Grace Presupposes Nature: The Structure of the *Summa* and an Illustration by the Virtue of Patience in Light of Christ

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Abstract

The first part of this essay argues that the very structure and ordering of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* manifests a departure from the typical theological position of his time regarding natural acquired virtues. Resting on a conviction that grace *presupposes* nature, Aquinas uniquely holds that natural virtues perfective of human nature can be acquired prior to grace, which can be elevated and incorporated by grace into the properly Christian life. The second part of this essay offers a case study of the virtue of patience that illustrates the argument of the first part of the paper.

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In the early thirteenth century, theology was dominated by Lombardian-style theology, which was largely a systematization of Augustine's theology. Due to these strong currents, theologians assumed and took for granted the Augustinian-Lombardian position that after the fall, we need Christ in order to grow in virtue. Aquinas breaks from this long-standing and heavily guarded traditional assumption and changes the very course of theological thinking about the virtues. Aquinas writes his own *Summa Theologiae*, surprisingly placing his treatise on the virtues between the fall and the Incarnation, implying that we can acquire virtues prior to the healing grace of Christ. Indeed, for Aquinas the moral virtues are acquirable, albeit imperfectly, before Christ. They are in turn taken up and perfected by grace, giving the virtues new operations and a new horizon — God Himself. The thesis is this: Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* is rightly ordered because human nature does have its own intrinsic perfectibility and virtues prior to grace, yet Christ's grace also elevates us to embrace a new supernatural end, which also comes with new virtues. The essay will proceed in two parts: (1) we will consider the setting of the *Summa*, including a consideration of how it departs from the typical style of the time, then (2) we will consider one

example that shows the veracity of Aquinas' suggestion that there are both acquired and infused virtues, vis-à-vis Augustine. The example case will be the acquired moral virtue of fortitude, and the infused virtue of patience which elevates and perfects fortitude to aim for man's supernatural end. Finally, true to the structure of the *Summa*, we will conclude with Christ who is best understood after we understand human nature as such, because precisely as fully man (and fully God) is He our ontological and moral exemplar who shows us how a fully human nature is fully integrated into the life of grace.

1. The Setting of the *Summa*: Contextualizing Aquinas' Work

Jaroslav Pelikan is both intensive and extensive in his historical theology series *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. In the third volume, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, he traces the historical and theological influences that led up to the growth and contributions of medieval scholastic theology. Of course, among these influences Augustine was unparalleled. Augustine was so dominant and authoritative that his positions were generally taken for unquestionable Church teaching.¹ Augustine's positions largely guided theology for nearly a millennium. Before considering the content of Augustine's thought as it relates to Aquinas' work, we will first consider other influential historical players closer in time to Aquinas — the early scholastics, who were largely influenced by Augustinian theology.

It is essential to consider Peter Lombard (1096-1160) for two primary reasons: (1) he follows Augustine closely, (2) and his influence on the tradition is undeniable. The Lombard is largely true to the Augustinian school, while more rigorously systematizing those positions in the typical scholastic fashion. This buttresses Pelikan's insistence on the influence of Augustine in scholastic theology; Peter Lombard, who is so influential, in many ways crystallizes Augustine's doctrines for the scholastic period. Not only were his *Sentences* a sort of standard textbook of theology, the norm for those who wanted to become masters, but his *Sentences* also "exercised so extensive an influence as a reference work" that the subsequent scholarship largely centered on his opinions.² Theologians of the time were generally required by their universities to comment on Lombard.³ Following this familiarity with the *Sentences*, many went on to write their own textbook-like summary works, their own *summas*, imitating Peter Lombard's structure and style.⁴ The point is to stress Lombard's overwhelming influence on the theology of the time, such that it was a

¹ J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 3: The Growth of Medieval Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 17.

² W. Principe, *The Theology of the Hypostatic Union in the Early Thirteenth Century, Volume 1: William of Auxerre* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1963), 10.

³ J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 47.

⁴ Principe, *Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, 10-12. Consider, for example, William of Auxerre's *Summa Aurea*, or Bonaventure's little *summa*, the *Breviloquium*.

typical expectation that professors would comment on his *Sentences*. Before turning to Aquinas, we will first consider a few of those scholastics between Peter Lombard and Aquinas.

Walter Principe has done considerable work on the development of scholastic theology in the early thirteenth century, especially the scholastic development of Christology and the hypostatic union. The early thirteenth century was “decisive”⁵ for Christological development. The contemporary discussions of the time refined questions on the mode of union of the incarnation, the fittingness of the incarnation, the motive of the incarnation, and more relevant to this paper, Christ’s created grace, knowledge, love, virtues, and defects.⁶

According to Principe, the catalysts of this robust theological development were two interrelated phenomena: new philosophical undercurrents and new theological methodology. The University of Paris gained an appreciation of Aristotle and a few of his Islamic commentators — Avicenna and Averroes. William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Phillip the Chancellor, and Hugh of Saint-Cher were exposed to these undercurrents in one way or another.⁷ These theologians took up various Aristotelian metaphysical notions that were useful in order to explicate and clarify some theological considerations. This directly leads to the next point. Theology, which was largely dominated by grammatical and dialectic procedures, began to “discover in itself a structure and method that would lead it to claim the rank of a science, indeed, of the first and supreme science.”⁸ Of course, these changes were not without difficulty and protest, but on the whole, M. D. Chenu tells us, the hard-won scholastic theology that emerged gained for theology a new breadth of “intelligible consistency, and properly metaphysical depth that was far more precise and definite.”⁹

While we could talk about any number of similarities, connections, and discussions between the scholastic theologians, the one that impinges directly on this thesis is the order and structure of these scholastic treatises. In all of the cases mentioned, the authors try to stress the role of Christ in the virtuous and graced life of man by placing their section on Christ between the fall and the virtues. This ordering *seems* reasonable for two reasons. First, it is simply the chronology of events. History unfolds in this order: the fall, then the Christ event, and our final redemption arc made possible by Christ. Secondly, this order stresses Christ’s role in redeeming and restoring man. After all, the Christian life, including the virtues and gifts, ultimately tends toward the imitation of Christ, which is ultimately made possible by His grace.

The point of this brief historical survey of the emergence of scholastic theology is to contextualize Aquinas. He is in fact embedded and nested in a lively field, and

⁵ Principe, *Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, 10.

⁶ Principe, *Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, 12-13.

⁷ Principe, *Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, 11.

⁸ Principe, *Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, 12.

⁹ Principe, *Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, 12.

his work is preceded by many systematic expositions. This context prevents us from glossing over the totally unique structure of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, which may not seem jarring considered by itself, but against the other systematic works, we can appreciate how radical Aquinas' approach is. In John Boyle words, "Aquinas rejects the more obvious historical ordering favored by his immediate predecessors and contemporaries."¹⁰ The remainder of this section of the paper, then, will be dedicated to explaining this departure, since Aquinas himself "with his characteristic modesty, does not signal this departure from his contemporaries."¹¹

Aquinas' Departure

As Principe makes clear in his scholarship on the early thirteenth century, Aristotelian metaphysics and ethics begin to make themselves known to theology. In this sense, we see an anticipation of the departure from the Augustinian ethic, but Aquinas would be the one who would notice and commit to the departure. First, we ought to briefly review the relevant content of Augustine's moral theology in order to understand that which Aquinas departs from.

The Platonists and Neo-Platonists conceived of the immaterial world as the real, and so the sensible world as a shadow, a participation in those immaterial realities. One of the implications of this participatory metaphysics that is directly relevant to this article is the idea that the material realm is penultimate, that is, it refers to, participates in, and imitates eternal realities. While the immaterial world is ultimately stable and unchanging, while the material world shifts and changes in order to better conform to what is ultimately real. Augustine enthusiastically embraced this world view.¹² This led him to conceive of the world as a place of signs that terminate in God — the truly real. This is not wrong *prima facie*; it is true that all things have at least a trace of God and so have some sacramental sign value that points back to Him. This is also not to dismiss Augustine's theory of signs; it has positively influenced especially sacramental theology.¹³ This is to suggest, however, that the theory cannot be all encompassing. It has its shortcomings, especially in regard to adequately explaining the human person.

The human person, a material occupant of the penultimate, participatory material world, is in turn subject to a resulting morality that is constantly in motion, moving from sign to reality, from material to the immaterial, from exterior to the interior, from the lower to the higher, from less real to more real. Anton Pegis has

¹⁰ J. Boyle, "Is the Tertia Pars of the *Summa Theologiae* Misplaced?," in: *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 18 (1993-1994), 104.

¹¹ Boyle, "Is the Tertia Pars of the *Summa Theologiae* Misplaced?," 104.

¹² W. Principe, 'Aquinas' Spirituality for Christ's Faithful Living in the World', *Dominican Journal of Spirituality* 44, no. 2 (1992): 110-131.

¹³ See C. Couturier, 'Sacramentum' et Mysterium dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin', in: H. Rondet (ed.), *Etudes Augustiniennes* (Paris: Aubier, 1953); see also P.T. Camelot, OP, "'Sacramentum' Notes de theologie sacramentaire augustinienne', in: *Revue Thomiste* 57 (1957): 429-449.

dubbed this the “Augustinian highway,” the never-ending, always-moving dynamic interior life.¹⁴ What might cause difficulty in moral theology is whether this incredibly dynamic account allows for qualities of lasting stability in the human person. David Decosimo’s recent study on pagan virtue in Aquinas, which readily engages Augustine’s conception of natural virtue, shows that Augustine’s notion of habit (*consuetudo*) is not used in the same way that Aristotle uses habit (*hexis*).¹⁵ The Aristotelian habit is a stable disposition, a shaping of the person toward something, whereas for Augustine, *consuetudo* does not so much describe virtue as it describes fallen man’s accustomed reluctance toward good and holy things.¹⁶ This is to say that besides the instability of the material world that man occupies, Augustine also accounts for the instability of fallen man. Synthesizing virtue in several of Augustine’s works, including *City of God*, Robert Dodaro argues that for Augustine fallen man is debilitated: his intellect is so darkened and his will is so weakened by the fall that his capacity to know and love God are severely impeded.¹⁷ Man is prevented “from seeing itself in relation to the highest good, or understanding completely the motivations behind its own moral choices.”¹⁸

The solution then, for Augustine, is to nest virtuous activity in the center of the redeemed life – the love of Christ. Augustine describes virtue as essentially “ordered love,”¹⁹ so the moral virtues are different facets of this love. Love is prerequisite for virtue, since virtuous acts are acts that flow from love of God. This has two relevant implications: (1) virtue is more intentional than dispositional, and so as a result, (2) virtuous activity for Augustine is only possible for Christians, since they must have the right referent in mind, that is, acting for the sake of God immediately, or love of God mediately through love of neighbor. *Without the true religion, there can be no true virtue.*²⁰ Virtue, for Augustine, is defined not so much as a lasting quality or formation of the soul itself, but more as to the intention of particular acts. In this sense, then, for postlapsarian man true virtue is not possible prior to the grace of Christ that establishes love in the soul.

Peter Lombard takes up Augustine’s notion of virtue,²¹ which explains the organization of his own work. Here we should finally see the relevant and direct connection between Augustine’s moral theology and the typical scholastic

¹⁴ Principe, “Aquinas’ Spirituality for Christ’s Faithful Living in the World,” 110-131.

¹⁵ D. Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 260, 327.

¹⁶ See J.G. Prendiville’s study on this, ‘The Development of the Idea of Habit in the Thought of Saint Augustine’, in: *Traditio* 28 (1972): 29-99.

¹⁷ R. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27.

¹⁸ Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in Augustine*, 28.

¹⁹ See Augustine, *City of God*, Book 15, Chapter 22.

²⁰ See Augustine, *City of God*, Books 5 and 19.

²¹ Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, Book II, Distinction 27, Chapter 1: “*Virtus est, ut ait Augustinus, bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur et qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus solus in homine operatur.*” The accuracy with which Lombard reports Augustine here is disputed; these words are not directly quoting Augustine, but rather Lombard’s summary of Augustine’s thought.

organization. Because for Augustine and Lombard no true virtue is possible without Christ, the order of a systematic work must place Christ between the fall and the virtues. Placing Christ after the virtues would be out of order, since they are impossible without Christ. Aquinas does precisely this, though. The very structure of his work bespeaks a radical departure from the tradition, suggesting that human nature, precisely as a nature, has a natural perfectibility. Even more than this, it has been suggested that the very catalyst for Aquinas writing his own *Summa* was to rightly place the moral life between God and Christ. James Weisheipl and John Boyle present evidence suggesting that Aquinas both tried to rework his first commentary on the Sentences and even start a new commentary on the Sentences, before abandoning both projects for a totally new work — the *Summa Theologiae*.²² This evidence suggests just how important it is for Aquinas that the moral life has an integrity unto itself.²³ Where the majority of the tradition before him (like Augustine and Lombard) stressed the necessity of grace in order to practice virtue, the structure of Aquinas' work shows that he would give more substance to the natural moral life of man, that there are in fact certain qualities that can be developed prior to grace (albeit imperfectly in the fallen state). Put simply, Aquinas wants to maintain that grace presupposes nature, grace perfects man's natural capacities.²⁴

It might be easy to overlook Aquinas' departure because of his characteristic gentleness in correcting other well-respected theologians. Again, as Boyle says, Aquinas "with his characteristic modesty, does not signal this departure from his

²² J. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 217-218; see also J. Boyle's introduction to the critical edition of *Lectura Romana in primum Sentarum Petri Lombardi*, ed. L. Boyle, J. Boyle (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2006), 1-18; and J. Boyle, 'Aquinas' Roman Commentary on Peter Lombard', *Anuario Filosófico* XXXIX/2, (University of Navarre, 2006), 477-496.

²³ This is not to say that Aquinas completely avoids grace in his account of the moral life. In fact, Aquinas is clear, especially in *STh* I-II, qq. 106-114 that fallen man, precisely as fallen, needs grace even for his natural completion because man does not have the power to overcome the effects of the fall himself (See especially *STh* I-II, q. 109, aa. 2-3). Where Aquinas differs from Augustine, though, as Reinhard Hütter explains, is that for Aquinas the imperfection or deficiency of man's postlapsarian love does not obliterate natural virtues. There is still a natural virtue that has the potential to be perfected, it just cannot be entirely complete in this fallen state prior to grace (See R. Hütter, 'Happiness and Religion: Why the Virtue of Religion is Indispensable for Attaining the Final End', in: *Nova et Vetera* 14, No. 1. (2016): 15-60). Thomas Joseph White also offers helpful insight on this point: "Human beings without grace remain intrinsically religious rational animals, but...remain wounded and partially frustrated" yet "the inclination toward God as the final natural end of the human person is not eradicated by this contrary inclination to sin, but is weakened and wounded (T.J. White, 'Nature, Grace, and the Virtue of Religion', in: H. Boersma, M. Levering (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, (Oxford University Press, 2015), 577-579).

²⁴ For example, Thomas Joseph White, specifically considering the virtue of religion, contrasts Aquinas' view with a claim like Augustine's that graced love is prerequisite for the virtue of religion. White's point stands in for speaking of any natural virtue: "Such a claim seeks to make charity the very essence of religious activity, which is attractive on the surface. This claim, however, requires that we posit a corollary thesis: that religious activity, formally considered, is alien to the nature of human beings as such...our human nature has no inherent potency for religious behavior, and the gift of prayer and devotion made to God is a grace that therefore remains entirely extrinsic...[this] leads to an acute grace-nature extrinsicism" (White, 'Nature, Grace, and the Virtue of Religion', 576-577).

contemporaries.”²⁵ Decosimo calls attention to this instance of correction as “a work of charity” on Aquinas’ part:

There, in charity, honoring what he thinks Augustine’s deepest currents, Thomas distinguishes where Augustine seems not to, proceeding as though Augustine had been dividing infused from acquired, perfect from imperfect all along, as if Augustine had never proclaimed the falsity of pagan virtue, only the absolute supremacy of infused.²⁶

The motivation here, according to Decosimo, is to avoid scandal, for Aquinas “wants Augustine’s best insights realized, [and] not to expose his shortcomings publicly and risk scandalizing weaker brothers.”²⁷ So in his departure from Augustine, when treating whether the moral virtues can exist apart from grace and charity, Aquinas disagrees with Augustine while still citing him in the affirmative.²⁸ Even though Aquinas refuses to explicitly contradict Augustine, we must not mistake the fact that Aquinas is reversing the long-standing Augustinian doctrine that there can be no virtue without grace. Because Aquinas has a conception of virtue as quality that can be developed prior to grace, Aquinas is able to say strongly in the very same article that the acquired virtues “were in many of the gentiles.”²⁹

Aquinas’ conviction that grace presupposes nature in general, and specifically that graced virtue presupposes some natural capacity for virtue, shapes the very structure of the *Summa*. Understanding this is not without difficulty, though. Twentieth century contributions to understanding the structure of the *Summa* have shortcomings in explaining its ordering.

Evaluating and Clarifying Aquinas’ Structure

M. D. Chenu’s “landmark”³⁰ contribution, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, is so important that one author calls it “a quasi-obligatory point of reference in scholarly discourse on this topic.”³¹ In his work, Chenu offers the compelling exitus-reditus scheme of reading the *Summa*. In this scheme, we see the origin of all things, God, presented in the *Prima Pars*, along with creation which proceeds from him. In the *Secunda Pars*, we see the teleological structure of nature, that all things move toward God as to their last end. Human beings do so in a special way, by enjoying the capacity to rationally participate in this eternal law, returning to God not just as some inchoate

²⁵ Boyle, ‘Is the Tertia Pars of the Summa Theologiae Misplaced?’, 104.

²⁶ Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue*, 262.

²⁷ Decosimo, *Ethics as a Work of Charity: Thomas Aquinas and Pagan Virtue*, 261.

²⁸ *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter, *STh*), trans. Laurence Shapcote (Emmaus Academic, 2018), I-II, q. 65, a. 2, s.c. and co.

²⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 2, co.

³⁰ Boyle, ‘Is the Tertia Pars of the Summa Theologiae Misplaced?’, 104.

³¹ J.-M. Laporte, ‘Christ in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*: Peripheral or Pervasive?’, in *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 221-48.

last end, but as their chosen beatitude. Finally, in the *Tertia Pars*, Aquinas treats the means by which we return, the actual way the *reditus* is fulfilled, that is, in Christ.

John Boyle notes that while Chenu presents this compelling case on the order of the *Summa*, Chenu simultaneously frustrates and thwarts his own case by failing to answer difficulties in a satisfying way. These are the difficulties, or possible objections: (1) the *Prima* and *Secunda Pars* seem to have one scientific method, while the *Tertia Pars* seems to have another, and (2) the *Secunda Pars* is only intelligible when read in light of the *Tertia Pars*. In response to the first objection, Chenu maintains that the *Summa* is in the right order precisely because the method of the *Tertia Pars* differs from the first two; the first two parts enjoy a greater unity being placed together on account of their similar method. The *Prima* and *Secunda Pars* are concerned with essential natures and their necessary parts. The *Tertia Pars*, on the other hand, is different in that it makes use of historical contingencies and so many arguments for fittingness. In response to the second objection, Chenu offers that we ought to read the *Tertia Pars* “as if it were in the second place,”³² since it is really what makes possible and accessible our rational return to God.

Boyle’s thesis ultimately aims to support Chenu’s original suggestion that the *Summa* ought to be read according to the *exitus-reditus* schema, and over and against Chenu’s own difficulties, Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* is actually both rightly ordered and uses one, unified, scientific procedure.³³ Succeeding M. D. Chenu’s work is James Weisheipl, who is unparalleled in his rigorous historical investigations of Aquinas’ entire *corpus*. Weisheipl argues strongly in his 1974 essay, *The Meaning of Sacra Doctrina in Summa Theologiae I, q. 1*, that the entirety of *sacra doctrina* is scientifically united. In broad strokes, we can summarize Weisheipl’s argument, with Boyle’s help, that *sacra doctrina* has as its goal not to introduce anything new into revelation, but rather to gain a “fuller understanding of the revealed truths of faith.”³⁴ In this sense, the whole of the *Summa Theologiae* is united, even if the *Tertia Pars* makes use of more historical contingencies and arguments for fittingness. Since the role of *sacra doctrina* is to connect revealed truths, the *Tertia Pars* suffers no injury in its coherence for its difference in approach, precisely because the approach is not arbitrary or disjunct. The whole *Summa* singularly aims at connecting the truths of the faith, and when the *conclusions* are revealed, those truths must be connected according to a different approach, namely offering premises for those conclusions that appeal to God’s wise ordering. These arguments for fittingness fulfill the causal relations demanded by the unity of *sacra doctrina*. Attention to historical data and arguments for fittingness are not out of step with Aquinas’ overall method; rather, they are totally in line with his overall method when we consider that he is simply connecting the truths of theology according to the content of revealed truths.

³² Boyle, ‘Is the Tertia Pars of the Summa Theologiae Misplaced?’, 104-106.

³³ Boyle, ‘Is the Tertia Pars of the Summa Theologiae Misplaced?’, 106.

³⁴ Boyle, ‘Is the Tertia Pars of the Summa Theologiae Misplaced?’, 106.

So the *Tertia Pars* proceeds according to the same scientific *purpose* as the rest of the *Summa*, simply arguing differently according to different types of data. Boyle would support Chenu's original thesis that offers strong support for the unity of Aquinas' *Summa*, beginning with God, then a detailed explanation of rational creature and their participation in God's order and plan, and finally the Christ-event of salvation history which offers fallen man the redemption and help he needs to rightly return to God. This brings us to Chenu's other difficulty, that the *Summa* makes more sense reading the *Tertia Pars* between the *Prima* and *Secunda Pars*. Chenu's suggestion amounts to saying that Aquinas ought not have departed from his contemporaries, that his radically new structure ultimately fails because it cannot be intelligibly read in his new ordering, anyway.

On the other hand, we can argue that Aquinas' order is right on account of the "hallowed scholastic formula" that "grace presupposes nature."³⁵ An account of the nature of the human person and the natural moral life allows us to understand how grace perfects human nature in the Incarnation. In this sense, we can say that the *Secunda Pars* is required pre-incarnational reading; we only understand Christ as God and man (*Tertia Pars*) once we understand God (*Prima Pars*) and man (*Prima and Secunda Pars*).

2. An Illustrative Example Case: Patience

The second part of this essay ultimately aims to address the difficulty Chenu himself failed to solve: whether Aquinas' *Summa* is rightly ordered. We will see that it is rightly ordered because for Aquinas virtue has a natural integrity that is yet still subject to higher elevation in grace. This section will rely primarily on heavy engagement with the *Secunda Pars*, and we will have time only to consider one cardinal virtue — fortitude — and one of its parts — patience. This small sample size will nonetheless be sufficient to show the overarching intelligibility of Aquinas' work, which again, unlike his predecessors, allows for both natural acquired virtues and for these virtues to be taken up into grace, too. Finally, we will see that Christ is most intelligible in Aquinas' framework because he completes our elevation in grace not only by his ontological exemplarity, being the perfect man, but also by being our moral exemplar and so revealing to us how to conform our intellects, wills, and sense appetites to our new supernatural end as adopted sons.

A Primer on the Passions

Before considering the virtues of fortitude and patience as such, we must understand Aquinas' account of the passions, especially over and against Platonism and Stoicism.

³⁵ S. Long, 'On the Loss, and the Recovery, of Nature as a Theonomic Principle: Reflections on the Nature/Grace Controversy', in: *Nova et Vetera* 5, no. 1 (2007): 133-184, at 181.

For Platonist and Neoplatonist moral theologies like Augustine's, the passions are under the command of the will. In this scheme, if one desires something, it is the power of the will reaching out for that thing. So in the case of a disordered desire, it is the result of one's uncontrolled will inordinately reaching out for something it should not reach out for. The solution, then, is simply to strengthen one's will against such urges. The stoics, on the other hand, treat the passions as being contained totally in the material part of the person, which is to say that they are entirely foreign to the immaterial soul. They are the "sicknesses of the soul."³⁶ The soul operates best then, according to the stoics, by silencing, suppressing, and ignoring the useless material cries of the body.³⁷

In sharp contrast to both of these ways of thinking, Aquinas has it that the passions are the operations of the sense powers of the soul. It is clear how this is a departure from stoicism; for Aquinas the sense powers, or the passions, are seated in the soul, not merely material, bodily urges as for the stoics. Moreover, for Aquinas the passions are seated in separate powers from the will. The passions are sense powers that move as elicited by sensed objects, which is to say that the passions are, well, *passive*. They are things we *suffer* (in a neutral, passive sense) as our sense powers are attracted to perceived goods.³⁸ This is an incredibly significant departure from the Platonist and Augustinian scheme of the passions, too, because this allows Aquinas to hold that *reason* can regulate or shape the sense powers themselves; it is not left to sheer willpower to command the passions. Rather, just as the will can be conformed to reason, so can the sense powers, as distinct from intellect and will, be conformed to reason.³⁹

Now the passions can be conformed to reason and in this sense "humanized" in two ways. (1) When the intellect, will, and sense powers all work in harmony in order to rightly choose to do good things, the passions are taken up into the rational life, "humanized" by participation in the rational choice.⁴⁰ (2) The passions are so habitually conformed, harnessed, and tempered by reason, that they anticipate right action. For example, a soldier whose passions of aversion and boldness are rightly disposed will enjoy a certain readiness to follow his orders in combat. His passions will work to his aid rather than against him, as in a case where a soldier is so afraid because his passions are so poorly disposed that he is effectively a useless soldier.

As a summary remark on the passions, we can say that for Aquinas, a full, realist account of the human person includes distinct sense powers, or passions. Far from being "sicknesses of the soul" or spontaneous "will-acts," the passions are

³⁶ P. Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Providence: Cluny, 2018), 175.

³⁷ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 226.

³⁸ *STh* I-II, q. 22; see also Gondreau's section 'On the Passibility of the Human Soul' in *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 168-193.

³⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 39, a. 2, ad 1.

⁴⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 56, a. 4, co.

elicited sensate powers. This opens up the moral life for Aquinas because it allows for these very powers to be taken up into, or shaped by, reason. These powers can be humanized by participating in rational choices and acts.⁴¹ In this way, we see how the passions “become integrated into the unified moral life of the entire human being.”⁴² In Aquinas’ moral realism, we see that “moral excellence and human passion converge in a perfectly ordered way...sound moral conduct must go through — not around, apart, or in abstraction from — the passions.”⁴³

Fortitude or Courage Considered in Itself

Aquinas enumerates the four cardinal virtues — those four general moral virtues “which make a man good, and render his work good.”⁴⁴ Man is made morally good, that is, lives according to reason, by living according to certain perfective qualities of the soul. These qualities of the soul are stable and firm, that is, difficult to change, such that we can really say, for example, not only that a man acts courageously, but that he is a courageous man, since he has such a stable and lasting quality that consistently shapes his actions to be courageous.

Aquinas makes his fourfold division of the cardinal virtues because he understands that in order for man to be completely morally good, his reason must be well-shaped and well-ordered to act in these four distinct ways. Man requires four cardinal *habitus* for the moral life. First, reason itself must be rectified so as to discern how to act well in every situation. In this way, we can say that prudence is a precondition for and governs the whole moral life. Secondly, human affairs are governed by the *habitus* of justice, that is, how we act in relation to other people. Finally, there are two general obstacles that arise in life: inordinate attraction to perceived goods, and inordinate fear of perceived evils. As such, the two final cardinal virtues are temperance and fortitude. Temperance rightly moderates man’s use of perceived goods, and fortitude rightly moderates man’s fear of perceived evils.⁴⁵

For the sake of space, this essay only considers fortitude, and its part of patience, in depth. Even just considering fortitude and patience is enough to advance the thesis, though. Fortitude has enough explanatory power to show Aquinas’ departure from Augustine and Lombard because fortitude shows both that man can genuinely acquire natural virtues prior to grace, yet fortitude is also open to supernatural elevation, too. A natural fortitude can be genuinely acquired and exercised, and fortitude can be later elevated in grace, too. Man’s rational nature allows for the acquired *habitus* of courage, and so “the brave man intends as his proximate end to reproduce in action a likeness of his habit, for he intends to act in

⁴¹ *STh* I-II, q. 56, a. 4, co.

⁴² Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 226.

⁴³ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 227.

⁴⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 123, a. 1, co.

⁴⁵ *STh* II-II, q. 123, a. 1, co.

accordance with his habit,"⁴⁶ that is, he intends to act bravely. Over and above this proximate, natural end, though, is man's elicited, supernatural end: God himself. When this new horizon enters the Christian's life, the brave man acts not only in accord with reason for his natural perfection, but also as moved by grace for his new supernatural end, too.⁴⁷ In short, there is a natural courage that is shaped by reason, elevates this natural virtue, allowing for a graced courage in conformity to Christ, even giving Christians the courage to die for Christ as in the case of martyrdom.

Patience

We know that fortitude enjoys status as a moral virtue because it "safeguards the good of reason against the impulse of the passions."⁴⁸ Now, among the passions, the impulse that presently concerns us is sorrow. Sorrow is in general considered to be a concupiscible passion because it regards a present evil absolutely.⁴⁹ Specifically, sorrow is a species of pain that follows from an interior apprehension of a present evil.⁵⁰

Aquinas himself acknowledges that sorrow is tricky to understand. Sorrow seems contrary to virtue,⁵¹ and even Scripture itself acknowledges that the just man is not sorrowful.⁵² When Aquinas treats whether sorrow is compatible with moral virtue,⁵³ he offers that to the natural philosophers, i.e. the stoics, it seems that sorrow cannot be a part of the virtuous man's life; it does not seem to be a passion that can be moderated. Any amount of sorrow seems unreasonable and excessive. To the

⁴⁶ *STh* II-II, q. 123, a. 7, co.

⁴⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 123, a. 7, co. Angela McKay Knobel rigorously considers this very relationship between acquired and infused virtue across her studies. Her concern is to preserve the Thomistic axiom that grace perfects nature by showing an interdependence between the acquired and infused virtues. See especially 'Relating Aquinas' Infused and Acquired Virtues: Some Problematic Texts for a Common Interpretation', in: *Nova et Vetera* 9-2 (2011): 411-431, and her recent book *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2021). William C. Mattison III does well to summarize the extant debate on this point in 'Aquinas, Custom, and the Coexistence of Infused and Acquired Cardinal Virtues', in: *Journal of Moral Theology* 8-2 (2019): 1-24, at 3-5. According to Mattison, all are in agreement that there are "material activities common to both acquired and infused virtues in a manner specified by reference to the supernatural end" ('Aquinas, Custom, and Coexistence', 4). The debate concerns whether after the introduction of grace and the infused cardinal virtues the natural acquired virtues remain. In the last analysis, Mattison guards the coexistence of acquired and infused virtues. While Knobel primarily argues for their coexistence in order to guard the scholastic formula that grace presupposes and perfects nature, Mattison argues on different grounds. Considering the loss of infused grace and virtue from mortal sin, Mattison argues that one would not immediately lapse into complete inability to be prudent, just, moderate, or courageous. Rather, the person would only lose the capacity to act for the sake of the ultimate supernatural end ('Aquinas, Custom, and Coexistence', 5; 17-24).

⁴⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 1, co.

⁴⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 23, a. 1, co.

⁵⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 35, a. 2, co.

⁵¹ *STh* I-II, q. 59, a. 3, co.

⁵² Proverbs 12, 21, according to Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 357.

⁵³ *STh* I-II, q. 59, a. 3, co.

contrary, Aquinas holds that sorrow can be rightly moderated by virtue like the other passions. Aquinas solves the apparent tension by maintaining that sorrow, like the other sense powers elicited by perceived objects, is not somehow *de facto* immoral. On the contrary, as a passion, sorrow is morally neutral, and is considered morally good or bad only in its relationship with intellect and will. Like all the other passions, Aquinas allows that the virtuous man can rightly integrate sorrow into the moral life; sorrow can be present in a virtuous man insofar as the passion is conformed to reason.⁵⁴ After all, the very nature of the moral virtues are to “regulate the passions into the good of reason.”⁵⁵

A real excess of sorrow would be sadness about virtue itself, or things that pertain to virtue. On the other hand, sadness about dangers present to one’s body are not excessive; it is acceptable for a virtuous man to have an acceptable level of sorrow when facing a real and present danger, like personal injury in combat, for example, because the body and life are real goods that grieve one to lose, and personal injury is not an essential part of the courageous act of endurance. A virtuous man can have sadness for imminent loss of his life, or serious injury to his body, because the object of his sorrow is not contrary to virtue; the man sorrowful for the loss of his life can still fully embrace the courageous act. If the sorrow is set against virtue, it is true that there is no moderation possible, but if the sorrow is not set against virtue, but simply for a legitimate good, it can be moderated.⁵⁶

Moreover, Aquinas offers compelling points that sorrow is not only compatible with moral virtue, but sometimes even necessary for the full moral life. Christians should have sorrow for their own sin and shortcomings or for the sins and shortcomings of others.⁵⁷

After saying all of this, we should still say that “the type of sorrow that disquiets the mind has no place in the life of the wise or virtuous individual.”⁵⁸ It is true that the virtuous man should not be so disturbed that his reason be impaired, but sorrow does not *necessarily* impair reason. Sorrow is compatible with moral virtue insofar as the agent maintains his equal-mindedness, and so long as one does not have sadness about virtue itself or things that pertain to virtue. About these latter things, any amount of sorrow is an excess.

Patience is that specific virtue which rightly harnesses sorrow. Aquinas rightly names patience to be an integral part of fortitude if it is enduring the sadness of death, since fortitude is principally concerned with death.⁵⁹ Yet patience in other matters, that is, not deadly matters, can also be a potential part of fortitude because patience accompanies and aids fortitude by keeping the mind steady despite the internal

⁵⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 59, a. 3, co.

⁵⁵ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 371.

⁵⁶ Of course, there is also the consideration of Christ’s sorrow, which we will turn to at the end of the essay.

⁵⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 59, a. 3, co.

⁵⁸ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 370.

⁵⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 128, a. 1, co.

apprehension and resulting sorrow of present evil, even if that evil is not so severe as death.⁶⁰ As for patience being assigned to fortitude in particular, Aquinas understands that it might seem strange to annex the concupiscible virtue of patience to the irascible virtue of fortitude. Aquinas solves this tension by reminding us that the virtues are not catalogued according to the subject, but rather according to their form. Patience as a potential part realizes the same formal type as fortitude.⁶¹ Even though fortitude is chiefly about fear (an irascible appetite), and patience is chiefly about sorrow (a concupiscible appetite),⁶² both fortitude and patience have endurance as their chief act.⁶³ Patience is concerned “to suffer with an equal mind the evils...lest he abandon with an unequal mind the goods whereby he may advance to better things.”⁶⁴ So while the formal type remains the same, patience is specifically concerned with harnessing sorrow so as to not disproportionately or unreasonably burden the soul, aiding the cardinal virtue’s act of endurance by harnessing the obstacle of sorrow. While fortitude endures through fear and requires patience as an integral part in the face of death, patience as a potential part supports fortitude as an allied virtue by enduring through the sorrow that accompanies non-fatal present danger.

Patience Requires Charity

We have said that patience can be considered an integral or potential part of fortitude, rightly enduring sorrow in order to hold firmly to right reason. What we have not mentioned yet, though, is that for Aquinas, patience is impossible without charity.⁶⁵ It is quite impossible for a man to be able to moderate the sadness of a present evil without the bond of charity that allows man to prefer the goods of grace to natural goods. Only charity can inform this part of fortitude to moderate sadness, since otherwise this sadness would either be unduly suppressed, as in the stoics,⁶⁶ or only have the appearance of patience, but really only being the rational animal’s capacity to do a cost-benefit analysis and sacrifice some goods for other concupiscible delights.⁶⁷ True moral virtue aims to conform the passions not simply for the sake of some other concupiscible natural good, but for the sake of conforming to reason and pleasing God as pleasing a friend.

True patience is not some stoic level-headedness resulting from a suppression of passions on account of their so-called uselessness. No, recall that for Aquinas

⁶⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 128, a. 1, co.

⁶¹ *STh* I-II, q. 60, a. 2, co.

⁶² *STh* II-II, q. 136, 4, ad 2.

⁶³ *STh* II-II, q. 136, 4, ad 1.

⁶⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 1, co.

⁶⁵ For a broader treatment as to whether virtue requires charity in general that also contextualizes Augustine on this point, see T. M. Osborne Jr., ‘Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas’, in: *The Thomist* 71-1 (2007): 39-64, at 45-46.

⁶⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 59, a. 3, co.

⁶⁷ *STh* II-II 136, a. 3, ad 1. See also Osborne, ‘Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas’, 45-46.

patience is not equal-mindedness for its own sake, but rather that “he may advance to better things.”⁶⁸ In other words, patience always has as its end something beyond simply maintaining inner peace; it bears a present evil for the sake of some end beyond nature, that is, some supernatural end, some grace. Now, the only thing that motivates man to prefer supernatural goods to natural ones is the bond of charity, to love God above even the greatest goods of the natural order, like one’s own life. True patience then, Aquinas says, is caused only by charity.⁶⁹

Aquinas acknowledges that it appears that some who are not in a state of grace exercise patience. For example, loyal citizens who suffer serious hardships rather than betray their country,⁷⁰ or making personal sacrifices in order to become healthier.⁷¹ Aquinas begins by saying that “sorrow and pain are of themselves displeasing to the soul, wherefore it would never choose to suffer them for their own sake, but only for the sake of an end.”⁷² In order to answer these objections, the ends of these seemingly patient acts must be investigated. In the first case, Aquinas has it that the loyal citizen is simply enduring one natural hardship for the sake of another natural good, namely political virtue. In this sense, the comparison to true patience fails, because it is within man’s natural power to adjudicate among natural goods and endure through hardships for the sake of the ends he judges, but it is not within man’s capacity without grace to adjudicate between natural and supernatural goods and prefer the supernatural. In order to prefer the good of grace, man requires charity.⁷³ In the second case, the comparison fails for the same reason: there is no comparison between an act of endurance for the sake of some natural good and an act of patience for the sake of some supernatural good. While both realize the operation of endurance, these instances proceed from a natural love of self, whereas patience as Aquinas means it proceeds from a supernatural self-forgetting love of God.⁷⁴

Man can trade natural goods for other natural goods proportionate to his nature and desire. Patience, though, does not simply moderate man’s judgement about weighing natural goods and stubbornness in adhering to that decision; rather, by patience Aquinas means the moderation of sadness for suffering natural evils for the sake of some goods beyond our nature, namely supernatural goods, or goods of grace. This patience, then, requires charity, since in order to be able to sacrifice natural goods for the goods of grace, we must be elevated to friendship with God and desire his goods even in the face of present evils. Aquinas admits that something *like* patience does operate at the natural level; this is nothing less than affirming the natural integrity of moral virtue in man apart from grace. Indeed, man can naturally acquire

⁶⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 1, co.

⁶⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 3, co.

⁷⁰ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 3, obj. 2.

⁷¹ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 3, obj. 3.

⁷² *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 3, co.

⁷³ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 3, ad 2.

⁷⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 136, a. 3, ad 3.

a virtue of fortitude, which allows him to face dangers well and even make reasonable judgements about trading some goods for others in the face of evils. Man is open to supernatural elevation too, though, being able to give up even the best natural goods for supernatural goods. This patience is inconceivable apart from the bond of charity. Patience, over and above acquired fortitude, proceeds from love of God, whereas other acts of endurance proceed from love of natural goods, like love of natural virtue or self-love.

The Illustrative Example of Christ

Thus far, I have refrained from appealing to the example of Christ in the Gospels to show the legitimacy of sorrow being integrated into the moral life. This was in order to advance the overarching thesis: Aquinas' *Summa* is rightly ordered, being able to deftly handle the virtuous and the moral life on its own terms, having its own integrity prior to grace. Fortitude can be grasped as a real acquired virtue prior to considering Christ. The example of Christ then shows us how we can be elevated to incorporate our passions into not only the virtuous life, but even the graced, supernatural life.

The Gospels reveal to us that Christ suffered sorrow, so "Thomas regards Jesus' experience of sorrow as a matter of revealed fact."⁷⁵ When Lazarus died, John tells us that "Jesus wept."⁷⁶ Christ himself, reflecting on His Passion to come in the Agony in the Garden says himself "my soul is sorrowful even to death."⁷⁷

As we have seen, the passions, considered in themselves, are morally neutral sensate realities. They assume moral worth in their interaction with intellect and will.⁷⁸ In Christ, then, because he is the moral exemplar of humanity, we know that his sorrow must be taken up perfectly by his intellect and will and be considered morally good by participation.⁷⁹ "It is inconceivable to speak of Christ's passions in abstraction from his perfection in moral virtue."⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 356.

⁷⁶ Jn. 11, 35.

⁷⁷ Mt. 26, 38.

⁷⁸ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 361.

⁷⁹ Gondreau's chapter, "'The Passions Were in Christ Otherwise Than in Us': The Moral Quality of Jesus' Human Affectivity," explains that Christ is a special case regarding the passions because he is similar to prelapsarian man in that he has the grace of original justice, which rightly orders his powers, but he inhabits a different world than does prelapsarian man. Christ maintains the "original innocence" that prelapsarian man had, that is, immunity to sin, but he nonetheless assumes the "punishments of this life" (Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 268). These "punishments" include "suffering" the inclinations of the passions that are in disharmony with reason. For example, in the Agony in the Garden Jesus prays "not my will but your will be done" (Mt 26:39, Lk 22:42), signifying that he has a sensitive passion of aversion that desires to flee, and Christ himself recognizes that this is in discord with reason. Even though Christ is morally perfect as was prelapsarian man in his immunity to sin, he nonetheless inhabits a world that is threatened by material evils and other morally evil agents, so he allows himself to suffer the difficulties of real human life while of course maintaining his perfect moral integrity.

⁸⁰ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul*, 252.

Moreover, “there was no conflict of appetites in Christ, or rebellion of the flesh against the spirit.”⁸¹ Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane does not compromise his moral integrity or his harmony with the Father.⁸² His sensitive appetite does have its proper spontaneous movement away from pain, but Christ’s intellect and will perfectly harness this legitimate, spontaneous passion. Aquinas’ exegesis of the prayer in the garden is this: by “my will,” Christ means his sensitive appetite, by “your will,” Christ means God’s will, and *the very act of setting aside his passion to freely conform Himself to the Divine will is an act of His rational human intellect and will*. His passion of sorrow is shown to be fully humanized by his prayer, which is a true human act of patience (among other virtues, too). It is an act of his human intellect and will rightly shaping his sorrow such that he can genuinely feel the passion, but that it does not overwhelm his decision making or injure his relationship with the Father.⁸³

It is worthwhile to recall the three reasons Aquinas gives for Christ’s prayer in the garden: (1) to show forth His humanity, (2) to show that the passions are not equivalent with willing something against God, i.e. it is not somehow sinful that He has a sensitive distaste for a tortuous death, and (3) to give an example of how man ought to subject his sensitive will to his rational will and likewise his rational will to the Divine will.⁸⁴ Christ then becomes for us an example to imitate as to how we ought to “integrate sorrow in the exercise of virtue.”⁸⁵ In allowing himself to suffer the “punishments of this life,” he becomes not only our ontological exemplar as the perfect man, but also a moral exemplar that we can actually imitate on account of his similarity to our condition.

Conclusion

The brevity of this last section on the example of Christ should support the overarching thesis of this paper, namely that the natural integrity of Aquinas’ realist account of the moral life makes the man Jesus intelligible. In other words, because Aquinas offers us such a robust account of the moral life, which includes a full realism of the natural integrity of acquired virtue as well as the transformation of those acts by supernatural charity, by the time we arrive at Christ, we are able to smoothly and easily understand his human integrity. This in turn supports the order of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. John Boyle asks whether the Tertia Pars is misplaced. We should be able to answer now that it is of course *not* misplaced. Precisely because the “humanity of Christ holds an absolutely central role in Thomas’ theology”⁸⁶ is the treatment of

⁸¹ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 270.

⁸² J.M. Wallace, “*Inspiravit ei voluntatem patiendi pro nobis, infundende ei caritatem*”: Charity, the Source of Christ’s Action according to Thomas Aquinas (Siena: Cantagalli, 2013), 332-336.

⁸³ Wallace, “*Inspiravit ei voluntatem patiendi pro nobis, infundende ei caritatem*,” 333.

⁸⁴ Wallace, “*Inspiravit ei voluntatem patiendi pro nobis, infundende ei caritatem*,” 335.

⁸⁵ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 367.

⁸⁶ Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul*, 106.

Christ rightly placed after understanding the integrity of humanity. In Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, we come to know the Christ who is *fully* God and *fully* man. As Thomas Joseph White puts it, "without such a concept [of pure human nature] we cannot rightly articulate why Christ is the fulfillment of what it means to be human."⁸⁷ Without first treating human nature, "we would be unable to consider man as truly and essentially human," "we would be unable to consider the redeemed human person...as more perfect *qua* human...in the potencies of his or her nature," and "we would be unable to understand the incarnate Lord...as bringing our human nature to an eschatological fulfillment."⁸⁸ In a word, we would be unable to see how Christ elevates us. While it is true that "Christ...fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear,"⁸⁹ Aquinas reminds us that we must first understand the integrity of human nature in order to understand who the man Jesus is and what his humanity clarifies for us. Without the integral account of man that Aquinas offers, which the very structure of his work suggests, we cannot begin to understand the *new horizon* of human life that Christ opens up for us.

⁸⁷ T.J. White, 'The "Pure Nature" of Christology: Human Nature and *Gaudium et Spes* 22', in: *Nova et Vetera* 8-2 (2010): 283-322, at 287.

⁸⁸ White, "The 'Pure Nature' of Christology," 297-298.

⁸⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* 22. This hints at the larger question of interpreting the theological anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*, a discussion advanced soon after the Council by the likes of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Karl Rahner, and M. D. Chenu. Thomas Joseph White summarizes some key points of the opinions and offers a Thomistic interpretation in his book *The Incarnate Lord* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 126-170.