Christ”, however, “is a refuge in this trouble, since he consoles [the penitent] in it, and by him man is strengthened and helped”.³⁸⁸ The “bodily troubles”, as Thomas expounds them, can take several forms, all of which involve the suffering of the people of God. Thomas initially describes these troubles as those persecutions experienced by the earliest Christians,³⁸⁹ but also describes them more generally as being able to take the form of both “general trouble...when all are killed” and “the oppression of the great...when the leaders are captured”.³⁹⁰ Thomas reads 45:3 (“Therefore we will not fear while the earth will be disturbed, and while the mountains will be carried into the heart of the sea”³⁹¹) as speaking into the latter two situations: ***“I will not fear when the earth shall be troubled, that is, if the whole people is troubled, and the mountains shall be removed into the heart of the sea.”*** Nor shall I fear even if the great are captured”.³⁹² Thus, the “earth” Thomas interprets as “the whole people”, and the “mountains” Thomas interprets as the “leaders”. On the foundation of this reading of the literal sense, however, Thomas constructs an edifice of spiritual interpretation: “But mystically, by the earth, which is solid, is understood the Jews, who were solid in knowledge of the one God, and fixed, and surrounded by the nations, just as the earth is

³⁸⁸ *Psal.* 45.n462.

³⁸⁹ “The saints suffered bodily tribulations in the early Church. *We were pressed out of measure* (2 Cor 1:8)”. *Psal.* 45.n462.

³⁹⁰ *Psal.* 45.n462.

³⁹¹ My translation. Gallican Psalter: *Propterea non timebimus dum turbabitur terra, et transferentur montes in cor maris.*

³⁹² *Psal.* 45.n462.

enveloped by the sea and surrounded by the waters”.³⁹³ On this interpretation, the “mountains” signify the apostles, and thus 45:3, read through this lens, “signifies the persecution which the faithful suffered from the Jews, as if to say, “I will not fear when the Jews are disturbed by the preaching of Christ”.³⁹⁴

Thomas’ reading according to the literal sense in this section provides an interpretation which is generally applicable to those in the Church across the eras of salvation history. One’s people suffering violence and one’s leaders being captured could be experienced by Christians at any point in history. Thomas’ mystical interpretation of this section, however, makes the reference of the Psalm much more specific, connecting the earth, the sea and the mountains to particular individuals and events in the history of the Church. Thomas might say that, in this section, the Psalm speaks in the literal sense of the sufferings of the Church across time, while when interpreted according to the allegorical sense its images refer to the persecution of the primitive Church. When interpreted this way, the things referred to in the text of the Psalm takes on a remarkable degree of polyvalence, with Thomas providing several distinct interpretations in quick succession, some of which rearrange the syntax of the passage. As Thomas reads it, a spiritual interpretation of 45:4 (Their waters resounded, and they were disturbed; the mountains

³⁹³ My translation. *Psal. 45.n462: mystice, per terram quae solida est, intelligitur Iudaea, quae solida fuit in cognitione unius Dei, et fixa, et cingebatur gentibus, sicut terra circumdatur mari et cingitur aquis.*

³⁹⁴ *Psal. 45.n462.*

were rattled with its strength³⁹⁵) may rest on a swapping of the places of *montes* and *aquae*: “Mystically, it can be read: **the mountains roared**, that is, the apostles, who are called mountains; **the waters were troubled**, that is, the people of the gentiles, at the sound of the mountains—that is, at the preaching of the apostles”.³⁹⁶ Thus, for Thomas, what in the literal sense refers to the trials of the Church, when interpreted according to the allegorical sense, might refer to the reason for that persecution. Thomas immediately follows this reading with another spiritual interpretation: “Or **the mountains**, that is, the apostles, **were troubled**, namely, exteriorly by tribulations, **in the strength of the sea**”.³⁹⁷ The point is that interpretations according to the spiritual senses are, as Thomas says, “based on the literal”,³⁹⁸ but quickly surpass and go beyond it.

In keeping with his high-level division of the Psalm, Thomas subsequently shifts to an examination of the “divine consolation”³⁹⁹ centring upon the “city” and the “river” of 45:5 (“The rushing of the river cheers the city of God, the Most High has consecrated his tabernacle”⁴⁰⁰). Taking the river as an image for the consolation mentioned above, Thomas sees the image as describing two things: “the flowing out of divine grace” and “the

³⁹⁵ My translation. Gallican Psalter: *Sonuerunt, et turbatae sunt aquae eorum; conturbati sunt montes in fortitudine ejus.*

³⁹⁶ *Psal.* 45.n463.

³⁹⁷ *Psal.* 45.n463.

³⁹⁸ *ST Ia.q1.a10.co.*

³⁹⁹ *Psal.* 45.n464.

⁴⁰⁰ My translation. Gallican Psalter: *Fluminis impetus laetificat civitatem Dei: sanctificavit tabernaculum suum Altissimus.*

consolation of the divine presence”.⁴⁰¹ With regard to the former, Thomas interprets the river as metaphorical speech which refers both to divine grace⁴⁰² and to the Holy Spirit, who, as Thomas describes it, proceeds from the Father and the Son just as a river flows from a spring, and who brings the “grace” of “joy” to the Christian.⁴⁰³ This, says Thomas, is what the Psalm is referring to when it describes the river as making the city of God joyful.

“This city is the Church”, which “is gladdened by the Holy Spirit descending upon it”, Thomas simply states.⁴⁰⁴ Significantly, Thomas never mentions Jerusalem in his work on this Psalm, preferring to read the city as a straightforward reference to the Church. Though one might expect Thomas to take the city, in the literal sense, to refer to the historical Jerusalem, and only in the allegorical sense to refer to the Church, this is not what Thomas does. There is no indication that Thomas is interpreting the city in any way other than according to the literal sense, in keeping with his method of interpretation throughout this section of *Psal.*⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ *Psal.* 45.n464.

⁴⁰² “the consolation is expressed using the image of a river (*exprimitur sub similitudine fluminis*), which signifies grace”. *Psal.* 45.n464.

⁴⁰³ *Psal.* 45.n464.

⁴⁰⁴ *Psal.* 45.n464.

⁴⁰⁵ Thomas adds later that “these things can be referred to (*possunt...referri ad*) the Blessed Virgin...since she is the city”, an interpretation which Thomas also seems to view as according to the literal sense.

After establishing that the city is metaphorical language for the Church, Thomas shifts to describing the “consolation of the divine presence” which the Church receives.⁴⁰⁶ Thomas takes as his point of reference 45:6 (‘God is in the midst (*in medio*) of it, it will not be moved’⁴⁰⁷). Thomas explains what it means for God to be ‘in the midst’ of the Church: it means that he is ‘not a respecter of masks’, (*non acceptor personarum*, citing Acts 10:34 and Ephesians 6:9⁴⁰⁸)—that God does not show partiality towards any in the Church. Thomas supports this assertion with two references to Scripture: Luke 24:36 (‘Jesus [after the resurrection] stood in the midst of them [the disciples]’⁴⁰⁹ and Genesis 2:9 (‘The tree of life in the midst of Paradise’).⁴¹⁰

Throughout his commentary on the Psalm, Thomas has been building up the association between the city and the Church, reading the former as referring to the Church in the literal sense. Thomas has taken the Psalm’s description of the river flowing through the city as referring to God’s presence in the Church, again in the literal sense. These citations from Luke and Genesis, understood in the context of Thomas’ argument, buttress this association. Jesus standing in the midst of the disciples, Thomas’ commentary suggests, can be understood with the further spiritual significance of God standing in the midst of the

⁴⁰⁶ *Psal.* 45.n464.

⁴⁰⁷ My translation. Gallican Psalter: *Deus in medio ejus, non commovebitur...*

⁴⁰⁸ My translation. *Psal.* 45.n464. Though in the New Testament this phrase does not specifically refer to God’s natural equanimity, regardless of any image put forward, towards all within the Church, but rather to all people, at this point Thomas clearly takes it to refer to the former.

⁴⁰⁹ My translation. Vulg.: *Iesus stetit in medio eorum.*

⁴¹⁰ My translation. Vulg.: *lignum...vitae in medio paradisi.*

Church.⁴¹¹ Thomas takes the events which occurred in the past Church as referring to the present-day Church. As Thomas states in *Quod. VII*, something said according to the literal sense in Scripture about the Church may be read according to the allegorical sense if “those things said about the primitive Church should be expounded as much as to the future state of the present Church”.⁴¹² Thomas’ juxtaposition of his citation of Luke 24:39 with Genesis 2:9 indicates that he reads the latter as following the same logic as the former. As the historical event of Jesus standing in the midst of his disciples possesses the additional meaning of God standing in the midst of the Church, so Thomas reads the TOL in the midst of Paradise as having a similar signification, that of God standing in the midst of the Church. Though largely implicit, Thomas reads the TOL here following the allegorical sense, because the TOL as described there has a historical reality which Thomas nevertheless interprets as having further spiritual significance.

Finally, Thomas completes his commentary on the Psalm, his evaluation of the Psalter as prophetic leads him to make an interesting interpretive move—to read 45:10 ([B]earing wars all the way off to the end of the earth. He smashes the bow, and he shatters

⁴¹¹ As a side note, Thomas is easily not the only commentator to read the river as somehow referring to God. In *Psal. 45.n464*, the friar reads the river as a metaphorical reference to the Holy Spirit: “[a river] derives from a source, namely, the spring, but the spring does not, in turn, derive from the river, since the spring is the river’s source, and the Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son”, immediately afterwards citing Revelation 22:1. Some modern commentators proffer a very similar reading of the river, this time as it appears in Revelation. See Beale, *Revelation*, 1104: “If the waters symbolize the Spirit...then Rev. 22:1 is an early picture of the later Christian confession that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son”.

⁴¹² *Quod. VII.q6.a2.ad5*.

weapons, and he consumes shields with fire'⁴¹³) as referring to the time of the birth of Christ in the literal sense. "In the literal sense, this was at the time of the nativity of Christ, since then civil wars had ceased and Octavius had subjugated the whole world. And this peace foreshadowed that peace which Christ would extend to all men".⁴¹⁴

3.4 The TOL read as signifying other elements of salvation history

3.4.1 *Germinet Terra, collatio in sero*

The sweeping argument of Thomas' sermon *Germinet terra* runs across the entire range of salvation history as the friar expounds upon the significance of Christ's work on the Cross. In the second section of the sermon, Thomas interprets the *lignum pomiferum faciens fructum* ('the fruitful tree bearing fruit') of Genesis 1:11⁴¹⁵ according to the allegorical sense, reading God's words in the creation narrative, as well as referring, in the literal sense, to the creation of plant life,⁴¹⁶ as signifying the Cross. As he continues, Thomas methodically draws in numerous other wooden objects from the narrative of Scripture, reading them, too, as connected with the Cross, according to the spiritual senses. Among these, Thomas interprets the TOL as signifying the Cross, a reading which bears the hallmarks of interpretation according to the allegorical sense.

⁴¹³ Gallican Psalter. My translation: *auferens bella usque ad finem terrae. Arcum conteret, et confringet arma, et scuta comburet igni.*

⁴¹⁴ *Psal.* 45.n468.

⁴¹⁵ My translation. Vulg. Gen. 1:11.

⁴¹⁶ Or, perhaps, to the generation of the "'the production of perfection of perfect species [of plants], from which the seed of others should arise". Cf. *ST Ia.q69.a2.co.*

Germinet was preached to an audience of Thomas' students at the University of Paris, most likely in 1271.⁴¹⁷ The sermons' method of explication of Scripture is distinct from that which one acquainted with his academic *lecturae* on Scripture might expect. Gone is the minute examination of the initial steps of the large-scale argument of a book or letter. Rather, Thomas uses a single verse as a jumping-off point for theological reflection, propelled by merciless punning and ingenious word association, a move characteristic of the thirteenth-century style of preaching known as *sermo modernus*.⁴¹⁸ This small section of Scripture, known as a *thema*, serves to organise the sermon at large, providing vocabulary for the argument unfolded therein.⁴¹⁹ Smith emphasises that "medieval preachers did not preach on their biblical *thema* verse in the sense of doing exegesis. Rather the *thema* verse was used as a mnemonic device, a memory aid, to give structure to the sermon".⁴²⁰ After outlining his *thema* verse, the practitioner of *sermo modernus* divides the verse into sections along which the argument sermon will proceed, known as *divisio*, and then commences his expounding, called *dilatatio*.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 259n.1. Hoogland argues that the sermon can be dated to 13 September 1271. Additionally the text included in the Leonine edition today is likely based on *reportatio*, so the modern reader has access to a scribe's record of Thomas' preaching, rather than of Thomas' manuscript or notes (as Mark-Robin Hoogland, "Introduction," in *The Academic Sermons*, ed. Mark-Robin Hoogland, vol. 11, The Fathers of the Church; Mediaeval Continuation (Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 11, states). All of the caveats necessary with reference to *reportatio* outlined above should be observed.

⁴¹⁸ Smith, *Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*, 48. The present section is indebted to Smith's work. See in particular Smith, 49–52.

⁴¹⁹ Smith, *Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*, 48.

⁴²⁰ Smith, *Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*, 48.

⁴²¹ Smith, *Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*, 46–47.

The argument of *Germinet* unfolds across the sermon's two main sections, known as the *sermo* and the *collatio in sero*. The *sermo* was preached during the morning Mass, the *collatio* at Vespers in the evening.⁴²² Together, the two expound a section of Genesis 1:11, describing the "twofold medicine put forth from the earth: the green plant and the fruit-bearing tree".⁴²³ The *sermo* discusses the *herbam virentem* (the 'green plant') and the *collatio* the *lignum pomiferum* (the 'fruit-bearing tree').

The opening of the *sermo* clearly lays out the method of argument which Thomas follows throughout *Germinet*. There, the friar states, "God in his providence gave to man, because he is earthly, a remedy from the earth...Now a twofold medicine is put forth from the earth, the green plant and the fruit-bearing tree. *The green plant is the Blessed Virgin*, whose birth the Church is celebrating these days".⁴²⁴ Following this, Thomas describes the reasons for this association: "she is called 'plant' because of her humility, 'green' because of her virginity, and 'bringing forth seed' because of her fruitfulness".⁴²⁵

Two related things should be noted about Thomas' argument at this point. First, a potential misunderstanding should be avoided: Thomas is not arguing that the green plant somehow *is* Mary on the historical level, or even that the words *herbam virentem* refer metaphorically to the Virgin. Rather, here, Thomas discerns an additional meaning to Genesis' *herbam virentem* in light of Mary's role in salvation history. In *Germinet*, Thomas

⁴²² Hoogland, "Introduction", 7.

⁴²³ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 260.

⁴²⁴ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 260. Emphasis added.

⁴²⁵ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 260.

reads the individual entities of Genesis 1:11 as signifying other elements of or events in salvation history—precisely what Thomas gets at when describing interpretation according to the allegorical sense. Thus, in *Germinet*, Thomas’ statement that “the green plant is the Blessed Virgin” means, ‘the green plant carries a reference, according to the allegorical sense, to the Blessed Virgin’. Second, Thomas’ outline of his exposition in the *sermo* highlights the logic behind his allegorical connections between Genesis 1 and Mary and Christ.⁴²⁶ The friar writes that the ‘green plant is the Blessed Virgin’, supporting this statement by outlining the numerous similarities between the Virgin and the green plant. In other words, the logic runs as follows: ‘*A* is *B*, fleshing out the relation between the two by adding that *B* is like *A* for *x*, *y* and *z* reasons’. This line of thinking informing Thomas’ interpretation according to the allegorical sense is visible in the *collatio* below.

This logic reappears in the *collatio*, where Thomas draws the Cross into the argument: “We have spoken about the plant, which is the Blessed Virgin. Now it remains to speak about the fruit-bearing tree, the tree of the Cross of our Lord, which is to be venerated”.⁴²⁷ Thomas continues, “It is very suitable (*satis congrue*) to connect these two remedies, because the green plant has brought forth our salvation, whereas the fruit-bearing tree has sustained the plant and has exalted it”.⁴²⁸ The Cross is like the tree in three ways, the friar adds: “Moses describes three things concerning the tree: its appearance, its

⁴²⁶ Again, cf. *Quod*. VII.q6.a2.ad5.

⁴²⁷ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 271.

⁴²⁸ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 271.

adornment, and its fruit”.⁴²⁹ Just as in the *sermo* Thomas read the plant as signifying Mary in the allegorical sense, likewise, here Thomas reads the tree as signifying Christ’s Cross.

The bulk of the *collatio* focuses upon the “appearance” of the tree—*lignum* (wood)—and its allegorical significance. This is where Thomas invokes the TOL, and the present section will focus on this element of Thomas’ interpretation below. At the end of the *collatio*, Thomas interprets the fruits of the tree in two ways, both following the allegorical sense. Focusing upon the “adornment” of the tree, Thomas expounds the fruits of the tree in Genesis as referring to the ‘fruits’ hung upon the Cross: Christ’s physical body, as well as his mystical body, the Church.⁴³⁰ Finally, Thomas also expounds the fruits of the tree in light of the results of Christ’s work upon the cross as applied to humans: salvation, sanctification and glorification.⁴³¹

In Thomas’ examination of the wooden appearance of the tree, the friar situates the woodenness of the Cross within the larger arc of salvation history. This description is stuffed full of puns, trading on the semantic range of the Latin *lignum*, which carries connotations both of wood as a material and tree as an object. To summarise Thomas’ logic throughout the section, since the original evil of the human race was brought about

⁴²⁹ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 271.

⁴³⁰ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 277.

⁴³¹ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 279–280. An example of Thomas’ interpretation according to the allegorical sense: “Through sin humankind is excluded from paradise, and therefore Christ has suffered on the Cross, so that through the Cross the gate from the earthly things to the heavenly things would be open. Hence the Cross of Christ is signified by the ladder that Jacob saw...All the saints go up to the heavens by the power of the Cross”. Aquinas, 280.

through *lignum*, it is fitting that God brought about humans' salvation by means of *lignum*. As Thomas writes, "The human race is wounded by wood (*lignum*), because the first man ate from the forbidden wood (*lignum*) and therefore the divine Wisdom found the medicine from wood (*lignum*)".⁴³² Using the allegorical connection between the tree of Genesis 1 and the Cross as a point of departure, Thomas launches into an overview of the role of *lignum* in salvation history—the Gospel according to wood.

First, Thomas draws the tree of the knowledge of good and evil into the association: "The human race is wounded...since the first man stole a fruit from the forbidden wood (*lignum*). The new man has placed himself, as a salutary fruit so to speak, back onto the wood (*lignum*)".⁴³³ In his crucifixion, Christ recapitulates, and in a sense undoes, the human act which caused the Fall. Though Thomas does not explicitly link the two *ligna* at this point, the relationship in which he places them has the effect of identifying the tree of knowledge of good and evil with the Cross, a relation following the logic of interpretation according to the allegorical sense.

The associations continue as Thomas draws in the wood thrown into the water by Moses. The friar explains that "the wood (*lignum*) of the Cross had the sting of bitterness",⁴³⁴ noting that even this bitterness becomes sweet as a result of Christ's work. Thomas interprets according to the allegorical sense Moses' action in throwing the wood

⁴³² Aquinas, *Sermons*, 272.

⁴³³ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 272.

⁴³⁴ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 274.

into the water, as the friar writes, “This sting of bitterness turns into sweetness, which is signified (*significatur*) in [Exodus], where it is said that ‘the children of Israel arrived at bitter waters: the Lord ordered Moses to throw a piece of wood (*lignum*) in, and the waters became sweet’”.⁴³⁵ That this interpretation reads Exodus according to the allegorical sense is clear from the fact that Thomas reads the former *lignum* as signifying the latter. Thomas continues, adding a further interpretation which, most likely, follows the moral sense: “If the just suffer adversities, the wood of the Cross makes these sweet”.⁴³⁶

Next, Thomas draws the TOL into his growing web of associations involving the reciprocity inherent in Christ’s work on the Cross. As the friar writes, “The first evil of man occurred when Adam was thrown out of Paradise. What was the remedy? The wood (*lignum*) of life. But, because he could not approach the wood of life, he could not have the remedy”.⁴³⁷ The solution? Christ’s crucifixion. Once again punning on the multiple associations of *lignum*, Thomas characterises the *cross* as the remedy for the evil caused by human sin, applying to *it* the role of the TOL: “Thus the Lord has said: See ‘that he does not take from the wood (*lignum*) of life’—but Christ has taken up the wood for us. Hence it is written: ‘The wood (*lignum*) of life, who would take hold of it?’”⁴³⁸ Though the text of

⁴³⁵ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 275.

⁴³⁶ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 275. Though Thomas does not specify, this interpretation most likely follows the moral sense, in light of the friar’s individualising reading of the passage, drawing a meaning from Exodus which sheds light upon the relationship between the individual soul and God.

⁴³⁷ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 275.

⁴³⁸ Aquinas, *Sermons*, 275.

Germinet does not explicitly link the TOL as it appears in Genesis with the Cross, according to the allegorical sense, other material from the Thomistic corpus indicates that Thomas, here, is interpreting the TOL as signifying the Cross in the allegorical sense. The logic at this point of *Germinet* bears strong resemblances to two quotations included within the *Catena aurea*. The first, brief, quotation may be found in the *Catena* on Matthew, attributed to Hilary of Poitiers: “In this way, therefore, on the tree of life the salvation and the life of everything is suspended”.⁴³⁹ The second appears near the end of the *Catena* on Mark, attributed to Jerome: “In this place salvation is figured by the wood (*lignum*); the first wood was that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; the second wood is one of unmixed good for us, and is the wood of life. The first hand stretched out to the wood caught hold of death; the second found again the life which had been lost”.⁴⁴⁰ Both of these quotations clearly identify the TOL with the Cross, following the logic of the allegorical sense. Though Thomas does not cite these quotations here, his inclusion of them within the *Catena* demonstrates both his awareness and approval of readings of the TOL as it appears in Genesis according to the allegorical sense, indicating that Thomas is interpreting the TOL in a similar manner at this point in *Germinet*.

3.5 Conclusion

One common feature connects all of Thomas’ readings according to the spiritual senses of passages of Scripture which reference the TOL: the friar’s demonstrable

⁴³⁹ *CaMatt.* c27.L7. My translation: *Sic ergo in ligno vitae cunctorum salus et vita suspenditur.*

⁴⁴⁰ *CaMark.* c15.L4.

grounding of his interpretations according to the spiritual senses upon the literal sense of the section of Scripture in question. In keeping with Thomas' theory of interpretation as outlined in Chapter 1, when the friar has recourse to the spiritual senses, the literal sense of the passage of Scripture always retains logical priority, even when the content of the spiritual senses, rather than of the literal sense, is the focus in Thomas' work. This bears out Thomas' insistence in *ST* Ia.q1.a10.co that "the spiritual sense is based on the literal, and presupposes it".

General Conclusion

In this work, I described Thomas' practice of Scriptural interpretation with a wider variety of source texts than is often the case in works on this subject. As well as to disambiguate some oft-used terminology (e.g. 'literal sense', etc.), I demonstrated my findings on Thomas' hermeneutical theory through a wealth of interpretive examples. It is my hope that this work thus provides a unique, concrete perspective which complements the many theory-focussed forays already extant.

Chapter 1 provided a comprehensive description of Thomas' approach to Scripture. In short, Thomas sees the God-authored words of Scripture as able to simultaneously signify multiple kinds of meaning, which the responsible interpreter may interpret with the framework of the fourfold sense. In this framework, the literal sense provides access to additional kinds of meaning. The chapter grounded its discussion of the nature of and relationship between the literal and spiritual senses in citations of a wide variety of Thomistic sources. It also treated some relevant sticking points neglected in other writings on the topic, such as the nature of metaphorical speech in Scripture read according to the literal sense.

Chapters 2–3 examined Thomas' theory in practice. Chapter 2 demonstrated the expansive content of the literal sense, which, according to Thomas, is whatever God sought to communicate through the words of Scripture. The content of the literal sense can include not only history, but also the proleptic content of prophecy, the referent of figurative speech, and so on. This is distinct from the content of the spiritual senses, as Chapter 3

showed, which includes whatever God sought to communicate through the things referred to in the literal sense.

The present thesis focussed upon the work of the Angelic Doctor himself, with occasional forays into the work of some of his intellectual forebears. As a good scholastic, Thomas' thought was a part of a larger dialogue, composed of citation, response, polemic and, sometimes, outright theft. To rightly study Thomas' work, then, one must also study both his contemporaries and his forebears. A practicable next step from this study would be to examine through the lens of a specific Scriptural topic the interpretations of a group of related thinkers, situating the uniqueness, or otherwise, of Thomas' approach to Scripture among his contemporaries.

Beyond the realm of Thomistic studies, the aim of this study is to aid those in the present who wish to faithfully read and teach God's word in understanding the work of teachers and preachers of past generations. I hope that such consideration will allow the modern reader to examine his or her own assumptions about how the Scriptures should be read, to view them alongside the work of biblical critics from other times and, hopefully, to learn from the work of earlier thinkers. This kind of evaluation, however, must be left for another time and place.

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