

AQUINAS IN THE CONCEPTUAL BORDER

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Abstract: *Recent studies have shown that philosophy and theology, two disciplines separated and distinguished from each other for more than five hundred years, are closer in reality than how philosophers and theologians of today understand them. This is even more evident in those who reflect on the so-called “death of metaphysics” and the “end of philosophy” that Martin Heidegger proclaims. This, however, cannot escape the question of dealing with St. Thomas Aquinas’ philosophical and theological enterprise, whose intellectual spirit is characterized by delving both into philosophical and theological questions.*

This work tries to place St. Thomas Aquinas within this framework, ultimately showing that he exemplifies a lively interaction and interpenetration between these two disciplines. To show this, the paper goes through a brief survey of the historical distinction which finds its roots in St. Thomas himself. Afterwards, it provides a new understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology primarily found in Jean-Luc Marion. Through this, one sees that in fact, St. Thomas does philosophy and theology truly, that while speaking of a distinction between these two disciplines, his whole intellectual project can be seen as both philosophical and theological, in which one cannot be spoken of without the other.

Keywords: *Philosophy, Theology, Postmodernism, St. Thomas Aquinas,*

One cannot deny that even at present, St. Thomas Aquinas remains to be an influential figure in the history of philosophy and theology. And as such, there are various ways of reading and making sense of who he is and how he thinks. On one extreme are those who think that the Angelic Doctor is the only one who does philosophy and theology truly, and thus it is but proper to follow his own method even in a time when both of these disciplines are more complex than it seems. On the other end of the stick are those who dismiss Aquinas as having no place in the history of ideas, because his “philosophy” is nothing more than a suppression of

reason and a submission to the authority of the Church. Still others mention that his philosophical value lies in his argumentation, with the content put out of the question. In any case, we have competing views regarding Thomas on the question of his identity, on whether he is a philosopher or a theologian, and that he cannot be both.¹

However, behind this question of categorization lies a more fundamental problem, namely, the distinction between philosophy and theology as separate disciplines. Naturally, this distinction is something that emerged by the time that these are identified as separate and distinct-academic-disciplines. And more than a question of domain and content, with most of us identifying philosophy with reason and argumentation and theology with faith and Divine Revelation, another inevitable question concerns the primacy and complexity of one over the other.²

In light of the conflict between these two disciplines, one can analyze the problem at hand. This particular paper attempts to address the question historically and systematically, that is, to trace the emergence of the conceptual distinction between these disciplines and the relationship that exists between them at present. But more than that, it places particular focus on St. Thomas, who was able to bring these two disciplines to harmonious synthesis. It shows two

¹ The variety of views and perceptions of St. Thomas can be found and is reflected on the question regarding "Christian philosophy," its sense and underlying conditions notwithstanding. On this, Henri de Lubac identifies distinct stands regarding St. Thomas, which can be classified into two categories. There are those who, like Emmanuel Bréhier, sees a fundamental incompatibility between Christianity and philosophy, and from which it follows that Thomism is merely an annexation of philosophy to Christian faith (Henri de Lubac S.J., "On Christian Philosophy," trans. Sharon Mollerus and Susan Clements, *Communio* 19 [1992]: 478-79; Jean-Luc Marion, "Christian Philosophy': Hermeneutic or Heuristic?," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, ed. John D. Caputo, trans. Christina Gschwandtner [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], 66-67.). On the other end of the spectrum, however, are Thomists who follow the tradition begun by Francisco Suarez and Cajetan during the early stages of modernity, showing Thomism as the "true philosophy" over and above anything else, reflected in Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (see Pope Leo XIII, "Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII *Aeterni Patris* on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy," The Holy See, 1879, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html, nos. 17-18.). See also Fergus Kerr O.P., "The Varieties of Interpreting Aquinas," in *Contemplating Aquinas*, ed. Fergus Kerr O.P. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 27-40. for a more contemporary view of Thomism in universities.

² One particular concern that emerges, this time in the aspect of seminary formation, is that of what ultimately stands as significant for priestly formation. There are several cases in which one is kept while the other is forgotten, sometimes on account of what is more interesting and enticing to pursue. One Filipino thinker seems to reflect this view, asserting that

when one goes the round of bookstores worldwide, one does not find much that is attractive on the religious shelves. That situation, in my opinion, is not true of philosophy, where one can find title after new title that one would still like to buy; philosophy still produces many good and genuinely challenging works, something however which cannot be said of theology. (Romualdo E. Abulad, "Atheism as a Prophetic Voice in the Era of Paradigm Shift," *Diwa* 38, no. 2 [2013]:77-78.)

A contrast is obvious here, though debatable. Nevertheless, a blatant comparison between these two disciplines is clearly demonstrated.

important things, namely (a) that the distinction actually emerged in and through St. Thomas, and (b) a long history of philosophy and theology brings us to a new understanding of the relationship between these two disciplines, which we can surprisingly find in St. Thomas in more ways than one. These are discussed to ultimately answer the question that scholars of St. Thomas, philosophy, and theology are brought together: *considering the distinction between philosophy and theology that exists at present, what is the place of St. Thomas in the intellectual terrain that distinguishes between philosophy and theology?*

Aquinas as the Origin of Distinction between Philosophy and Theology

In order to see the origin and development of this distinction, it is first and foremost important to determine how these disciplines emerge as independent entities with their particular objects. And in this regard, the brief historical account of Jean-Luc Marion on the conceptual distinction would be of great help. Marion points out that “philosophy” and “theology” do not appear as distinct disciplines in the initial stages of the coincidental yet fateful encounter between Greek philosophy and the Christian *evangelion*. In fact, the early Church does not identify its thought to be a *theology*, for this originally referred to the Greek poets and philosophers’ discourses concerning the gods. And contrary to these, the God of Christian revelation remains unnameable and unsayable, to be defined and describe only according to how He reveals Himself.³ However, Christian thinkers recognize their own rationalized faith, articulated through philosophical categories, in continuity with the philosophy that they are familiar with. Its articulation is reached in its fullness in Augustine, who put Christian faith on equal grounds with philosophy, and not with any “theology,” which Christians could not comprehend. In fact, Augustine points out that the true philosopher, that is, doing *philosophy* truly, is the one who loves God, for God Himself is the Wisdom that these philosophers seek to love.⁴

³ Jean-Luc Marion, “On the Foundation of the Distinction between Theology and Philosophy,” ed. Philippe Capelle-Dumont, trans. John Carlo P. Uy and Eduardo Jose C. Calasanz, *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* XIII, no. 1–3 (2009): 49 [henceforth referred to as OTF].

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52. Here, Marion returns to Augustine’s use of *theologia*, referring to the three senses that the Roman scholar Varro uses, namely (a) rationally explaining the existence of the Roman pantheon, (b) the explanation of the movement of nature and the heavenly bodies articulated

Thus, not only does the distinction non-existent and unthinkable, but also that these disciplines, as it is identified at present, are not evident as such and thus do not have any common object of intellectual confrontation.

The distinction only came during the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, who adopts the word *theologia* as it was used by Pseudo-Dionysius and Peter Abelard, having thus a common object-Divine Revelation-shared with philosophy. In putting them on the same level of discourse, it became therefore possible to determine the scope of these two disciplines. Aquinas then made a particular distinction between the two based on the scope and content of each discipline, first in the *Summa Theologiae*, and then in his *Commentary to Aristotle's Metaphysics*.

In the *Summa* (ST I.Q1.A1), Aquinas answers the question regarding the status of “sacred doctrine” as a science distinct from philosophy. He then affirms this distinction based primarily on one thing: efficient causality. He says that while the philosophical sciences comprehend the truth of things based on reason and argumentation, sacred doctrine is understood through Divine Revelation, thus in and through faith, although he concludes further that what is received in faith can also be understood by reason.⁵ And regarding the first article of the *Summa*, four important points can be raised. First, Aquinas confirms that Sacred Doctrine is a science distinct from philosophy (Q1.A1), and that it is a singular and speculative science (Q1.A2-3). Second, the distinct object of this science is nothing but God alone and His effects, and argues the truth of these through its principles, the articles of faith (Q1.A8). Third, and perhaps, most importantly in terms of the relationship between philosophy and theology, is that it bears a unique relationship with other sciences, most notably with philosophy. Aquinas points out in the fifth article that the science of Sacred Doctrine surpasses all other sciences, since it deals with divine knowledge, and that philosophy serves as an aid to clarify its teaching. Moreover, in the sixth article, he also points out that while it “has no concern to prove the principles of

by *philosophi*, and (c) a theology that concerns the cult in the city. Augustine claims that the first and the third are not the concerns of a Christian since they are respective manifestations of crimes, the first being that of the gods and the third being that of human desire itself. This second type can be discussed vis-à-vis the Christian faith only because of the fact that it concerns divine nature and how it intervenes in this world. Otherwise, Christian faith does not have anything to do with it at all (Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods [New York: The Modern Library, 1950], VIII.1.).

⁵ References to the *Summa* are taken from St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 1 (New York: Benziger Brothers Inc., 1948).

other sciences,” it judges them from the light of faith. And this is so because it has God for its object not only as He is known through His effects, but as “He is known to Himself and revealed to others” (ST I.Q1.A6.), the only access to which is a sound understanding and interpretation of Sacred Scripture as shown in the last two articles. Taken as a whole, this question reveals the nature of sacred doctrine, which, judging from its content and argumentation, may well be taken as “sacred theology,” which stands distinct from any human sciences due to the fact that it comes from faith, although articulated through its “handmaids.”⁶ Therefore, it stands above metaphysics and deserves to be called as “wisdom” in its most proper sense.⁷

This distinction between philosophy and sacred doctrine is even more pronounced in his *Commentary*, as he expanded this distinction in comparison to other objects of philosophy. Here, he combines Aristotle’s three unconnected disciplines—*prima philosophia*, which concerns “the first causes” of everything, *metaphysica* which speaks of ens in quantum ens (being insofar as it is being), and the *scientia divina sive theologia*, which concerns separated substances, God included as the highest one—into a single *metaphysica* in which these disciplines find their ultimate principle in God.⁸ And following the aforementioned argument of the *Summa*, one concludes here that the *theologia* which is part of the unified *metaphysica* stands differently from sacred doctrine. While the latter concerns God as He is identified in and through the articles of faith, the former refers to a particular way of talking about God not as He is in Himself but through His effects.⁹

⁶ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange O.P., *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summ*, trans. Bede Rose (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1944), 68-69.

⁷ Ibid., 73. Rudi A. te Velde, “Understanding the Scientia of Faith: Reason and Faith in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*,” in *Contemplating Aquinas*, ed. Fergus Kerr O.P. (London: SCM Press, 2005), 59.

⁸ OTF, 53; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago: Regnery, 1961), 1.

⁹ Ibid. This claim is consistent with what Aquinas points out in ST I. Q2. A2, saying that the truths of God that can be known by reason serve as “preambles” to the articles of faith, as aids that lead one to faith. But more than that, he also says that “there is nothing to prevent a man . . . accepting. . . something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated,” suggesting the synthesis of these two sciences. This fact is even more established by what he asserts in ST I.Q2. A1, that God’s existence, though it is self-evident to us, cannot be fully known in the same way that He knows Himself, but only so far as He is known to us through His effects. Brian Jones uses this as a basis for a “natural theology,” which is basically knowledge of God’s existence through what can be understood by reason (see Brian Jones, “‘That There Were True Things To Say:’ The Scandal of Philosophy and Demonstrating God’s Existence in Thomistic Natural Theology,” *The New Blackfriars* 95, no. 1038 [2013]: 420-21.).

However, in no way do sacred doctrine and *theologia* stand separate from each other, having a common object. At the bottom of this difference lies, for him, an intimate relationship between the two sciences. What he forms therefore is a grand synthesis of faith and reason, with distinct but inseparable disciplines. While *metaphysica* speaks of God within the bounds and limits of what reason can offer, sacred doctrine deals (later determinately called as *theologia vero Sacrae Scripturae*) with God as He reveals Himself in and through Sacred Scripture, and from there proceed toward universally valid and intelligible conclusions. What distinguishes them is precisely the means—not to be misconstrued and conflated with the starting point—to arrive at knowledge of their respective object, which is, in the end, God Himself.¹⁰

This brief historical survey of the emergence and distinction of these two disciplines shows that it is actually Aquinas who first sets the distinction between the disciplines of philosophy and theology, albeit concluding that they are in harmony with each other. One must note, however, that this is done to preserve, on one hand, the distinct nature of Divine Revelation as accessible only by faith or, categorically, by believing reason, and, on the other hand, the capability of reason to understand what is to be taken by faith, at least to a certain extent. This distinction actually comes as an aid for Aquinas, helping him determine what is to be taken by faith and what can be further argued and, at times, challenged.¹¹

After Aquinas, however, the distinction between these two disciplines would be radicalized, one which gives way to a separation between these two, and in fact one would take the history of philosophy to a different direction than what the scholastic philosophers have in mind.

¹⁰ Leo L. Elders, "Faith and Reason: Synthesis in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* 8, no. 3 (2010): 528-29; te Velde, 67.

¹¹ Marion notes that the scope of the *scientia divina sive theologia*, which will soon be *theologia rationalis*, would only be concerned with the essence and existence of God as understood by pure reason, that is, concerning proofs of his existence and the divine attributes that can be concluded from His effects. Without these considerations, philosophy as such would not be able to deal with the God of Revelation. This is the reason why Aquinas distinguishes this *theologia rationalis* from *theologia vero sacrae scripturae*, which has knowledge of the God of Revelation as revealed through Scriptures, only accessible through believing reason (OTF, 53-55.). See also John D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 17-18.

The Creation of the Rift during the Enlightenment

What changed the terrain of scholastic philosophy was not actually a discussion on the nature of philosophy and theology *per se*. Rather, one can point to the Franciscan Duns Scotus' interpretation of Aquinas regarding creatures and God. Scotus did not see Aquinas' "being" as an analogical concept, but a universal concept that can be applied univocally to God and all creatures, although he uses this understanding to show how a believer can show the non-believer that God exists just as everything else exists, which inevitably results to this univocal understanding.¹² The consequence, therefore, is that in Scotus, one loses the distinct identity of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, radically different from all creatures. This difference is instead reduced to the category of finitude, that is, the fundamental difference between God and creatures is that the essence of the former is infinite, while the latter is merely finite.¹³

In situating the difference in form's finitude or lack thereof (for God), the sense of existence (*esse*) as an active dynamic principle that links creatures of God in and through participation in His very Being is lost. This led to the emergence of a philosophy, initially scholastic but eventually developed into something "modern" and scientific, that defines God within the limits and boundaries of reason that is separated from Divine Revelation, different from Aquinas' own synthetic view that values the distinct character of Divine Revelation. Another remarkable shift would be a more rationalist way of Thomism, characterized as a fixed system of abstractions that can be used to categorize everything in reality, including God.¹⁴

In this rationalist shift, Francisco Suarez, a Jesuit commentator of Aquinas, becomes prominent. He asserts that Aquinas' two *theologiae* are not only distinct but also separate sciences, and thus separate disciplines altogether. On one hand, *theologia rationalis*

¹² Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 129-130, 147-48.

¹³ Joseph M. de Torre, "Thomism and Postmodernism," in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman T. Ciapalo (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 249.

¹⁴ De Torre highlights three characteristics of scholastic philosophy and metaphysics, namely (a) the primacy of essence over existence, asserting that the former instead of the latter is the root and source of perfections, (b) the development of a more radical description of the distinction between *esse* and essence, not as constituent principles as described by Aquinas, but as "states" that occur in one and the same reality, rooted in a rather extrinsic understanding of the relationship between Creator and creature, and (c) the primacy of the shallow categorization between necessary and contingent being, without regard for the theory of participation that links the two together (Ibid., 252-53.).

understands God through pure reason's capacity, while on the other hand, *theologia vero sacrae scripturae* has nothing to do with *theologia rationalis* as it argues from Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition, which reason does not touch or critique.¹⁵ One sees at this point a radical split that would lead to a complete separation, even an opposition not just on the question of truth but also of primacy in institutions of learning.¹⁶

Thus, from late Medieval Ages to the Age of Enlightenment, one sees a radical separation between two disciplines that were originally synthesized by Aquinas. On one end, philosophy becomes purely concerned with what reason can certainly and determinately know and define, without resorting to God as a principle of explanation or, more scholastically, as a source and end. In fact, it can even do away with the existence of God.¹⁷ On the other hand, theology takes a rather different and complex turn, taking two distinct paths. On one hand, there lies a more strict association with Thomism, identified in the 19th century as the only true philosophy that the Church holds on to, as opposed to "modernism" which was identified primarily with Descartes and Kant all the way to Hegel.¹⁸ On the other hand, theology found an unlikely ally in the Romantic Movement, situating the rationality of religion not with discursive reason but with feelings and sentiments that lead the human being to the Divine and the Transcendent.¹⁹ Put briefly, the inherent connection between philosophy and theology was lost, with each discipline operating on its own objects, methods, and content.

¹⁵ OTF, 54-55; Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logos in Cartesian Thought*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 41-43.

Suarez himself shows his method in his *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, moving toward a rationalist method by naming the task of metaphysics as an identification of the "supreme definitions of entities, and the most universal properties and the proper notions of essence and being, and all the manners of distinction that there are in things" (Francisco Suarez, "Metaphysical Disputations," in *Descartes' Meditations: Background Source Materials*, ed. Roger Ariew, John Cottingham, and Tom Sorell [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 33.).

¹⁶ This opposition is evident in Immanuel Kant's critique of the status of medicine, law, and theology as higher faculties, under which is the lower faculty of philosophy, concerned solely with reason. Kant says that if this be the domain of philosophy, thus having the power to investigate the claims made by these higher faculties, then it has the right to do so. Therefore, these higher faculties as such must allow and permit philosophy to do so. Thus, effectively, one can see how Kant practically places philosophy in a special position, even above these higher faculties due to its source and domain (Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor [New York: Abaris Books, Inc., 1979], 122-23.). See also Caputo, 29.

¹⁷ Caputo shows how it is evident in the 18th century Enlightenment, particularly in Kant who regarded God and religion as merely regulative concepts (*Ibid.*, 31-32.).

¹⁸ Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 27-30. On Aeterni Patris, see n. 1 above.

¹⁹ Caputo, 33-34; McCool, 31.

Philosophy and Theology After Modernity: Marion's "Shared Indeterminacy"

The Enlightenment and the modern era, however, also came to an end, when in the end of the 19th century all the way to the 20th century, the primacy of reason as determined and described by the Enlightenment philosophers have been brought to question and criticized. John Caputo points to the various causes of the fall of modernity and the rise of the *postmodern* condition which allows us today to reconsider the relationship between philosophy and theology.²⁰ This is so because, as Marion points out that how we understand the distinction and the form that it takes at present is formed and understood only historically, and thus can be reconsidered from time to time.²¹ For Caputo, what is important in this transition from modernity to postmodernity is the emergence of theology, this time as a discipline that interprets reality from the lens of faith, now seen as a form of seeing and understanding.²² Therefore, it is fitting to say that philosophy, which frees itself from the confines set by the Enlightenment upon itself, and theology, as a legitimate discipline coming from faith, are two distinct ways of seeing one reality, which ultimately share a common end: the appreciation of life and coming to terms with the joys and struggles that constitute it, all toward a profound way of living, in keeping with the "passion of life" which calls us beyond ourselves.²³

Jean-Luc Marion, however, draws these two disciplines closer than ever, as he going back to the fundamental criteria with which philosophy are distinguished from each other. Coming from his own phenomenology of givenness, he concludes that a valid criteria for distinguishing—and bringing together—philosophy and theology are the way they receive and interpret what is given phenomena as an object of experience, based on the scope and limitations of each of them.²⁴ But to understand this further, it would be necessary to

²⁰ Caputo, 44-50. Here, Caputo discusses various turning points in the history of philosophy that led us to our current situation. He briefly described this into three "turns," namely (a) the hermeneutical turn, which he largely attributed to Martin Heidegger, (b) the linguistic turn, attributed to Ludwig Wittgenstein, and (c) the revolutionary turn, attributed to Thomas Kuhn.

²¹ OTF, 55.

²² Caputo, 56-58.

²³ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁴ Marion, 67. In an unsurprising move, Marion notes that St. Thomas is to be credited for this development, one that only an attentive reader of the *Summa* can see. This will be discussed on the next section of this work.

return to Marion's repudiation of the conventional criteria from distinguishing philosophy and theology, coming from the distinct perspectives of these two disciplines, but within the context of the "end of metaphysics" that is, for him, closes philosophy and theology's chapter on modernity.²⁵

First, from the point of view of philosophy, it appears that the distinction it creates between itself and theology based on its access to *being/ens*, and thus its self-identification as *ontologia* to which all other sciences, including *theologia*, are subordinated. The turn of philosophy, however, toward the "end of metaphysics," leads one to question this distinction, for in an intellectual field that does away with while openly questioning metaphysical truths, how can philosophy, or any philosophy for that matter, have access to the ultimate reality?²⁶

Beyond this, a stronger objection can be claimed once one looks at theology, treated by philosophy as *ontologia* as nothing but a subordinated, ontic science focused on the event of Divine Revelation. Here, Marion inserts and applies a postmodern concept, the phenomenology of the event, to push his point further. He says that Divine Revelation, which is itself an event, cannot but *be*, and as such, philosophy cannot deny that it can enter into its intellectual field. But more than that, it also appears that these events, phenomenologically treated as such, transcends philosophy's understanding of being, that is, within certain parameters that reason names and imposes (e.g. essence/existence and possibility/impossibility), and in fact grants the possibility of experiencing, comprehending, and understanding being.²⁷ In other words, these events that are the object of theology, specifically the events of Revelation in Sacred Scriptures, overpower and overturn the rules of being; therefore, this theory of subordination that places philosophy in a privileged and distinct position no longer holds.²⁸ And regarding this, a more important claim can be thus concluded,

²⁵ For a more comprehensive view of the "end of metaphysics" as articulated by Heidegger and appropriated by Marion into his thesis, see Jean-Luc Marion, "The 'End of Metaphysics' as a Possibility," in *Religion After Metaphysics*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall, trans. Daryl Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 166-89.

²⁶ OTF, 56-57.

²⁷ For a full treatment of Marion's phenomenology of *givenness*, which sees phenomena more as *events* rather than as common objects, see Jean-Luc Marion, "The Event, The Phenomenon, and The Revealed," in *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion*, ed. James E. Faulconer, trans. Beata Starwaska (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 87-105.

²⁸ OTF, 57-58.

namely that philosophy cannot distinguish itself from theology based on its claim that it only comes to know through “reason alone,” having sole access to the universal and common characteristic of being without any consideration whatsoever. When one sees Divine Revelation as events, even admitting only of its meaning while bracketing its truth, this very reason that philosophy uses to determine and distinguishes loses its power to do so because it has been overpowered by that which gives it to itself, or more precisely, the thinking subject who engages in it.

Second, this does not mean, however, that theology’s criterion for distinction holds. Marion says that theology today sees itself as a privileged discipline that has sole access to the supernatural by virtue of starting from the point of view of faith that receives this Revelation. Therefore, for theology, while philosophy is mainly concerned with what is “natural,” that is, what can be reached by reason alone, theology is concerned with the content that is handed over by Divine Revelation, thus the supernatural which is granted by grace and received in and through faith.²⁹ While this seems to make sense at the surface, especially with Aquinas, Marion says that at present this is even untenable. Coming from the renewal of Catholic theology initiated by the so-called *nouvelle théologie* movement, particularly that of Henri de Lubac, SJ, he points out that in reality, there is no clear-cut distinction and separation between the natural and supernatural domains, most especially with the nature of the human being itself, which has the capacity to surpass his own nature due to his supernatural orientation and destiny given by God Himself.³⁰ And analogically, this extends to the *beings* of this world, created as such, has a supernatural destiny in God that they achieve in the fullness of their nature (which for St. Thomas is an evident notion seen from the light of faith but is also obvious from reason, as articulated in ST I.Q44.A4). Thus, while theology can interpret phenomena in the light of faith, it cannot distinguish itself from philosophy by virtue of accepting the doctrine of creation, from which it follows that there really is no such thing as a “pure nature”

²⁹ Ibid., 60-61. Interestingly, this view is reflected in the First Vatican Council, in which “Revelation is presented primarily as the communication of supernatural truth inaccessible to natural reason, and faith as the submissive acceptance of this revealed truth.” (Josef Neuner S.J. and Jacques Dupuis S.J., eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th ed. [Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996], 43.)

³⁰ Marion, OTF, 61; Henri de Lubac S.J., *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1967), 69-72.

that remains within the realm of philosophy alone.

In this regard, therefore, Marion puts forward a relationship between the two disciplines that is characterized by what he calls a “shared indeterminacy,” and this is so because, as they go beyond the late medieval and even modern conception of identifying themselves as “sciences,” these two disciplines do not have the right to distinguish and set themselves apart from each other.³¹ Although he admits that certain ways of doing philosophy and theology can continue this course and distinction, it could happen that they would end up with the same problems that characterized modernity. Instead, he puts the criterion of the distinction on the objects of these sciences themselves, namely the phenomena that *give* themselves and determine the way that they are received, known, and interpreted. He then traces all of these given phenomena to a primary instance of *givenness* from which everything can be traced, namely the event of Revelation in and from which everything can be understood and interpreted within a certain perspective. This appears to be a valid claim for both disciplines, as theology recognizes this as an originary position, even before any form of comprehension in the light of faith, and as philosophy, moving beyond “the end of metaphysics,” can recognize this as a legitimate object of experience that can be meaningfully interpreted even without judging on its truth and falsity, bracketing them in the course of the phenomenological investigation of what gives.³²

And for Marion, in the event of Revelation can one find the criterion for distinguishing these disciplines. As such, he says that Divine Revelation itself “introduces a division, establishing a critical criterion for distinguishing among the thoughts and conceptions of men which come from God.”³³ But does this not presuppose, for both disciplines, more so on the side of philosophy, the fact of Revelation? Marion answers that in fact, this event leaves itself for the believer or non-believer, the philosopher or theologian, to decide upon whether to accept or reject it not as a fact, but as a *given* phenomenon, i.e., a phenomenon that gives itself. He explains this further through the use of a maxim that has long since been present in Christian thought and present in St. Augustine and Blaise Pascal,

³¹ OTF, 65.

³² Ibid., 65-67.

³³ Ibid., 68.

namely the possibility of accessing truth and meaning primarily through *love*, as an epistemological condition that is demanded by what Reveals itself.³⁴

Judging from Marion's own view of Revelation, this is something that is acceptable and sensible for these two disciplines. On one hand, philosophy originally identifies itself as the *love of wisdom*, and thus philosophy is called again to become such, that is, to faithfully receive the phenomena that give themselves without limiting them within certain categories of reason akin to modern philosophy. It is thus called to accept the *given* from within its limits, that is, without admitting the data of Revelation (as immediately *given*) from the perspective of faith, remaining on the level of the *as if*.³⁵ On the other hand, theology is called all the more to be faithful to this epistemological position, primarily because, in and through faith, it comes to understand the very event of Revelation primarily as a Revelation of Love. And since only love can understand Love, then the theologian is compelled - or better yet, drawn - towards taking the position of love to be able to receive Love Itself/Himself.³⁶

But in saying this, can one speak of a distinction? Marion says that despite this shared indeterminacy, one can still distinguish them from the manner of receiving the *given*, determined by the "unbridgeable gap between the modes of givenness (revealed from elsewhere for one, experienced by oneself for another) and the gap between their modes of experience (immediate or mediated by faith and the love of truth)." It suffices to say, therefore, that a distinction based on sources, or more precisely, the manner of reception and comprehension, remains as one thinks it to be; however, this does not place any limits neither to philosophy to investigate the meaning of claims made in faith within its own rationality, insofar as it comprehends the given, nor to theology to investigate what philosophy receives in its own distinct manner through reason. In this way, a greater and richer relationship develops between the two, as one acts as a "bad conscience" to the other, in which one is reminded of the other not merely by the limits imposed on them by their respective modes of reception, but also and more importantly the limitless expanse that this manner of reception can

³⁴ Ibid., 69-71.

³⁵ Ibid., 73.

³⁶ See Jean-Luc Marion, "Evidence and Bedazzlement," in *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 67.

reach.³⁷ But unlike Caputo, Marion admits a minor aspect in which one is unequal to the other, saying that theology is broader than philosophy because it is immediately oriented toward reception of the given in a distinct manner.³⁸

Thus, through Marion's explanation within his own phenomenological worldview, one can see that at present, philosophy and theology are closer to each other than ever, perhaps as close as they were during the early stages of conception and development of these two academic disciplines. Within this characterization, one might as well ask by virtue of its relevance in doing philosophy and theology today, where does one place St. Thomas in this distinction?

Placing Aquinas in the Field Determined by the Given

Considering this present identification, where does one see St. Thomas, considering his insight on philosophy and theology that were not only revolutionary but, in a more fundamental manner, *originary*? This is an obvious answer to raise considering Marion's framework, since one still has to wait for the 20th century for a phenomenological framework to emerge; therefore, it might be an anachronistic way of saying that St. Thomas has the right to belong or not belong to this intellectual field. However, in the midst of this non-comparison, a possibility remains to be considered: how does one characterize St. Thomas's way of thinking when placed in the current situation, given that what he speaks of remain to be relevant, not to mention that much of philosophy and theology largely relies on this insight?

A provisional answer would be to say that despite the limitation of language and context on St. Thomas's part, it is possible for him to enter into this field (thus to ask, in a proper sense, whether he is a philosopher or theologian in the contemporary sense of the word, this being the debate among Thomists). However, a careful perusal of what Marion speaks of and how St. Thomas thinks leads us to a conclusion, namely that Aquinas' own thought penetrates and even makes possible this way of thinking about the distinction between philosophy and theology. This can be seen not only in Marion's explicit reference to St. Thomas and to his commentators, but also in

³⁷ OTF, 73-75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

the way Marion articulates the distinction between philosophy and theology, standing close to St. Thomas in this regard.³⁹ And in him, what emerges is a dynamic relationship between the rationality of the world and the incomprehensible data of Revelation, and thus between reason and faith. More precisely, one can see Aquinas' effort as a placing of two elements that co-exist and in tension with the other. Thus, paradoxically, reason and Revelation are in fact intimate and at the same time distant with each other.

On one hand, there is recognition of the intelligibility of Divine Revelation, insofar as sacred doctrine is concerned. Not only does St. Thomas credit sacred doctrine to be a legitimate science, that is, as a body of knowledge grounded in clear and self-evident propositions, but this time, unlike other sciences, coming from what is received by faith.⁴⁰ But still, for it to merit the status of a science means that it is a body of knowledge, even the *highest* one due to its primary source (ST I.Q1.A5), and thus to a certain extent can be rendered intelligible.

With this, two things can be noted. First, the use of reason for St. Thomas is not just based on the fact that he intends to show that the data of Divine Revelation, directly known and received through historical events, are universally true and valid by using the categories and framework of a universal and valid philosophical sciences. In other words, granted in faith that Divine Revelation concerns the Truth, then it must be intelligible from the perspective of a science that concerns itself with the truth. And in this case, it is philosophy with its insight on being itself insofar as it is being (*ens in quantum ens*).⁴¹ However, more than that, St. Thomas sees also that this articulation through philosophy is actually an attempt to render intelligible the incomprehensible Mystery that is believed. Therefore, the use of reason in relation to Divine Revelation is an attempt to render meaningful that which is received in faith, ultimately showing that even from the point of view of believing

³⁹ As mentioned above, Marion credits the identity of theology at present to a careful reading of Aquinas, specifically that of ST I.Q1.A1 (Marion, 67.).

⁴⁰ Aquinas speaks of sacred doctrine as a *subalternated* science, not under the self-evident knowledge that reason receives and produces but under the knowledge of things themselves (*principia per se nota*) that only God and the saints have (see 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 Wawrykow [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005], 9.). This is fairly evident in ST I.Q1.A2.

⁴¹ te Velde, 72; Elders, 535.

reason, what one believes in makes sense.⁴² As he points out,

[t]his science [sacred doctrine] can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences; but immediately from God, by revelation (ST I.Q1.A5; brackets mine).

And since the purpose of Divine Revelation is for the human being to not only act upon, but also see clearly the intended final end ordained for him by God (ST I.Q1.A5), then it is necessary that, at least provisionally, the believing human being sees the clarity of what he receives in faith.⁴³ Simply put, St. Thomas strongly affirms that the data of Divine Revelation, although received only in faith, is not a crude, esoteric, and inaccessible body of knowledge but one that is actually universally valid, reasonable, and arguable. And thus, the Christian believer does not find it difficult to discuss and argue upon these things with a non-believer.

Second, one can notice here that St. Thomas recognizes in a quite implicit way that Divine Revelation radically gives itself to the human being who has the capacity to receive it. So great is this giving, in fact, that it is in a way accessible to that which can run the risk of not properly receiving it and thus misunderstanding it: the rational faculty which searches for truth and certitude, yet bearing the possibility to fall into error.⁴⁴ He points out that sacred doctrine, as the highest science, does not prove the principles of other sciences but only judges them, based on the truth that it receives (ST I.Q1.A7). Thus, it has the power to say, insofar as the object of sacred doctrine is concerned, that other sciences are not in line with the truth of sacred doctrine and thus must be judged as false. One can see here most evidently the authoritative character of sacred doctrine as the highest science; however, one can see that St. Thomas implicitly opens us to the possibility that a misinterpretation on the part of the lower sciences can arise, e.g. the existence of God and His essence that can be named and determined by one engaged in the philosophical sciences, hinting at the radical accessibility of the

⁴² te Velde, 69.

⁴³ Marshall, 2.

⁴⁴ The radical givenness of Divine Revelation is emphasized by Marion, in saying that Revelation in fact introduces concepts that the natural light of reason has not known previously. See Marion, "Christian Philosophy," 74-76.

data of Divine Revelation.⁴⁵ Thus, one can conclude that, despite being received roughly, incompletely, and erratically, what Divine Revelation holds as true can be found by those who search for truth and meaning.⁴⁶

Bringing these together, one can then see in St. Thomas, there already is an implicit understanding of the given character of Revelation by virtue of its intelligibility. This then brings closer to what Marion articulates regarding philosophy and theology, as well as the distinction that exists between the two.

On the other hand, St. Thomas balances this by saying and emphasizing that sacred doctrine, and thus theology, is still rooted in what can only be received by faith and understood only to a certain extent. Thus, the clarity and universal validity that reason provides in service of sacred doctrine are not the end-all and be-all regarding the data of Divine Revelation. Instead, they are projected toward, and only in service of, the higher knowledge, incomprehensible from reason, that only God and the saints have (*scientia beatorum*), and thus one can only take as such in faith.⁴⁷ At great lengths does St. Thomas reinforce the limits of reason and protect the incomprehensible nature of Divine Revelation, thus saying that no elaborate system can capture the Mystery that only God and the saints hold.⁴⁸ In the end, one can only receive and hope to make sense of them in and through faith. And indeed, a distance between merely knowing and believing exists, so radical that St. Thomas even holds that an old woman (*uetula*) of great faith without knowledge of the philosophical sciences can achieve wisdom and thus salvation, unlike the most erudite philosopher who does not have faith.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ This same argument can be concluded in Aquinas' assertion that "[t]here can be no contradiction between true natural knowledge and the doctrine of faith, because both have their origin in God who, as the creator of the world and of man, places the principles of our knowledge in our minds, but has also given us revealed knowledge" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Boetii De Trinitate* Q2.A3, quoted in Elders, 529.). This grounds the assertion that even the fact that God exists, although without knowledge of who or what this God is, can be discovered by reason.

⁴⁶ Marshall, 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁸ One can find this in several passages in the *Summa*. In ST I.Q1.A1, Aquinas already asserts that "once they [things beyond man's knowledge] are revealed by God they must be accepted by faith." He makes mention of the *scientia beatorum* that sacred doctrine can only approximate and hence must be taken in faith (ST I.Q1.A2). This is perhaps seen even more clearly when he discusses how the Sacred Scriptures must be understood and articulated, reminding us of the metaphorical and analogical method in interpreting Scriptures (ST I.Q1.A9), and the multiplicity of the senses of Scriptures (ST I.Q1.A10). Another important thing to stress is that which is found in ST I.Q1.A1, regarding the existence of God which can be known through proofs (which Aquinas shows in ST I.Q1.A3, known as the *quinque viae*), but cannot be known absolutely.

⁴⁹ Marshall, 25-26. In this regard, Marshall makes an explicit reference to the sermons of

One question then arises: does this mean that all philosophical arguments are therefore useless and uncertain, as these do not ultimately lead to divine wisdom that faith, even a simple and little one, can achieve? As established above, in no way does St. Thomas throw away the knowledge that he develops, knowing that its ultimate purpose is for his readers to be able to see clearly the meaningfulness of what one receives in faith, even without taking a believing stance. But then, this must be the very purpose of understanding, that is, to clarify what is held and accepted in belief (*credo ut intellegam*) and to lead the sensible and rational toward belief (*intellego ut credam*). St. Thomas, however, recognizes that the meaningfulness of what can be explained is only a little of the incomprehensible Mystery of Divine Wisdom. And given thus, it is for him a fruitful and meaningful endeavor to understand even just a little bit, if it serves to appreciate the great Mystery in which all of this knowledge is grounded.

But more importantly, from the point of view of belief, a significant usefulness of this articulation and explanation of what is received in faith is that it invites both believers and non-believers to a great leap of faith. If indeed reason “ministers to faith” (ST I.Q1. A5), and that *gratia naturam non tollat sed perficiam*, that grace does not destroy nature but instead perfects it, then reason can only properly lead to the great leap toward faith. In other words, that in finding the truth that one loves, one can only love it to the point of receiving it properly; translated in terms of the relationship between reason and revelation (or philosophy and theology for that matter), the love of Wisdom leads one to take a step further, that is, to receive this Wisdom in the way that it can be fully received.⁵⁰ And only in believing can one be able to embrace the inaccessible light that reason can only glimpse of within its own parameters and limits, eventually granting greater understanding, being able to see and act with clarity and certainty (ST I.Q1.A5).

Looking at this paradoxical relationship between reason and faith, and thus between philosophy and theology, one can see how St. Thomas carefully and intricately woven together the two sources of understanding regarding the human being, his world, and the God that one may or may not believe to exist. In this synthesis, St.

Aquinas on the Apostles' Creed made in 1273, in front of a community gathered for Lenten Vespers.

⁵⁰ OTF, 69-70.

Thomas' genius lies on the very fact that he himself maintains that reason and faith are close and at the same time apart from each other, brought together nevertheless by Divine Revelation which gives itself gratuitously and unselfishly to the human being who opens himself to its reception. While he deeply recognizes the great capacity of reason to render what is experienced intelligible and meaningful, he also reminds his readers that the conclusions of reasons can only be fully understood when placed within the infinitely larger context of the ineffable Mystery of God, accepted only through faith and accessible only to God and the saints. This is so present in St. Thomas that one can see it in two distinct aspects of Thomistic thought which can be considered as "limit concepts," ones that are so full of meaning that they do not completely define the reality that they pertain to; therefore, while they confer some sense of intelligibility, they always lead to an incomprehensible reality. In this regard, these two may be briefly elaborated.

The first is St. Thomas's identification of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, whose essence is Being / existence Itself (ST I.Q3.A4).⁵¹ This is significant because St. Thomas does not in any way identify God as the "highest" being among all other beings, from which everything else—all beings—is grounded and explained.⁵² While it is true that it enables one to understand God within the horizon of the thinkable, that is of being which can be predicated and thought in everything besides God, St. Thomas, to a certain extent, gives God a privileged name that cannot be equated with other beings, but can only be referred to analogically. In a quite radical manner, he is saying that God as *esse*, that is, *esse divinum*, is the very plenitude of being in whom all other beings exist. But as such, nothing can be said, or to be more precise, conceptualized further about God, for to say that he is *ipsum esse subsistens* only affirms that he cannot be known directly, that is, as an existent whose existence is in-formed (ST I.Q3.A7). Regarding this, Marion draws a conclusion in his reading of St. Thomas's *ipsum esse subsistens*, saying that

⁵¹ This identification of God can also be seen in the Chapter IV of Aquinas' earlier work *De Ente et Essentia (On Being and Essence)*. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1949), IV (45-46).

⁵² This is the particular accusation that the philosopher Martin Heidegger directs at Thomistic thought, saying that it is a form of "onto-theological thinking" that disregards the dynamic characteristic of *Sein* / Being. Thus, for Heidegger, Aquinas cannot be called properly as a "philosopher of Being," but one among the many who forgot Being in place of beings (*Seiende*). See Jean-Luc Marion, "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theology," in *The Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 290-91.

[t]he esse that Thomas meditates on may deal not with metaphysics, or ontology, or even the “question of being” but, instead, with the divine names and on the “luminous darkness.”⁵³

Simply put, what Marion affirms about St. Thomas’ identification of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* is his way of taking us to the direction that only faith can pursue, albeit articulated in this sense that can be understood by reason to a certain extent: the incomprehensibility of a God that is both transcendent and immanent. Thus, we are led to the infinite distance that separates God from all other beings in terms of comprehension and understanding, that in speaking of God using a category that is common to us, we are in fact led to how He is radically different from us.

The same can be said, in a more lucid manner, when one sees the relationship between God as Creator with all other beings as His creature. Through a comprehensive synthesis of the Aristotelian understanding of causality and the Neoplatonic doctrine of participation, St. Thomas was able to come up with a theological explanation of the doctrine of creation. He says that God, as *ipsum esse subsistens*, produces beings existing in particular forms that he bears in His Divine Mind (ST I.Q45.A2). And thus, one can speak of God as the efficient cause of everything. These creatures, however, are not separated from their efficient cause because in their own act of being, they participate in Being Himself (ST I.Q44.A1), thus having an analogical relationship between beings and God as Being Himself. And ultimately, they find God as their final cause, as the final end of each being, characterized as sharing in the fullness of Being Himself (ST I.Q44.A4), as intended by God Himself.

At the surface, one can notice that what is peculiar is actually the fact that St. Thomas provides the structure of creation in a full circle, coming from God’s will to create and his desire for creatures to be in union with Him as their final goal. But more than that, what he also affirms is the distinct identity of the Creator, which cannot be reduced as the “first” and “last” cause of Aristotle, but in fact *the* efficient and final cause in and through which everything not only exists but can be thought of. Marion points to this reality as one that affirms the unique and unfathomable character of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, saying that the Creator, as efficient cause, determine the

⁵³ Ibid., 311.

creatures, but the former cannot be determined or concluded from the what the latter, as they remain *infinitely* inadequate compared to the Creator.⁵⁴

Put briefly, the creature, as the effect of an efficient cause which at the same time presents itself as the ultimate final cause, can never be equated to any degree whatsoever. Thus, it places the Creator at an infinite distance and yet in this distance, remains close by virtue of participation of the created *ens* with the *esse divinum* as its Creator. A consequence of this is that when one refers the *esse* of a creature to the Creator, one can only speak of it *analogically* in terms of proportion, suggesting this infinite distance. This rather complex explanation leads us to three simple conclusions, namely that (a) “God explains himself as *esse* only by exercising a causality [both efficient and final] which affects their *esse* as much as their essences,”⁵⁵ (b) God as the efficient and final cause is not defined by being but instead produces being and makes possible the apprehension of it, and (c) as the Creator of being, God exceeds being, and is thus, as Marion says, *beyond* being.⁵⁶ God, then, lies outside the metaphysics of being, and is in fact the very condition of the possibility for speaking of being at all. Thus, the doctrine of creation, speaking of God as a Creator, only refers to God as efficient cause insofar as he is *ipsum esse subsistens*, thus recognizing his infinite distance from all creatures. Creation defines causality, and not the other way around, as most commentators of St. Thomas would think.

Taken together, these two expressions of God’s incomprehensibility in relation to the capacity to know other beings show how St. Thomas brings together faith and reason, the data of philosophical reflection and of Revelation, to a synthesis that renders meaningful what can be known but at the same time respects the inexhaustible mystery of what lies beyond our understanding. And in showing how this is operative in St. Thomas’s own philosophy and theology, one comes to a full circle, but one that provides a greater understanding and insight on what St. Thomas sets to show and do in his thought. The discussion on the emergence of the distinction between philosophy and how it can be understood

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 300; emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; brackets mine.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

at present finds its beginning and end (more of a comprehensive recapitulation) in St. Thomas, and what one sees is the fact that St. Thomas is nothing more but a faithful lover of wisdom and searcher of the Truth that lies as a Mystery before Him. Thus, at present, one can see that indeed, Aquinas lays down the conditions for the possibility of thinking about the intimate relationship between philosophy and theology and how these two disciplines, engaged in comprehending what is handed over to them within their own capabilities and limits, aid each other not merely in understanding but more importantly in gazing at awe and wonder at that which Reveals Itself, which not only grants greater understanding but also allows both these disciplines to identify themselves.

Conclusion: On the Thomistic Spirit in Contemporary Times

This brief treatment of Thomistic philosophy and the history of the conceptual distinction between philosophy and theology reveals that in the end, it is actually St. Thomas Aquinas who remains at the background of this movement. In other words, he cannot be placed within the territories and boundaries set by this distinction because in fact, his own thought is a condition of the possibility—both in the past and at present—of this distinction, and it is actually through his own understanding of the relationship between reason and Revelation, as well as rational argumentation and faith, that we are led to think and constantly rethink about the relationship between these two disciplines alongside other circumstances that affect our way of thinking.

This leads us back to the affirmation of St. John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* of the genius of Aquinas in synthesizing what is believed and what is known. And as such, he deserves to be called both as “a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology.”⁵⁷ In a sense, this can be called as the greatest contribution of Aquinas in the history of both philosophy and theology. Through his synthesis that brings together two separate ends that define the meaning of the human being, a synthesis that paradoxically contains both distance and intimacy insofar as faith and reason are concerned, he was able to expand the horizon of the human intellect and will to frontiers

⁵⁷ Pope John Paul II, “Fides et Ratio,” *The Holy See*, 1998, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html, nos. 42-44.

that go beyond what he can understand and comprehend. But more than that, through his framework, he presents to us a worldview in which both mystery and intelligibility is embraced, with the human being open to be defined and changed by what he understands and experiences. What he accomplishes, I believe, remains to be the task that both philosophers and theologians are called to pursue at present, especially when they are confronted with various ways of seeing and interpreting what we human beings see as true and meaningful.

In this regard and in relation to Aquinas' endeavor to bring together faith and reason in a unique and profound relationship, one can also speak of a certain "Thomistic spirit" that is oriented toward greater understanding and, hence, greater appreciation of the Mystery that beholds and captivates the human being. Umberto Eco notes that the significance of Aquinas, for him, lies in his use of Aristotle to elaborate the data received by both reason and faith, one that Christian thinkers, working solely within the Neo-platonic framework, deem to be unthinkable. In other words, he dared to use a "this-worldly" philosophical system in Aristotle, eventually Christianizing it and using its categories to explain data of experience, certain aspects of Divine Revelation included.⁵⁸ And perhaps this is the call of those who search for wisdom, to continue to dare and push their boundaries toward greater intelligibility and meaning. This might be the best—and most sensible—thing to do especially for Christian philosophers and theologians, as they confront the different ways of thinking that emerge from postmodernity. In fact, a more specific task would be that of *discernment*, namely, to be able to decide upon which ways of thinking can accommodate the rich Mystery of Revelation and use it to explain the rationality of faith, or better yet, invite one toward authentic faith.

Considering these two, Aquinas can be more appropriately called, instead of being a mere philosopher or theologian, as one who searches for, loves, and serves Wisdom, for he is one man who has remained faithful to the Truth, willing to expand his understanding and horizons in view of embracing the great incomprehensible Mystery, given radically to him, that continued to astound him until his very last breath.

⁵⁸ Umberto Eco, "In Praise of Thomas Aquinas," *The Wilson Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1986): 84-85.

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