Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's *Treatise on the One God*

Thomas Aquinas's classic *Treatise on the One God* is one of the greatest works ever written in the history of philosophy and theology. During the first half of the twentieth century, philosophy of religion was widely viewed as dead, not even a domain of serious questions but only of "pseudo-questions." Surprisingly, not only did the supposed corpse rise from the dead, but religion once again became one of the most active fields of philosophical investigation. So the time could not be more fitting for a reinvestigation of *Treatise on the One God*, which opens the massive *Summa Theologiae*. In this unparalleled exploration of the *Treatise*'s penetrating arguments, J. Budziszewski explores and illuminates the text with a luminous line-by-line commentary. Supplemented with thematic discussions, this book discusses not only the *Treatise* itself, but also its immediate relevance to contemporary thought and issues of the modern world. This work fittingly closes the author's series of commentaries on the *Summa Theologiae*.

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To unknown seekers whose inquiry into God
is discouraged
And to unknown friends
with gratitude for their prayers

Analytical Table of Contents

The following Article titles are paraphrased; in the text itself, they are given both in paraphrase and in literal translation.

Commentator's Introduction *page* xvii
What Is God? xvii
Regulating the Firehose xviii
Perplexity xviii
Removing Obstacles xx
The Partnership of Faith and Reason xxii
Pushback xxiii
Esotericism xxv
Aristotle, the "Destroyer," and Reason, the "Whore" xxvi
Things to Learn and Unlearn xxviii
St. Thomas and Modern Science xxx
Why Now? xxxiv
Overview xxxv
Architecture xxxvii
Housekeeping xli
Acknowledgments xliii

Question 1, Article 1: Is it reasonable to think that the reach of our reasoning needs to be extended by divine Revelation? 1
It would hardly be persuasive for St. Thomas to say that we need divine Revelation just because divine Revelation tells us so. He does quote from Holy Scripture to show that it confirms his conclusions, but the argument in this Article is based squarely on reason: We need Revelation because some of the things we need to know cannot be found out by reason alone, and because even many of those things which can be are very difficult for reason to ascertain.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 1

Discussion: Preambles to Faith – and Preambles to Reason? 13

Question 2, Article 3: Does God exist – is He real? 15
When St. Thomas asks whether God exists, this is not like asking whether Zeus, Apollo, or Athena exists. Rather we are asking whether there is a Something or Someone on which all else depends. None of the five arguments St. Thomas presents for the existence of God depend on Scripture. Each is purely philosophical. We are not in the realm of faith, but still in the realm of the reasonable preambles to faith – although faith goes on to purify and fortify reason, and confirms the conclusions that reason has attained.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 15
Discussion: Why is There Something and not Rather Nothing? Hey, Whatever 37
Discussion: Maimonides on the First Cause 39
Discussion: Does Purposeful Order Really Require a Designer? 39

Question 3, Article 7: Is God completely simple, rather than in some way composite? 42
In everyday language, something is called simple if it is easy to understand. Here, though, simplicity is contrasted with being composite – with having distinct aspects or parts. Composite things might be compounds of bodily parts or portions, of matter and form, of nature and "suppositum," of existence and essence, of genus and difference, or of substance and accident. The Tradition claims that God is not composite in any of these ways. Is it correct?
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 42
Discussion: The Same All Through 54
Discussion: Maimonides and the Divine Simplicity 56

Question 4, Article 1: Is God "perfect" or complete? 58
In the received view, God is perfect, meaning that He is complete, lacking in nothing, without undeveloped potentialities; He is always full. Contemporary English tends to use the term "perfect" differently, in the sense of what is entirely good. Though one might anticipate that if God is perfect, then He is entirely good, the question of His goodness per se is not explored until Question 6. Here we are asking only about His fullness or complete actuality.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 58
Discussion: Creation Revisited 66
Discussion: Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire 66

Question 6, Article 2: Is God the summit or apex of good? 68
To say that God is the supreme good – literally, the summit of good – means more than that He is good. It even means more than that He is the best good. The claim is that He is good in a better way than all other goods. He is the uncreated Good from which all finite possibilities of

good flow downward. His goodness and theirs cannot even be measured on the same scale. He is the Uncreated Source of all that is. He is the Original, of which created goods are but copies. Could even that be true?
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 68
Discussion: Highest Good, okay – but why say God is Good in the First Place? 80

Question 49, Article 2: Granted that God is the supreme good, is He also the cause of evil? 81
This is the only Article we take up out of order. Could it be that since the universe contains things like cancer and tapeworms, God is just evil? Or that in some sense God is good, but His idea of good is entirely unintelligible and irrelevant to us? Or that, in His goodness, God doesn't mean to do us evil, but the evils we suffer are beneath His notice? St. Thomas addresses such concerns elsewhere in the Treatise on the One God. The equally dreadful possibility considered and rejected in the present Article is that God is indeed the Creator of good – but also the Creator of evil. Even if we understand the reasoning behind the proposition that God is altogether good, we may yet suffer the nagging doubt that He couldn't be. For where would evil come from, if not from Him? The Universal Doctor presents rational solutions to such doubts.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 81
Discussion: Why Doesn't God's Providence Just Eliminate all Evils From Things? 93
Discussion: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? 95
Discussion: Does God Cause Spiritual Blindness and Hardness of Heart? 97

Question 7, Article 1: Is God infinite? 100
Although at several points we have spoken as though God is infinite, up to now the fact has not actually been proven. His infinity follows closely from other things we have considered. However, to show that this is the case, St. Thomas has to delve into what "infinity" means.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 100
Discussion: Is God Infinite the Same Way Numbers are Infinite? 110

Question 8, Article 1: Is God in all things? 111
The idea that God is in all things has often been taken as implying pantheism – that God is all things. But doesn't the Tradition say that God is in all things? It does. Then isn't pantheism true? And if it isn't true, then is the Tradition mistaken to say that He is in all things? In order to investigate whether He is in all things, St. Thomas must also consider what has traditionally been meant by the assertion.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 111
Discussion: But Doesn't God Use Secondary Causes? 123

Question 9, Article 1: Is God exempt from every sort of change? 126

As St. Thomas is aware, God's changelessness is rather plainly implied by His perfection, since any change would be a decline from that perfection. Nonetheless, the Objectors present various reasons for thinking that God could not be immutable – that He would have to be subject to change – and so these need solutions. In our own day too, many people are inclined to object, thinking that an unchanging God would be "static." Since in all of our finite experience, to be a living person is to be immersed in flux and change, we suppose that an unchanging God would be frozen in time, never doing anything, no more living or personal than a statue. But this is a false picture. We should not say that the eternal God is doing nothing, but that everything He does, He is doing all the time.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 126
Discussion: Immutability and Trustworthiness 136

Question 10, Article 2: Is God eternal? 138
If God is eternal, then he has no beginning and no end, and His action extends to every moment, rather than being limited in time as our action is. St. Thomas unpacks the implications of these ideas. We already know from the previous Article that eternity has to do with changelessness, and we already know from Question 9 that God is changeless – so He must be eternal too, and there is nothing left to do in this Article – right? Not quite. Besides, most of the heavy lifting in this Article is in the Replies to the Objections.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 138
Discussion: Eternity in Their Hearts 150

Question 11, Article 3: Is God a single Being? Is there just one of Him? 155
Many polytheists would be perfectly happy to borrow yet another god from Christianity, but only so long as they could demote Him from the One God to a god among gods: "What have you got against the others?" The naïve assumption is that God belongs to the genus "gods" – that He is just one more of those things (but in Christian belief, the real one). St. Thomas has argued that He is not that sort of thing at all – in fact, He is not a "sort of thing." Moreover He is of such a nature that there could not be more than of Him. But how do we know He is one? Even someone who considers the many gods of polytheism false, foolish, base, demonic, or all too human may ask "But is monotheism true?"

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 155
Discussion: Formal Gods, Informal Gods, and God 169
Discussion: The Trinity, Take Two 170
Discussion: Weak and Beggarly? 174

Question 12, Article 13: Can we gain a loftier knowledge of God by divine grace than by our natural powers of reason? 176
The term "grace" refers to unmerited gifts of God, among which might be gifts of knowledge. Does God offer knowledge over and above what

we could have learned just through the still earlier gift of our inbuilt reasoning powers? At stake is the authenticity of the deeds, and the truth of the teachings, recorded in Holy Scripture. Thomas Aquinas always takes natural reason as far as he can before turning to what God has revealed by grace; he wants us to trust Revelation, but only authentic Revelation. Now, though, he turns the inquiry around. In order to know all that we need to know about God, do we need His grace at all? This inquiry amplifies the one in Question 1, Article 1.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 176
Discussion: If We Can't see God, then how do the Blessed see him? 192

Question 13, Article 12: Granted that we do not perceive the essence of God, still, can we affirm anything positive about Him? 195
Can we form true propositions about God? Some say no – but one would have to know a great deal about God in order to be certain that one could not know anything else about Him. At every stage of his writing, St. Thomas has taught that what we can say about God is limited. In this life we do not see His very essence, and the mere backwash of His glory would overwhelm us. However, whether our little speeches are inadequate is not the question: Rather we should ask whether their inadequacy makes them false. Can we say anything positive about God? Throughout this book St. Thomas has been making affirmative statements about Him. But even if we can, then what kinds can we make, and in what sense should we take them? We might even ask what it is about the reality of God that makes talking about His reality so difficult – and yet so important.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 195
Discussion: Illogical Logics and Scrambled Affirmations 213

Question 14, Article 1: Does God know anything? 218
According to certain views, God has no knowledge. Perhaps He is just a great world process that grinds on without knowing what it is doing. Or perhaps God is the All, which is not intelligent, but contains intelligent parts – that is, us. Or perhaps, although God does not have knowledge from the first, He may acquire knowledge. It is not difficult to refute such opinions. But where does all this leave us? Can He know anything? Does He know anything? What does He know? And how well does He know it?

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 218
Discussion: Don't Tell me "Everything" – What Does God Know? 232

Question 16, Article 5: Is God, in His own being, truth? 237
Doubtless many readers take the saying that God is truth in a merely figurative sense, as a dramatic way to emphasize that He loves truth, reveals truth, and loves those who live according to His truth and are truthful themselves. All of those claims are made in Scripture too. But

could the statement that God simply is truth be meant literally? We should not carelessly dismiss the possibility, for by this point in the Treatise on the One God many other startling things about God have already proven to be the case. St. Thomas investigates whether this is another.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 237
Discussion: Is Truth About Things or About Sentences? 246
Discussion: Does Truth Really Lie in Correspondence? 247
Discussion: The Thought That Stops Thought 249

Question 18, Article 3: Is it fitting to call God alive? 251
Life science students are taught that living things are distinguished from nonliving things by the functions they perform, such as nutrition, excretion, and adaptation to the environment. Such lists of functions are not drawn up with a view to life in general, but only with a view to biological life. It would be foolish to say that God is not alive because He does not excrete. In order to find out whether the Tradition is correct in attributing life to God, we need a better criterion of what it is to be alive, and it must be generally applicable, not crafted just to produce the conclusion that He is. St. Thomas has such a criterion, and puts it to work.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 251
Discussion: In the Hands of the Living God 269

Question 19, Article 3: Does God have to will what He wills – is He compelled by necessity? 273
The hypothesis that God's will is completely free, that He does not have to will what He wills, seems to present difficulties. Would it mean that His will does not have to be good or wise? That would make him an arbitrary tyrant. But the hypothesis that His will is not free, that it is compelled by necessity, that He cannot otherwise than as He does, turns Him into a kind of Fate. Presumably even our prayers to such a God would be pointless, because for Him to respond to a prayer would be to will something different than what He would have willed had the prayer not been offered. St. Thomas distinguishes the question of whether there is anything that God wills by necessity from the question of whether He wills all that He wills by necessity. These questions turn out to have different answers.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 273
Discussion: Does the Necessity of God's Knowledge Make Our Acts Necessary? 289
Discussion: The Range of God's Freedom 291

Question 20, Article 2: Does God love all things? 296
Love is an attitude that exults in the sheer existence of the other and wills the other's good. In the words of the Thomist Josef Pieper, it wants to say

"It is good that you exist; it is good that you are in this world!" Thus it is not primarily a condition of the feelings but an attitude of the will. But does God love the things that He creates? Does He cherish even the least of His creatures, as the Tradition claims? Much earlier we established that He is good. But does He will to impart good? Objections can be offered from many different directions. Of course Scripture asserts God's love for all things, but St. Thomas inquires whether this can be demonstrated by logical considerations alone.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 296
Discussion: Lover, Beloved, and Most Perfectly Liberal Giver 311
Discussion: Does God Even Love US With the Love of Friendship? 313

Question 21, Article 4: Is everything God does characterized by both mercy and justice? 318

Mercy is the will to relieve another's suffering. Justice is the will to give another person what he deserves. Sometimes, giving him what he deserves makes him miserable. Moreover, even apart from punishment, people do suffer. These facts make it difficult to see how mercy and justice can coexist. Yet according to the Tradition, they do. The claim is not merely that God is sometimes just and sometimes merciful – but that He is always both in every act at every time. How could this even be possible?

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 318
Discussion: Can Justice and Mercy be Reconciled in Human Affairs Too? 331

Question 22, Article 2: Does God's providence rule everything, not just things in general but also particular things? 333

The term "providence" refers to God's detailed rule of the universe, to His provision for all things. Why should He pay attention to details? In particular, why should He take notice of all our doings and govern what happens to us? According to a certain common view of God, He doesn't. At most He exercises "general" providence, for example setting up space and time and the sorts of regularities that occupy physicists, but not paying attention to us. Our ability to govern even our own small affairs is limited. How then can a Being in charge of the whole universe take notice when each sparrow falls, and number each hair on our heads? Besides, the great among us do not trouble themselves much with the affairs of their underlings. So wouldn't God be above all that sort of thing?

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 333
Discussion: Like an Archer who Aims at a Target 366
Discussion: Does God Care for Oxen? Revisited 367

Question 25, Article 3: Is God all-powerful, or omnipotent? 371

It may seem that this Article is unnecessary – isn't God's omnipotence already plain from the earlier demonstration of His complete actuality

and His primacy in the order of causes? Yes, and in that sense, the Article proves nothing new. However, our imaginary Objectors think they have compelling reasons to think that God couldn't be omnipotent. If they are right, then despite appearances, the previous arguments must have been flawed somehow, and we need to backtrack and find out how. St. Thomas finds that each Objection misunderstands what it means for God to be omnipotent. So despite the wording of the "whether" in the title of this Article, the real question is not so much whether God is omnipotent, but what it means for Him to be omnipotent.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 371
Discussion: Omnipotence Does not Imply Voluntarism 391

Question 26, Article 3: Is God the beatitude of the beatified, the very blessedness of the blessed ones in heaven? 393

Beatitude is supreme happiness. The query before us is not whether God will give the blessed supreme happiness, but whether He is their supreme happiness. To put it another way, it is not whether He will give them beatitude as something different from Himself, but whether He will give it to them by giving them Himself. The answer, interestingly, depends on the sense in which the question is asked – for there are two ways of taking it, and they must be treated differently. With this Article we tremble at the threshold of the Gospel.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 393
Discussion: Loitering at the Gate 402
Discussion: The Broader Argument 403

Commentator's Conclusion: Preamble to What? 409

We saw at the outset of the book that Thomas Aquinas considers reason a preamble to faith. But to faith in what? Human life is triply haunted, by the specter of absurdity, by the burden of brokenness and guilt, and by the dread of mortality and incompleteness. Can there be meaning, can there be healing and forgiveness, can we be everlastingly fulfilled? According to St. Thomas, the answers to these three questions are provided in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who bore our sins and opened the path to the Father. This scandalizes us because if the Gospel is true, then the facile and comforting proposal of "many roads to heaven" is false. It scandalizes us even more because it asks something of us. And so the Treatise on the One God is not the end of our investigation, but the beginning.

Index of Scriptural References 413
General Index 415

Ante Studium (Before Study)

Ineffable Creator, Who out of the treasures of Your wisdom appointed treble hierarchies of Angels and set them in admirable order high above the heavens; Who disposed the diverse portions of the universe in such elegant array; Who are the true Fountain of Light and Wisdom, and the all-exceeding Source: Be pleased to cast a beam of Your radiance upon the darkness of my mind, and dispel from me the double darkness of sin and ignorance in which I have been born.

You Who make eloquent the tongues of little children, instruct my tongue and pour upon my lips the grace of Your benediction. Grant me penetration to understand, capacity to retain, method and ease in learning, subtlety in interpretation, and copious grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress, and perfect the conclusion of my work, You Who are true God and Man, Who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Thomas Aquinas

I saw within Its depth how It conceives
all things in a single volume bound by Love,
of which the universe is the scattered leaves.
Dante Alighieri, Paradiso (trans. Ciardi)

Commentator's Introduction

> *Because the doctor of Catholic truth ought not only to build up the advanced, but also to instruct beginners – as the Apostle says, "As unto little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat"*[1] *– we propose in this work to set forth whatever belongs to the Christian religion in a way which is suitable to the instruction of beginners. In our view, novices in this doctrine are frequently hindered by the writings of other authors. Partly this happens because of the multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments. Partly it happens because the things they need to know are set forth not according to the intrinsic order of the subject, but according to the needs of the writer's own plan of exposition, or according to the opportunities which offer themselves for discussion. Indeed, they are hindered partly because frequent repetition of the same thing generates loathing and confusion in their minds. And so, to avoid these and similar faults, with confidence in divine help, we will try to pursue what pertains to sacred doctrine as briefly and clearly as the subject permits. – Thomas Aquinas*[2]

WHAT IS GOD?

From childhood, Thomas Aquinas pestered his teachers with the question "What is God?" The doctrine of the One God is His answer to the question.

Yet it is an answer that not even St. Thomas himself considered remotely adequate to the reality, for in the end, he concluded that in this life we cannot grasp what God is in His own essence. Human intellect extracts the forms of things from sense impressions, but God is not something that can be tasted or touched, except metaphorically. In the next life, the blessed will truly see God by the supernatural elevation of their intellects, but we do not so see Him now.

[1] 1 Corinthians 3:1b–2a (DRA).
[2] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Preface, broadly translated.

Yet even in this life, though we cannot say what God *is*, we can say *that* He is, and we can make many other true statements *about* Him. Working these things out is the Angelic Doctor's purpose.

REGULATING THE FIREHOSE

Reading St. Thomas for the first time – and the second, and the third – is a bit like drinking from a firehose. This *Commentary* is something like the regulator in a compressed water delivery system, adjusting the pressure of the outflow so that we can take it in. Although the book is all in one style, I've written it for more than one audience and purpose. This does not mean that each audience has the same priority. My first aim is to make Thomas Aquinas's reasoning about the nature and existence of God more accessible to those who are new to it. But although I avoid the narrowest technical questions, I also want to make it more thoroughly understood by those who have encountered it before. I have in mind not just scholars – scholars of all fields, not just philosophers and theologians, and of all persuasions, not just Thomists – but also students and general readers.

Naturally I cannot please everyone, and I hope that my failings will be regarded with charity. From long experience, I know that trying to write accessibly is itself sometimes viewed as a fault, and I disagree. St. Thomas himself considers it his duty and vocation to try to be as clear as possible. I strive for precision but avoid stilted and cumbersome formality. I try to convert what is idiomatic in Latin into what is idiomatic in English, and do not view an occasional contraction as slumming.

PERPLEXITY

A certain portion of my intended audience (not all of it) is those whom the great Jewish scholar Maimonides called "perplexed." At least I hope some perplexed souls will read it, and I will speak of them first, for this book aims to fill a gap: Better yet, a chasm. Allow me to use my own students to illustrate. They know, of course, that there is a lot they don't know about history, mathematics, and the sciences. That is not the sort of chasm I mean, because they know it is there, and they know they can fill it. Typically, however, they are astonished to find that rational arguments can be given *at all* concerning God's existence and attributes. No one has told them that this is possible. In fact, they often tell me that they have been told that it is *impossible*, for in some areas our intellectual culture transmits ignorance more effectively than knowledge. Some of them resist the news that one can reason about these things. Then again, some welcome it like a freshet of water in a parched land.

I am not speaking only of folk with no exposure to faith. Much the same chasm of understanding is found among those who have gone to church all their

lives and consider themselves Christians. My church-nurtured students are only slightly less likely than their secularist counterparts to buy into today's relativistic notion that "my reality" may be different from "your reality" – an absurdity if ever there was one, because we are all in the same world together. How paradoxical that an intellectual culture that teaches "Reason alone! Have nothing to do with faith!" allows reason a narrower and narrower circle of inquiry, and finally doubts its own foundations. So thin are our ideas about what the mind can reason about that not only questions about God, but also questions about right, wrong, happiness, meaning, purpose, and the good life are commonly treated as off limits for rational inquiry. Paradoxically, this tendency persists even though in recent decades, both ethical philosophy and philosophy of religion have enjoyed strong revivals among the specialists.

Sometimes we hear that people become relativists about God just because they are exposed to so many theories about Him. This explanation seems implausible, for in that case, why wouldn't people who are exposed to multiple theories of subatomic structure become subatomic relativists? People often say, "God is real for you, but not for me," but I have never heard anyone suggest, "Neutrinos are real for you, but not for me."

What then are the real reasons? Perhaps one is that although people today are certainly exposed to many *views* about God, they are exposed to very few reasoned arguments about Him. Another possible reason is that whereas in fields such as physics, phenomena are taught first and competing explanations are taught afterward, in matters concerning God, this order of presentation is often reversed. One *begins* with the competing views, long before he is presented with any means of deciding among them.

A third possible reason is the fallacious notion of religious neutrality, which needs more explanation because it is more subtle and insidious. People who say "I have no opinion," "I am suspending judgment," or "I am keeping my mind open" may think they are being reasonable and tolerant, but the point of suspending judgment is not avoiding judgments altogether, but gathering what we need to make better ones. As G. K. Chesterton remarked, "The object of opening the mind as of opening the mouth is to shut it again on something solid."[3] Therefore we must never *permanently* suspend judgment, and in fact, there is no such thing as having no opinion. The person who supposes that he is floating in a permanent state of suspended judgment is always attached to some judgment unawares. Usually his tacit judgment is that *it doesn't matter* whether there is a God, and he chooses to live as though there isn't one.

In fact, he is not even managing that. If by a god, small g, we mean that which is most important in all reality, that which deserves our unconditional commitment, then everyone favors some candidate for that honor, even if

[3] G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*. In *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, Volume 16 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 212.

a false one. The man who is living as though there is no God is really living as though something other than God were god, which would be fine if he had hit on the right one, but he has probably not considered the question. Sex, wealth, love, knowledge, power, reputation – a myriad of gods compete.[4] Everything depends on getting it right.

The pedagogy of Thomas Aquinas differs in all three respects. In the first place, he does not merely discuss views of God, but presents reasoned arguments about Him. In the second place, although he always gives the Objectors the first word, the Tradition is always in the background; it is that massive faith and body of thought against which their Objections are presented. In the third place, he never imagines that neutrality is possible. Refusing to decide is a decision. Not choosing is not one of the options.

REMOVING OBSTACLES

One of the goals in this book is to humanize the teachings of Thomas Aquinas – more precisely, to make their humanity more obvious. To many people, including not only students and general readers but a great many scholars, his arguments seem to concern dry, dusty abstractions of no human interest, and this is not at all the case. For people ask such agonized questions about God! How do we know that He is good? Maybe He is evil. How do we know that we should worship the God of whom St. Thomas speaks, rather than, say, Zeus? Maybe all gods are made up. Even if God is good, why should we imagine that He takes any interest in us? Surely we are making too much of ourselves to hope for that.

St. Thomas takes all these questions seriously. But he does more. By vocation, he was a Dominican, a member of what is called the Order of Preachers. Although the Dominicans are known for their scholarship, a preacher is always more than a scholar, and even more than a teacher. As St. Paul urged, "admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."[5] We may lose sight of the human interest of St. Thomas's questions, but St. Thomas never does. His aim is always that man may come to enter into fellowship with the God who would otherwise be unknown to him. This was the desire of St. Paul when he preached in the city of the philosophers:

> So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, *To an Unknown God*. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."[6]

[4] I have addressed St. Thomas's views about such candidates in *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[5] 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (RSV-CE). [6] Acts 17:22–23 (RSV-CE).

But the notion of dry, dusty irrelevance is not the only obstacle I hope to remove. To those unfamiliar with St. Thomas's vocabulary, his arguments may seem like word salad; well, we can learn the vocabulary. To those unfamiliar with the *genre* of the scholastic disputation, his arguments may seem stilted; well, we can learn how the *genre* works. Even with these obstacles removed, his arguments are difficult; well, we can paraphrase and explain them.

But must they be so *complicated*? Even the doctrine of Divine Simplicity is complicated! This obstacle is greater than the other two, because we want things to be easy, and St. Thomas, it seems, won't let them be. Our quarrel with complications comes from being in a hurry. Hurrying has a history of its own, for the popularity of "made simple" books is not just a feature of the present generation. Alexis de Tocqueville thought that it was a persistent feature of any country which devalues traditional authorities. In an aristocratic order of society, one might model his thinking, for better or worse, on the opinions of people who are esteemed to know something. But in a democratic order of society, this option seems to disappear – and yet there are far too many matters to know for everyone to think them all through for himself! One result is that people seek shortcuts. But another is that they model their thinking, not on the traditional authorities, but on the transient opinions of the crowd instead. Paradoxically, to people who think "everyone is just like me," the dictate of the crowd doesn't seem like an authority.[7]

Perhaps this is why the prevailing intellectual fashions all present themselves as very simple. Materialism, for example, says matter is all there is. Relativism says right and wrong are different everywhere. Bible-alone fundamentalism says the plain sense of Scripture is the sole authority on every question. What could be easier? Since *unnecessary* complexity is bad, the problem with these simple ideas isn't that they are simple, but that reality is more complex than they are. Yes, there may be such a thing as matter, but the meaning of a book about matter is not matter. Yes, how to express gratitude for kindness may vary from place to place, but gratitude itself is right everywhere. Yes, the Bible may be true and authoritative, but it isn't self-interpreting, it doesn't address every subject, and besides, another authority besides the Bible is needed to know what belongs to the Bible and what doesn't.

So yes, Thomas Aquinas's thought is complicated. So is trigonometry. So is chemistry. The explanation must be as subtle as the reality we are trying to explain.

[7] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume 2 (1840), Book 2, "Influence of Democracy on Progress of Opinion," especially Chapters 1, "Philosophical Method among the Americans," 2, "Of the Principal Source of Belief among Democratic Nations," and 3, "Why the Americans Display More Readiness and More Taste for General Ideas than Their Forefathers, the English."

THE PARTNERSHIP OF FAITH AND REASON

Thomas Aquinas considers sound reasoning a preparation for faith, a "preamble" to it. For if it could be proven that there couldn't be a God, or that if there is, it would be impossible for Him to disclose Himself to us, then why would anyone be interested in what something passing itself off as Divine Revelation has to say about Him? On the other hand, if sheer philosophical reasoning can show that He is real and active, or even that this is likely to be the case, then when Revelation does come in, it extends what reason has to work with.

Revelation is *reasonable* to accept, because it can be shown to be possible, necessary, likely, authentic, and even confirmed by experience, although this confirmation is not like the proofs of geometry; it is more like the knowledge that lovers have of each other, because they have become second nature to each other.[8] But consider: We would be unable to say that Revelation *is* possible unless we trusted that God exists and has the power to disclose Himself. So for those who think philosophically – not necessarily for everyone – the demonstration that He exists and has the power to disclose Himself comes first. *That* demonstration really is something like the proofs of geometry.

In saying all this, I don't mean that St. Thomas's demonstrations can't be questioned. For that matter, geometry can be questioned! But it isn't *reasonable* to accept only what cannot be questioned, for there is no such thing. Rather we should accept what we have good reason to believe.

Reasoning illuminates some things Divine Revelation leaves obscure, such as what it could possibly mean for God to be eternal. On the other hand, Divine Revelation illuminates many things which reasoning alone leaves obscure, such as how we can be healed of our alienation from God. In a general audience on Thomas Aquinas, Benedict XVI explained more precisely as follows:

> Faith, in fact, protects reason from every temptation to mistrust its own capacities, it stimulates it to open to ever more vast horizons, it keeps alive in it the search for foundations and, when reason itself applies itself to the supernatural sphere of the relationship between God and man, it enriches its work. According to St. Thomas, for example, human reason can without a doubt attain to the affirmation of the existence of one God, but only faith, which receives divine Revelation, is able to attain to the mystery of the Love of God, One and Triune.
>
> On the other hand, it is not only faith that helps reason. Reason also, with its means, can do something important for faith, rendering it a threefold service that St. Thomas summarizes in the preface of his commentary to Boethius' *De Trinitate*: "To demonstrate the foundations of the faith; to explain through similarities the truth of the faith; to refute the objections that are raised against the faith" (Question 2, Article 2). The whole history of theology is, fundamentally, the exercise of this effort from the intelligence, which

[8] See my *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Divine Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. xxvi.

shows the intelligibility of faith, its internal articulation and harmony, its reasonableness and its capacity to promote the good of man.[9]

In the lovely image of John Paul II, faith and reason are the two wings of the human spirit. Both are needed to fly.[10]

PUSHBACK

Needless to say, not everyone takes this view. Many view faith and reason as enemies. Consequently, when St. Thomas uses philosophical reason, one sort of critic accuses him of "baptizing the philosophers," but when he quotes Scripture, another sort accuses him of "blind dependence on authority." St. Thomas does consider the authority of Revelation greater than that of any purely human reasoning: "[A]lthough the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest."[11] Interestingly, though, the *Treatise on the One God* rarely grounds any claim on the Bible alone. Whatever reason can establish, it uses reason to establish, turning to Scripture after pure reasoning has gone as far as it can go. Even in Question 12, Article 13, which draws from Revelation to explain how the mind can be uplifted by grace, St. Thomas is depending on his previous demonstration in Question 1, Article 1, that it is *reasonable to think that our minds need* such uplifting. Many of the biblical quotations St. Thomas offers merely confirm or deepen points already established by argument. Sometimes they explain how the Objectors – who often do rest their case on Scripture – are misreading it.

One would think that ratiophobes, who are irrationally hostile to reason, and fidephobes, who are irrationally hostile to faith, would be entirely different groups with no overlap whatsoever. Curiously, in our own time ratiophobia seems strongest among the fidephobes – and suspicion of reason among those who are suspicious of faith. Perhaps this is because those who reject all faith are no longer in a position to express faith in reasoning itself. G. K. Chesterton anticipated this development:

> The great march of mental destruction will go on. Everything will be denied. Everything will become a creed. It is a reasonable position to deny the stones in the street; it will be a religious dogma to assert them. It is a rational thesis that we are all in a dream; it will be a mystical sanity to say that we are all awake. Fires will be kindled to testify that two and

[9] Pope Benedict XVI, "On Aquinas, Philosophy and Theology." General Audience, June 16, 2000. Translation by Zenit News Service, available at www.zenit.org/article-29626?l=english.

[10] "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves." John Paul II, encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998), preface.

[11] I, Art. 8, ad 2.

two make four. Swords will be drawn to prove that leaves are green in summer. We shall be left defending, not only the incredible virtues and sanities of mental life, but something more incredible still, this huge impossible universe which stares us in the face. We shall fight for visible prodigies as if they were invisible. We shall look on the impossible grass and the skies with a strange courage. We shall be of those who have seen and yet have believed.[12]

But there are other difficulties. Sometimes, after St. Thomas has demonstrated some attribute of God – for example that He is not composed of parts, or that He is pure actuality without potentiality – we may recoil, not because we don't understand the demonstration, but because our minds can't encompass such a Being. "I just can't conceive Him."

Well, no, nobody can. In this life, being able to conceive Him is an unreasonable expectation. Our finite minds can draw true inferences about Him and conceive *that* He is, but they cannot conceive *what* He is in His own Being. (And by the way, St. Thomas establishes this point by reasoning too.)

Should this inability trouble us? In one sense, no. There are a lot of things we can't conceive, even in this finite created world. For instance, I accept the curvature of space, but even though I grasp the mathematics of multidimensional geometry, I can't picture more dimensions than the ordinary three. It isn't because I can see such things as the curvature of space that I accept them, but because they follow from and make sense of other things I know. If it is like this even with things less ultimate than God, then why not with God? We want Him to be simple in the sense of being easy – but although He is simple, He is not simple in *that* sense!

This is why we have to make inferences about Him, rather than knowing Him just by *looking*.

Contemplation is good, yet in this life even contemplation falls short of its target. To be sure, a "general and confused" knowledge of God's existence is implanted in us by nature. For we naturally desire happiness – moreover, since this desire is natural, happiness must be a real existent thing,[13] and whether or not we know it, He is that happiness. But to have a general and confused knowledge of God is not the same as to see Him in His Being. In that sense of knowledge, "This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching."[14]

But in another sense, we should be troubled that we cannot yet see God. We don't want just demonstrations, we want *vision*. So does St. Thomas himself.

[12] G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, Chapter 20 (public domain). The final sentence alludes to Jesus's ironic remark upon appearing to the disciple Thomas, who had said he would not believe in Christ's resurrection unless he saw Him for himself, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." John 20:29 (RVS-CE).

[13] "It is impossible for a natural desire to be void of object, for nature does nothing in vain." *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.55.13. Later on we return to the question of whether nature does nothing in vain.

[14] Q. 2, Art. 1, ad 1.

This hope is poured out in a hymn he composed for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, a lyric which he also seems to have used as a private prayer:

> O Christ, Whom now beneath a veil we see, may what we thirst for soon our portion be,
> To gaze on Thee unveiled, and see Thy face, the vision of Thy glory and Thy grace.[15]

St. Thomas holds that in heaven, all veils between us and God, all need for inferences, even faith itself, will drop away, for at last the redeemed will see God face to face, knowing Him as they are known.

In the meantime, however far short of seeing God's face they may be, St. Thomas's inferences and demonstrations may preserve us from a multitude of deadly errors. For otherwise we might deny God's own reality; we might worship what is not God as though it were; and even if we have the additional help of Divine Revelation, we might mistakenly think that the things that Revelation teaches must be *contrary* to reason – a fairy tale – just because they are too good, too *awefull*, to be true.

ESOTERICISM

I mentioned that some consider it unnecessary, or even a bit vulgar, to try to be clear and accessible. Among those who take this view, a certain snobbishness comes into play, of course. But sometimes even a certain deliberate esotericism comes into play, which may in the end be very much the same thing. The proponents of a certain approach to the interpretation of texts, widespread among the disciples of the late Leo Strauss, are convinced that the greatest thinkers always drop hints of secret meanings, like Hansel and Gretel dropping breadcrumbs in the forest, concealing them in otherwise baffling contradictions and inconsistencies which only insiders and sophisticates will be able to decode. I do not often come across this attitude among persons whose first training is in general philosophy. Since I do frequently meet it among those whose first training is in political philosophy, which was Strauss's intellectual home and my own first training, let me say a word about it.

Although the esoteric approach may suit some works of some writers, it certainly does not suit Thomas Aquinas. If he had been a Gnostic, a Freemason, an adherent of one of the ancient Greek and Roman mystery cults, or even a Platonist, perhaps he would have been deliberately esoteric too. However, the whole notion of a secret doctrine available only to adepts and initiates is contrary to the tenor of his faith. Although Jesus concludes some of His parables with the remark "He who has ears, let him hear,"[16] even in this case the purpose is not to hide the truth but to warn that

[15] Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro Te Devote*, trans. James Russell Woodford (public domain), final stanza.
[16] See for example Matthew 13:9 and 43 (RSV-CE).

those who deaden themselves to divine truth will not fathom it. Some things may be hard to understand – St. Peter makes this remark about the letters of St. Paul[17] – but God is unwilling that any should perish.[18] Not even the "mysteries of salvation" are mysteries in the sense of secrecy, but rather in the sense that if God had not disclosed them, they would not have been known.

St. Thomas is never deliberately baffling, and his approach to seeming inconsistencies in his sources is not to treat them as clues to secret meanings, but to find out whether they can be harmonized or resolved. In fact, he considers it an idle distraction to worry too much about whether some writers may have concealed their true meanings. Here is what he says about that sort of thing in his own commentary on Aristotle's treatise *On the Heavens*:

> Now, some claim that these poets and philosophers, and especially Plato, did not understand these matters in the way their words sound on the surface, but wished to conceal their wisdom under certain fables and enigmatic statements. Moreover, they claim that Aristotle's custom in many cases was not to object against their understanding, which was sound, but against their words, lest anyone should fall into error on account of their way of speaking. So says Simplicius in his Commentary. But Alexander held that Plato and the other early philosophers understood the matter just as the words sound literally, and that Aristotle undertook to argue not only against their words but against their understanding as well. *Whichever of these may be the case, it is of little concern to us, because the study of philosophy aims not at knowing what men think, but at what is the truth of things.*[19]

So, for example, when St. Thomas calls philosophy a "discipline" in some places but a "science" in others, I do not think we should leap to the conclusion that the terminological difference is a subtly buried clue for adepts. After all, philosophy is a science *and* a discipline. And when his paraphrase of Isaiah changes "waiting" for God to "loving" Him, I do not accuse him of concealing a disagreement with Isaiah. After all, those who wait expectantly for God wait for Him *because* they love Him. My concern with St. Thomas's language is simply to unfold it, explain it, and exhibit some of its implications.

ARISTOTLE, THE "DESTROYER," AND REASON, THE "WHORE"

I mentioned that certain critics accuse St. Thomas of baptizing the philosophers. The strongest objections are mounted to his use of Aristotle, and the most

[17] "There are some things in [Paul's letters] hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction." 2 Peter 3:16b (RSV-CE).

[18] "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." 2 Peter 3:9 (RSV-CE).

[19] Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition of Aristotle's Treatise on the Heavens*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher and Pierre H. Conway (Columbus, OH: College of St. Mary of the Springs, 1964), available at https://isidore.co/aquinas/DeCoelo.htm. In the final sentence, to which emphasis is added, where Larcher and Conway have "feel," I have substituted "think." The Latin term *senserint* can bear either meaning.

famous accuser is the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther. Luther held that the doctrine of justification – how we can become just and acceptable in the sight of God – is the pivot of the entire Christian faith. This being the case, one would expect that Luther would say a great deal in condemnation of St. Thomas's views on justification. Surprisingly, he doesn't; his wrath is stirred more by St. Thomas's use of Aristotle.[20] "The whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light," he thunders.[21] "Thomas wrote a great deal of heresy, and is responsible for the reign of Aristotle, the destroyer of godly doctrine," he proclaims.[22] In another place he writes, "This is the procedure of Thomas. First he takes statements from Paul, Peter, John, Isaiah, etc. Afterwards he concludes that Aristotle says so and so and he interprets Scripture according to Aristotle."[23]

In fact, Luther often issues anathemas not only against Aristotle but against reason *as such*, perhaps viewing him as its representative and symbol. His intention may have been to uphold the use of human reason in service to God, while condemning its employment in proud defiance of Him. However, he is notoriously careless about the distinction. Consider his *Disputation Concerning Man*. On the one hand he writes "it is certainly true that reason is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of his life, the best and something divine . . . . Nor did God after the fall of Adam take away this majesty of reason, but rather confirmed it."[24] Yet just a little later he seems to take this praise back, condemning "those who say that the light of God's countenance is in man, as an imprint on us . . . in like manner, that it rests with man to choose good and evil, or life and death."[25] Since those whom he is criticizing take these two propositions straight from the Latin translation of the Bible, his condemnation is baffling. For the psalmist sings, "The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us," and Moses, exhorting the Hebrew people to follow the Commandments, says, "Consider that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand death and evil."[26]

Is it really true that Thomas Aquinas follows Aristotle slavishly? Actually, in his own works he corrects Aristotle whenever Aristotle's arguments are

[20] "As is often noted, Luther's criticism of Aquinas on justification is relatively infrequent, and it is more often other Aristotelian aspects of his thought that are singled out." Robert Stern, "Martin Luther," endnote 22, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 ed.), available at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/luther.

[21] Martin Luther, *Disputation against Scholastic Theology*, Thesis 50 (1517), in *Luther's Works*, American edition, 55 vols. (St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1958–86), Vol. 31, p. 12.

[22] Luther, *Against Latomus* (1521), ibid., Vol. 32, p. 258.

[23] Luther, *An Opinion about Thomas Aquinas* (1532), ibid., Vol. 54, p. 39.

[24] Martin Luther, *Disputation Concerning Man* (1536), Theses 4, 9, ibid., Vol. 34, p. 137.

[25] Ibid., Theses 29–30.

[26] Respectively, Psalm 4:7 (DRA), corresponding to verse 6 in contemporary translations, and Deuteronomy 30:15 (DRA).