

## QUAESTIO DISPUTATA

### "IN PERSONA CHRISTI"

A RESPONSE TO DENNIS M. FERRARA

A rather surprising thesis was defended by Dennis Michael Ferrara in the June 1994 issue of this journal.<sup>1</sup> He proposes that when Thomas Aquinas describes the priest's action in the celebration of the Eucharist with the formula *in persona Christi* he means that the priest effaces himself before Christ, not that he represents Christ. This "apophatic" interpretation, Ferrara believes, captures the primary meaning of the formula. He allows that Thomas has in mind an indirect representation of Christ when he uses the same formula to describe the priest's exercise of hierarchical authority, but, because the priest's "hierarchical-regitive" role is entirely ordered to and normed by his "ministerial-eucharistic" role, Ferrara maintains that the applications of the formula must be similarly ordered. The non-representational, ministerial, and "apophatic" meaning of *in persona Christi*, not its hierarchical meaning, he claims, is primary, original, and normative for St. Thomas.

In Ferrara's opinion, this insight can be used to counter the chief theoretical objection to the ordination of women, namely, that women lack the "natural resemblance" to Christ called for by the fact that the priest acts *in persona Christi*.<sup>2</sup> While he is aware that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not advance this argument as the decisive ground for its judgment in *Inter insigniores*,<sup>3</sup> he nevertheless suggests that overturning it would remove the major obstacle to a line of reasoning driven by a "subordinationist" theory.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter reaffirming the Church's constant teaching, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*,<sup>4</sup> was released just as Ferrara's essay appeared in print. *Theological Studies* then published a note in which Ferrara continues to press his point.<sup>5</sup> His June article questions

<sup>1</sup> "Representation or Self-Effacement? The Axiom *In Persona Christi* in St. Thomas and the Magisterium," *TS* 55 (1994) 195–224; henceforth referred to as "Representation."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 195 n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1977); *AAS* 69 (1977) 89–116; hereafter, *Inter Insigniores*. I will cite page numbers (in parentheses) for the Declaration and the Commentary from the USCC edition.

<sup>4</sup> For the English text, see "Apostolic Letter on Ordination and Women," *Origins* 24 (1994) 49–52.

<sup>5</sup> "The Ordination of Women: Tradition and Meaning," *TS* 55 (1994) 706–19; henceforth referred to as "Ordination." Ferrara asserts that his intention is "to combat the

the reading of Thomas's theology of priesthood found in *Inter insigniores*. His December note questions the magisterium's use of the distinction between (1) the "fundamental reason" why the Church can admit only men to ministerial priesthood (viz., the fact of a constant tradition which the Church traces back to the will of Christ) and (2) the theological explanations which have been developed to illustrate the fittingness of this tradition. Ferrara characterizes the first as the "extrinsic" and the second as the "intrinsic" basis of the argument, and then proceeds to object that the magisterium's "studied separation" of the two arguments leads to a new fideism. In his view, the magisterium has abandoned the traditional and faulty intrinsic argument (its appeal to the subordinate status of women) without supplying a theological rationale rooted in a more adequate Christian anthropology. As a consequence, the extrinsic argument is left hanging in mid-air, unintelligible because no explanation is supplied as to why Christ willed to restrict the apostolic ministry to men.<sup>6</sup> In his note, Ferrara restates his earlier thesis, making its application to women's ordination more explicit.

It seems to me most worthwhile to engage Dennis Michael Ferrara in debate. Serious theological dialogue within the Church cannot be advanced without the careful consideration of the teaching of the contemporary magisterium. Some years have passed since the initial responses to *Inter insigniores* were published, and the magisterium has addressed the question again since then. There are questions here that deserve further examination, and I welcome the occasion to reopen them.

My response is addressed to both of Ferrara's pieces, but I will begin with the note since it provides the frame of reference for the article. I intend to dispute at length Ferrara's interpretation of St. Thomas and his reading of the argumentation drawn from Thomas in the Declaration *Inter insigniores*.

#### *Value of Identifying the "Fundamental Reason"*

The distinction which the magisterium draws between the fundamental reason for reserving ministerial priesthood to men and the theological arguments from fittingness serves the purpose of clarifying its dominical foundation, rejecting an argument now seen to be faulty, and retrieving the elements of a more adequate argument. In my view, it need not and does not lead to fideism.

Pope John Paul II's *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* reinforces the distinction between the statement of the normative tradition, proposed with authority by the magisterium, and the theological reasons brought forward to clarify it by means of the analogy of faith, which do not engage

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hierarchical interpretation of *in persona Christi* that dominates recent magisterial teaching" (706).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 716.

the authority of the magisterium.<sup>7</sup> In this document he reasserts the "fundamental reasons": the example of Christ, attested in Scripture, in choosing only men as his Apostles, and the constant practice of the Church in fidelity to his example. Because this new intervention of the magisterium does not repeat the theological argumentation proposed in section 5 of *Inter insigniores*, some speculated that it was being discarded. The appearance of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's Commentary has corrected this impression: the purpose of the apostolic letter is to address the formal and gnoseological structure of the doctrine. *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* intends to make explicit the grounds for the Church's certitude that it does not have the authority to admit women to ministerial priesthood.<sup>8</sup> It does not repudiate the argumentation of *Inter insigniores*, but presupposes it. The further development of arguments from fittingness based on a renewed theological anthropology, Ratzinger writes, is the task not of the magisterium but of theologians.<sup>9</sup>

In response to *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, Ferrara sets out to contribute to the discussion "with specific reference to the distinction, and the importance thereof, between the external fact of the Church's traditional ban on the ordination of women and the inner theological meaning of the tradition."<sup>10</sup> In his earlier article he takes explicit note of this distinction, describing the use of arguments *ex convenientia* in sections 5 and 6 of *Inter insigniores*. He also expresses his conviction that the doctrinal statement and its explanation are in a certain sense inseparable, even though the binding force of doctrinal affirmations cannot be said to depend on the cogency of the arguments used to defend them.<sup>11</sup>

Ferrara appreciates the fact that this distinction allows *Inter insigniores* to reject arguments in the traditional teaching that are "scarcely defensible today."<sup>12</sup> He believes, and I agree, that the intrinsic argument ultimately turns on the question of theological anthro-

<sup>7</sup> This distinction is found in *Inter insigniores*, section 5 (11) and in the Commentary (30).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "La Lettre *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* confirme ce que l'Église a toujours vécu dans la foi," *La Documentation Catholique* no. 2097 (3 Juillet 1994) 611–15.

<sup>9</sup> Ferrara insists that the magisterium must "explain its position, and the mind of Christ himself, with reasons other than have appeared in the tradition of the Church thus far" ("Ordination" 718). He holds that the burden of proof rests on those who defend the tradition rather than those who promote change. This raises the deeper question of the role of tradition. I believe the burden of proof lies on those who argue for change.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 706.

<sup>11</sup> Ferrara, "Representation" 195, n. 1. The Commentary (31) agrees that "it is impossible to be content with making statements, with appealing to the intellectual docility of Christians; faith seeks understanding, and tries to distinguish the grounds for and the coherence of what is taught."

<sup>12</sup> The Commentary (22) makes it clear that St. Thomas's "most famous" argument, *quia mulier est in statu subjectionis*, is the one being rejected, even as it indicates the difficulty of disentangling the philosophical concept from its traditional biblical sources (Gen 1–3; 1 Tim 2:12–14).

pology.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, although Ferrara acknowledges the primacy of the extrinsic argument, he does not seem to appreciate that it forms the *basis* of the intrinsic argument. His characterization of the categories as "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" tends, I think, to obscure their actual relation. We are, after all, confronted not only with the historical fact of the Church's constant tradition, but with the claim that this tradition is rooted in the will of Christ. The force of *Ordinatio sacerdotialis* is to call attention to this source of the Church's certitude.

I readily grant that the link between this tradition and the will of Christ manifested in the choice of the Twelve poses other questions,<sup>14</sup> but I believe Ferrara is mistaken in thinking that the extrinsic argument cannot claim our assent unless it can be shown to be reasonable on some prior grounds, i.e. the meaning of the natural differentiation of the sexes. As I understand it, the function of theological argumentation from fittingness is to discover, by means of the analogy of faith and human reasoning, the appropriateness and intrinsic reasonableness of something we receive as God's gift or revelation. The choice of the Twelve may not belong to the same class as the call of Abraham or of Mary,<sup>15</sup> but that it be naturally intelligible independent of the history of salvation is not the only alternative. *Inter insigniores* seems to classify it instead with sacramental signs. Sacraments possess a deep natural symbolism, but they are correctly interpreted only in light of their link to the constitutive events of Christianity and to Christ himself.<sup>16</sup> Again, if we try to discern why the Word became a man rather than a woman, we may appeal to arguments drawn from a theory regarding the natural differentiation of the sexes, but it is entirely possible that this fact of revelation may, in the end, be the source of a proper anthropological theory.<sup>17</sup>

### *Dominical Foundation of the Tradition*

One consequence of distinguishing the norm from theological attempts to illustrate its fittingness has been a clearer identification of the New Testament source of the Church's constant tradition on this

<sup>13</sup> Ferrara, "Ordination" 718, n. 43. The need for a renewed anthropology was well-established by George H. Tavard in the early years of the contemporary debate. See his *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1973). In my opinion, this inquiry must include further consideration of the theological relevance of the maleness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Since Ferrara does not open up this line of reasoning in his essays, I will not attempt to do so in this response. Still, it is clearly pertinent to Ferrara's argument, and he admits to being baffled by the way the magisterium appeals to it ("Ordination" 709–10).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 709.

<sup>16</sup> *Inter insigniores*, section 4 (10).

<sup>17</sup> See Joan Gibson, "Could Christ Have Been Born a Woman? A Medieval Debate," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8 (1992) 65–82. The scholastics maintained that whereas a female incarnation was within God's *power*, incarnation as a male was more *fitting*. They presupposed that whatever God actually did is most excellent.

question in the call of the Twelve. This argument can be traced to the patristic period. It is neither the invention of late scholasticism nor a "new tradition" inaugurated by the Vatican.

Ferrara looks upon the appeal to Christ's call of the Twelve as a new argument. The relation of the scriptural texts cited by the magisterium to the question of women's ordination strikes him as "tenuous at best."<sup>18</sup> He supposes that this extrinsic argument first appears in the late scholastic period in the form of an appeal to Christ's institution of the priesthood, and then suggests that this appeal may have come about in response to the anti-intellectualism that followed the condemnations of 1277. In support of his view, he notes that neither Thomas nor Bonaventure makes appeal to Christ's institution.<sup>19</sup>

I propose another explanation. In the first place, a review of the history of this question reveals that two lines of argumentation dominate in the patristic era. When women were admitted to priestly functions among the Christian Gnostics, Marcionites, Montanists, and Collyridians, the Church countered these innovations (1) by citing the Pauline injunctions against public teaching by women, especially 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:12,<sup>20</sup> and (2) by appealing to the "command of the Lord" and the "law of the gospel." This second court of appeal is found in third and fourth century ecclesiastical constitutions and collections of canons.<sup>21</sup> In the *Panarion* (374-77) of Epiphanius of Salamis, this appeal begins to take the form that would become classical in the West, viz., since the Lord did not call his Mother to belong to the Twelve, despite her great dignity and excellence, it is evident that he did not intend women to assume priestly functions.<sup>22</sup> Notice that admission to priestly and episcopal functions is consistently identified with admission to the office of the Twelve. I believe Ferrara would have to concede that some of the earliest arguments for restricting the priesthood to men rely precisely on the normativeness of Christ's call of the Twelve.<sup>23</sup>

In discerning the value of these two traditional arguments, the con-

<sup>18</sup> Ferrara, "Ordination" 710.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 714-15. See Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, d. 25, a. 2, q. 1; Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 25, q. 2, a. 1.

<sup>20</sup> The Pauline ban was, in turn, supported by appeal to Gen 2:18-24 and 1 Cor 11:7.

<sup>21</sup> This other pattern of reasoning came to clear expression in the East, especially in the Antiochian and Egyptian traditions (*Inter insigniores*, section 1 [5]) and Commentary [30]). For citations of the original sources, see notes 7 and 8 of the Declaration.

<sup>22</sup> Epiphanius employs the first line of argument; in addition, he appeals to the Church's constant tradition. See Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood: A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 416-18. This entered the canonical tradition in the West as a result of its use by Pope Innocent III. See the citation in *Inter insigniores*, section 2 (7).

<sup>23</sup> He holds that "attempts to justify the maleness of the priest by appealing to the normativeness of Christ's call of the Twelve" were unknown prior to Vatican II ("Ordination" 718).

temporary magisterium has clearly preferred the second to the first. The argument from the Pauline texts does not form the basis of its judgment, but is in fact subjected to a critique and even given a new interpretation, based on the "gospel innovation" in Gal. 3:28, in recent papal teaching.<sup>24</sup> The faulty "intrinsic" argument, which is intimately linked (but not identical) with the tradition of appealing to the Pauline ban, and which marked Catholic explanations of the exclusion of women from ministerial priesthood up until very recently, has been abandoned. Instead, the argument from the will of Christ in choosing the Twelve has been given new prominence, even while it is acknowledged that apart from the witness of the tradition one would not easily find explicit indications of Christ's will on this matter in the Scripture.<sup>25</sup>

In the second place, I would offer two points in response to Ferrara's theory about the source of the late scholastic appeal to the "extrinsic" argument. One, it seems that Thomas and Bonaventure were well aware of and took for granted the existing consensus of the Church, fixed by that time in canonical legislation, when they advanced arguments from fittingness on this question. Both cite the Pauline texts as evidence of a binding tradition.<sup>26</sup> I take this to be a form of the extrinsic argument. Two, the appeal to institution by Christ (the alternate form of the extrinsic argument) found in the later scholastics may be explained in light of the question that intrigued them, namely, whether the Church is guilty of injustice for denying priestly ordination to women. Their interest is to show that the restriction of orders to males derives from the will of Christ, not from prejudice against women on the part of the apostles or of the Church.<sup>27</sup> While this move may reflect some of the influences noted by Ferrara, his theory is not needed to account for it.

### *Retrieval of Bonaventure's Argument from Fittingness*

The magisterium has rejected the argument from fittingness based on a faulty (i.e., hierarchical) understanding of sexual complementarity, and proposed in its place an argument from fittingness which links the requirement of maleness for the priest with the maleness of Christ.

<sup>24</sup> This revision is found especially in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (Mulieris dignitatem)* (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1988); AAS 80 (1988) 1639-1729.

<sup>25</sup> Commentary 27.

<sup>26</sup> Bonaventure cites Paul in some of his objections, but he appears to rely more heavily on the authority of the tradition, summed up in Gratian's *Decretals*. Thomas cites 1 Tim 2:12, conflated with 1 Cor 11:34. Modern readers sometimes underestimate the weight given by the scholastics to the "argument from authority" in the *sed contra* of St. Thomas. See Leo V. Elder, "Structure et fonction de l'argument 'sed contra' dans la *Somme Théologique* de saint Thomas," *Divus Thomas* 80 (1977) 245-60.

<sup>27</sup> See the analysis of John Hilary Martin, "The Injustice of Not Ordaining Women: A Problem for Medieval Theologians," *TS* 48 (1987) 303-16.

This is not a novelty, as Ferrara supposes,<sup>28</sup> but is drawn from the sacramental theology of St. Bonaventure.

In reporting that the late scholastics were the first to appeal to the extrinsic argument of Christ's institution of the priesthood, Ferrara has overlooked evidence presented in *Inter insigniores*. He likewise overlooks the evidence the Declaration supplies when he judges that "the theological tradition prior to Vatican II knows only one intrinsic argument against the ordination of women: the 'faulty' argument from women's inferior status."<sup>29</sup> It seems to me that the magisterium has successfully retrieved a "non-faulty" argument from the teaching of Bonaventure on this question: it is the argument from maleness as a condition for the priest's sacramental signification of Christ, Head and Bridegroom of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

A rather full exposition of this teaching, set in the larger context of Bonaventure's understanding of sacramental signification, was published by Jean Rezzette shortly before the release of *Inter insigniores*;<sup>31</sup> it can reasonably be assumed that this provides a rationale for the Declaration's interpretation of the Seraphic Doctor's teaching. Although Bonaventure's commentary includes arguments of unequal value, as the Declaration acknowledges, it also provides the elements of the argument from fittingness which the Declaration adopts.

Curiously, Ferrara's report omits from Bonaventure's position the very point that the magisterium finds most telling, namely, his understanding of the way the person enters into the constitution of the sacramental sign, and the relevance of male sex to the signification of Christ the Mediator, who became incarnate as a male. Ferrara cites only the first half of the pertinent sentence, then (without notifying the reader of the omission) skips over to a different argument, drawn from the solution to the first objection.<sup>32</sup>

He also fails to mention that one of the reasons Bonaventure gives

<sup>28</sup> Ferrara, "Ordination" 718.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* I would concede that the precise points from Bonaventure's treatment which are now regarded as pertinent were not reported in the tradition represented by manual theology. See, e.g., Joseph A. Wahl, *The Exclusion of Woman from Holy Orders*, Abstract of a Dissertation, Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology (Second Series) 110 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1959) 48, 53–54.

<sup>30</sup> I have attempted to elucidate some of the implications of Bonaventure's position as it relates to our contemporary inquiry regarding women's capacity for priestly ordination, in "The Priest as Sacrament of Christ the Bridegroom," *Worship* 66 (1992) 498–517.

<sup>31</sup> "Le Sacerdoce et la femme chez Saint Bonaventure," *Antonianum* 51 (1976) 520–27.

<sup>32</sup> Ferrara, "Ordination" 712. Bonaventure writes: "In hoc enim sacramento persona quae ordinatur significat Christum Mediatorem; et quoniam mediator solum in virili sexu fuit et per virilem sexum potest significari: ideo possibilitas suscipiendi ordines solum viris competit, qui soli possunt naturaliter repraesentare et secundum characteris susceptionem actu signum huius ferre." Ferrara excerpts this only up to the word "mediatorem." See Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.* d. 25, a. 2, q. 1, concl. (*Opera Theologica Selecta* [Quarrachi-Firenze: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1949] 4.639).

against the ordination of women is their incapacity for the office of bishop (an office to which the other orders lead): because the bishop is the *bridegroom* of the Church, a woman cannot become a bishop.<sup>33</sup> The special contribution of this "nuptial" argument is its potential for articulating the differentiation of the sexes as a relationship of complementarity oriented to self-gift, rather than a hierarchically structured relationship related to social status.<sup>34</sup>

For Bonaventure, sacramental signs must have some quality in common with the realities they signify. This principle is easily understood in the case of baptism and Eucharist. In the case of orders, by contrast, there is no "matter" in the strict sense; there is, however, an external sign which might be called the "element" or "sign" in a broad sense. In fact, the recipient of orders is himself the sign, a symbol of Christ. The truth of the sacrament requires, for Bonaventure, that the visible sign have a "natural resemblance" (i.e., correspond even by way of gender) with the one signified.<sup>35</sup>

#### *An Argument Common to Bonaventure and Thomas*

It seems that this argument from fittingness can be positively coordinated with St. Thomas's principles of sacramental theology and his view of priestly action *in persona Christi* in the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>36</sup> The common principle is that a sacramental sign should bear a "natural resemblance" to the reality signified, and the common presupposition is that the priest symbolizes Christ. *Inter insigniores* draws out the implications by claiming Thomas as well as Bonaventure in support of its theological argument from fittingness.

In Ferrara's view, the presentation of Thomas's argument from fittingness in *Inter insigniores* is "so completely bowdlerized as to be virtually indistinguishable from Bonaventure's symbolic argument that the ordained person is 'a sign of Christ.'"<sup>37</sup> He believes that the "natural resemblance" Thomas has in mind is, rather, the position of eminence in the ecclesial community appropriate to the male. This, he supposes, is an expression of the "faulty" argument based on the hier-

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 638.

<sup>34</sup> This is the line of development pursued by Pope John Paul II in *Mulieris dignitatem* nos. 23–27. The nuptial analogy relies on the symbolism of bodily sex, but understood as a specific, reciprocal capacity for the personal gift of self, not simply as physical or biological sex. I have drawn out some of the implications in "The Priest as Sacrament."

<sup>35</sup> Rezette provides this analysis ("Le Sacerdoce et la femme" 525–26.) A formal consideration of Bonaventure's position would have to take into account his other arguments, especially his appeal to the traditional view that a man, by reason of his sex, is a more fitting image of God.

<sup>36</sup> Bonaventure also teaches that it is because the priest speaks "*in persona Christi*" that he can say "my body" and "my blood" when he consecrates the Eucharist (*IV Sent.* d. 8, a. 1, q. 1, concl. [Quaracchi, *Opera* IV, 464]; cited by Rezette, "Le Sacerdoce et la femme" 527).

<sup>37</sup> Ferrara, "Ordination" 716.

archical relationship between the sexes that has been rejected, not on the priest’s sacramental role. “None of this has to do in any way, shape, or form with a ‘natural resemblance’ to Christ himself.”<sup>38</sup>

In my opinion, there is a genuine convergence in the thinking of these two great scholastics,<sup>39</sup> but it can be discovered only by allowing that both understood the priest to represent Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. I do not expect to demonstrate that Thomas provides an argument against the ordination of women based on “gender symbolism” (other than the faulty argument already discounted). I do intend to challenge Ferrara’s view that a non-representational, “apophatic” meaning is primary in Thomas’s use of the formula *in persona Christi*. I wish to show that Thomas regards the priest to be a sign as well as an instrument in the sacrament of the Eucharist, that he presents this mode of signification as unique, and that he understands the sacramental symbolism of persons as inclusive of the natural resemblance of gender.<sup>40</sup> This leads me to my detailed response to his article, “Representation or Self-Effacement?”

### *An “Apophatic” Understanding of “In Persona Christi”?*

Ferrara sets out to investigate Thomas’s use of the formula *in persona Christi* in light of his theories of instrumental causality and sacramental signification. He reports that Thomas uses it almost exclusively with reference to the celebration of the Eucharist, the supreme expression of the priestly office. Thomas teaches that ordination confers a sacerdotal character, that is, a spiritual power ordered to divine worship which is instrumental and ministerial. The priest, endowed with this instrumental power, is himself a kind of instrument; in the administration of the sacraments he operates not by his own power, but by the power of Christ. In consecrating the Eucharist he acts both by the power and in the person of Christ.

According to Ferrara’s analysis, this instrumentality prohibits rather than requires the priest’s representation of Christ. As instru-

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Ferrara proposes a distinction, in Thomas, between the priest’s hierarchical and his sacramental role (“Representation” 203). I would follow Bernard Dominique Marliangeas, who believes Thomas intentionally linked these roles (*Clés pour une théologie du ministère: In persona Christi, in persona Ecclesiae* [Paris: Beauchesne 1978] 227). On this same point, Ferrara’s claim that Thomas never invoked 2 Cor 2:10 in a eucharistic context cannot be supported; the key passage he dismisses directly refers to the New Testament priesthood in the context of offering sacrifice (*ST* 3, q. 22, a. 4 c).

<sup>39</sup> This might have come to full explicitation had Thomas lived to complete his *Summa theologiae*. In fact, we have only what he wrote in his Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, a work written some twenty years earlier. This article, *In IV Sent. d. 25, q. 2, a. 1*, was incorporated into the *Supplement* (Q. 39, a. 1) of the *Summa theologiae* by his disciples after his death.

<sup>40</sup> I will confine my inquiry, as Ferrara has, to the doctrine of Aquinas and its relation to what is proposed in current Catholic teaching. I will indicate page numbers from Ferrara’s article, “Representation,” in the text.

mental cause of the Eucharist, the minister "has no other act save the pronouncing of the words" of consecration.<sup>41</sup> Whereas in the other sacraments the minister utters the form in his own person, in this sacrament he effaces himself, for he pronounces the words "as if Christ were speaking in person." Ferrara concludes that the priest, uttering these words *in persona Christi*, appears "not as 'another Christ' but as 'another than Christ'" (201). Instead of adding "some kind of representation of Christ to the priest's mere instrumentality," he argues, this sacrament "reduces it to the barest minimum" (205).

Ferrara makes his case by appealing to the "anamnesitic" nature of the sacramental form. The presence and transcendent causality of Christ, the chief minister, is "sacramentally visible" not in the person of the priest but in his recital of Christ's words. The priest, in fact, "quotes" Christ: "in the quotation of Christ's words of institution by way of anamnesis, the 'I' of the priest steps aside in order to let the 'I' of Christ appear, the *persona* of the priestly narrator gives way visibly to the *persona* of Christ" (213). Claiming the authority of St. Thomas, Ferrara proposes that any positive representation of Christ by the priest would obscure the "sacramental visibility" of Christ, the true speaker of the words of consecration, and "to that extent would imply a merely symbolic rather than real presence of Christ [in the eucharistic elements]" (215).

Ferrara supports the point that the priest is "other" than Christ by insisting on the historical distance between the Last Supper and the Mass. In his view the visible, sacramental sign of the Eucharist (*sacramentum tantum Eucharistiae*) "has the form of an historical recollection in which the priest, in uttering the words of Christ by way of quotation, by that fact publicly and manifestly affirms the difference between the Last Supper and the Mass and his own nonidentity with, indeed, his radical otherness from, Christ" (211).

A key point in Ferrara's "apophatic" interpretation of *in persona Christi*, then, is that the priest "quotes" Christ but does not represent him. From this premise, he argues that the priest's instrumentality does not involve dramatic representation. This, in turn, leads to his conclusion that, "since the quoting has nothing whatsoever to do with 'taking Christ's role' dramatically and in fact expressly excludes it, neither has being a man" (211). The success of his thesis is entirely dependent on whether his initial premise is correct.

### *The Priest Does More than "Quote" Christ*

In Ferrara's view, the priest recites or reads aloud an historical narrative when he speaks the words of consecration. As evidence, he brings forward a text from the *Summa theologiae* 3, q. 78, a. 5: "The priest recites that Christ said: 'This is my body'" (207). Ferrara ex-

<sup>41</sup> ST 3, q. 78, a. 1 c.

plains: "The 'my' of 'This is my body' is antecedently included in the 'he' of 'he said'" (208).

Article 5 of Question 78 asks whether the formulas used to consecrate the eucharistic elements are really true. Thomas sets out to explain how they are true, in the face of objections regarding what "This" refers to (the bread? the objects of sense experience?) and the causal relation of the form to its effect. (That the priest *quotes* Christ is not the point at issue for him.) Thomas first affirms that the formulas are true because these words are pronounced *in persona Christi*.<sup>42</sup> He then proceeds to consider four opinions; three are unacceptable, the fourth, correct. The passage Ferrara cites—"The priest recites that Christ said: 'This is my body'" —is taken from the first opinion. What Thomas finds objectionable is the idea that the celebrant says "This" in a purely material sense, without intending to indicate anything present. In the next sentence he writes: "This view, however, cannot be sustained. If it were so, the words would have no reference to any present bodily material, and so there would be no sacrament."<sup>43</sup>

Ferrara takes from this only the point that the priest quotes Christ. He draws the conclusion that since the power of the sacrament lies in the words, no signification is required. According to Thomas, however, simply "quoting" Christ would be insufficient to accomplish the consecration, even if the celebrant were ordained. The priest must pronounce the words "as having signifying power (*significative*) and not in a purely material sense."<sup>44</sup>

Thomas teaches that the celebrant must pronounce the words "*simul et recitative et significative*."<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, the priest must recite the words of Christ in a material sense, and this he does *recitative*, that is, as the words of another.<sup>46</sup> Ferrara is quite right to insist on this dimension: the priest is entirely dependent upon Christ. Unless he quotes the words as Christ's, his speaking them would not refer to the Lord's own words and deeds at the Last Supper. The liturgy would be not a memorial, but a new and different sacrifice. The priest would not act *in persona Christi*, and the word "my" would refer to his own body and his own blood.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See *ST* 3, q. 78, sed contra.

<sup>43</sup> *ST* 3, q. 78, a. 5 c. (I am using the Blackfriars translation of the *Summa Theologiae* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963]).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> This expression is drawn from *In IV Sent.* d. 8, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 4 ad 4. Striking out beyond the thought of his predecessors, Gueric of St. Quentin and St. Albert the Great, Thomas adds the requirement of pronouncing the words *significative*. Marliangeas discusses this whole question (*Clés* 89–91).

<sup>46</sup> See Aimo M. Roguet, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, Somme Théologique, L'Eucharistie* (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1960) 1.393–405; henceforth referred to as Roguet, *L'Eucharistie*.

<sup>47</sup> Ferrara does not draw these conclusions, but seems in fact to promote what Thomas rejects, namely, the independence of the eucharistic celebration from the Last Supper and the differentiation of speakers in the form as uttered ("Representation" 210–11).

On the other hand, if all he did was to quote Christ, the word "This" would refer not to what lies before him, but to the elements transformed long ago at the Last Supper, leaving the elements on the altar unchanged. The liturgy would remain only a memorial of the Last Supper; it would not be its sacramental representation. So, in addition to quoting Christ the priest must say the words of Christ formally, *significative*, giving them the signifying power they would naturally have in his mouth. In order to do what Christ did at the Last Supper, it is just as necessary that the priest speak the words *significative* as that he speak them *recitative*.

The difference can be seen by comparing two cases: (1) a priest proclaims Paul's institution narrative (1 Cor 11: 23–26) from the lectern, and (2) a priest pronounces the words of institution at the altar. As a lector, he pronounces the words only materially, as the words of another. In the sacrament of the Eucharist, he pronounces the words of consecration both materially (as the words of another) and formally (as his own) at one and the same time.<sup>48</sup>

Thomas refutes the very position Ferrara defends, namely, that the causal influence of Christ is exercised through the words of institution alone, while the minister disappears to the point of becoming invisible before the person of Christ. For Thomas, Christ uses as instruments both the words and the priest. The person of the priest, in a certain manner, enters into the form of the sacrament, giving the form its instrumental value.<sup>49</sup> In his *Commentary on the Sentences* Thomas writes that "the instrumental power which serves to accomplish the eucharistic conversion is not only in the word, but also in the priest; but it is in each in an incomplete state, since the priest cannot consecrate without the word, nor can the word consecrate without the priest."<sup>50</sup>

By insisting that the words be pronounced *significative* Thomas maintains the effective, though instrumental, causality of the priest. By insisting that only a priest has the power to consecrate he shows that the priest himself enters into the constitution of the sacrament of

<sup>48</sup> Marliangeas shows that Thomas draws the idea of acting or speaking *in persona Christi* from a patristic tradition of biblical exegesis, which is rooted in 2 Cor 2:10 (*Clés* 33–60).

<sup>49</sup> *L'Eucharistie* 402. Roguet notes that Thomas is very aware of the temptation to assimilate the sacramental structure of the Eucharist to that of the other sacraments, especially the role of the minister of baptism to that of the minister of the Eucharist (*ibid.* 392–93).

<sup>50</sup> *In IV Sent.* d. 8, q. 2, a. 3, sol. 9, cited by Roguet (*L'Eucharistie* 402–3). Thomas notes that the priest has a greater similarity to the principal cause than the word, since he is a sign of Christ, but the word is in some respects more powerful than the priest inasmuch as it is the sign of the effect. He uses the analogy of a writer, who employs both his hand and his pen to write: the pen (like the word) is nearer to the writing, but the hand (like the priest) to the writer.

the Eucharist by taking Christ's role.<sup>51</sup> In the other sacraments, the priest as a minister of Christ pronounces the sacramental words in his own name: e.g. “I baptize you.” He exercises his own proper, though instrumental, activity.<sup>52</sup> Here, his ministry is self-effacing (Ferrara's point), and he does no more than supply the words of Christ. Still, he is indispensable precisely because of his ordination. The constitution of the sacrament of the Eucharist requires, as an essential component, the activity of one who is ordained to obey the command, “Do this in memory of me.” The causality of Christ is present not only in the words of institution but also in the person of the priest who gives sacramental visibility to Christ whose minister and instrument he is.

This sacramental visibility, for Thomas, includes not only the words but the actions of the priest. In celebrating this mystery, the priest acts *in persona Christi* when he consecrates, offers, and administers the sacrament. This leads to another point in Ferrara's analysis.

### *The Priest “Takes the Role” of Christ*

Ferrara objects to the idea that the priest represents or “takes the role of” Christ. As he sees it, Thomas stresses the priest's “otherness,” both personally and in his historical situation, from Christ. He contends that *Inter insigniores*, claiming the authority of St. Thomas, replaces this apophatic “otherness” with a theory of dramatic representation. But does the Declaration maintain that the priest “takes the role of” Christ in the manner of an actor in a historical drama, as Ferrara suggests (210)?

The Declaration does indeed speak of Christ's “role” being “taken” by a man, stating that “role” is the original sense of the word *persona* in the formula *in persona Christi*. And the Commentary released with the Declaration explains this use of *persona* in terms of “a part played in the ancient theatre, a part identified by a particular mask. The priest takes the part of Christ, lending him his voice and gestures.”<sup>53</sup> Admittedly, this seems to provide a basis for Ferrara's view that the analogy is “to an actor who plays the part of Christ in a historical drama” (210).

Assuming this to be the case, Ferrara uses the following example to compare the dynamics of dramatizing a historical event with the dy-

<sup>51</sup> Thomas explains that only a priest has the power of consecrating *in persona Christi* (ST 3, q. 82, a. 1). He states further that “the consecrating virtue is not only in the words of consecration, but also in the power delivered to the priest when he is dedicated and ordained (ibid. ad 1).

<sup>52</sup> Roguet insists on Thomas's distinction between acting “by the power” and “in the person” of Christ (*L'Eucharistie* 398). Ferrara agrees with this (“Representation” 203). Marliangeas, on the other hand, seems to suppose that Thomas identifies the two (*Clés* 129, 134).

<sup>53</sup> *Inter Insigniores* section 5 (13); Commentary 32.

namics of celebrating the Eucharist. In a drama about the Civil War, he points out, every effort would be made to abolish the difference between the actor and Abraham Lincoln; in the Mass, on the other hand, no effort is made to disguise the non-identity of the priest with Christ whose words he quotes. In the drama, moreover, every effort is made to abolish historical distance, so that the audience experiences "being there"; in the Mass, however, the past is recalled as past and historical distance is consciously affirmed. The liturgy is clearly not an historical pageant intended to reproduce the Last Supper, and the celebrant is quite evidently not disguised as Christ.<sup>54</sup> From this, Ferrara concludes that acting *in persona Christi* should not be interpreted as "taking Christ's role." In his judgment, the "anamnetic" form of the consecration serves to "rule out formally and completely the meaning assigned to the term *persona*" by the Vatican Declaration (209).

*Inter insigniores* is concerned, however, neither with the apophatic self-effacement described by Ferrara, nor with dramatic representation in the manner of a historical play, but with sacramental representation. And in this, I would argue, the Declaration is faithful to St. Thomas. It is clear to any onlooker that, although he is not an actor, the priest is ritually enacting Christ's part in relation to the other worshippers. He pronounces the words spoken at the Last Supper with the intention of doing what Christ did, and he accompanies his words with gestures (breaking, giving to eat and drink).<sup>55</sup> He presides as host at this sacrificial meal, in obedience to the Lord's command, just as Christ presided at that Supper. The voice which pronounces the words of consecration is not disembodied, but the speech of a person who stands in the midst of a community, taking the part of Christ in a way not shared by the others who are present.<sup>56</sup> Thomas does not hesitate to say that the priest enacts, or "bears" the image of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

The sacramental mode of representation is *sui generis*. On the one hand, the priest is not simply identical with Christ. On the other, there is a positive relationship of sacramental representation, not just between the words the priest speaks and the words Christ once spoke, and not just between what the ministerial priest does and what Christ once did, but also between the priest himself and Christ. This cannot be explained, as Ferrara would like, only in terms of "otherness" and "non-identity."

<sup>54</sup> In Ferrara's comparison, "Only a man (or an ungainly and heavily disguised woman) can play Abraham Lincoln; but anyone can quote the words of Christ" ("Representation" 211).

<sup>55</sup> Thomas argues that administering the sacrament belongs to the priest, just as the consecration does, for "he consecrates in the person of Christ, who consecrated his body at the Last Supper and also gave it to others to receive" (*ST* 3, q. 82, a. 3 c). See also Marliangeas, *Clés* 95.

<sup>56</sup> It seems Ferrara pays insufficient attention to the contextual situation of the priest vis-a-vis the worshipping assembly. Here is where the value of sexual differentiation comes into play, signifying sacramentally the relation of Christ and the Church.

<sup>57</sup> *ST* 3, q. 83, a. 1 ad 3.

According to Aquinas, it is the nature of the sacraments to be signs, and as signs they make the realities they signify present under “alien” forms.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, liturgical anamnesis looks to the past, and in fact recalls a real, concrete event in history, but it neither leaves the event in the past nor reproduces it in its natural condition. Rather, anamnesis makes the past event effectively present now. The virtue of this category lies precisely in its capacity to highlight the unity of the eucharistic celebration with Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross.<sup>59</sup> History is irreversible, so the historical event is not itself repeated, but by the Holy Spirit, and by means of signs, this very event becomes sacramentally present.<sup>60</sup>

When Thomas considers the role of the priest as minister of this sacrament, he calls attention not to historical difference but rather to the unity of the Eucharist with the sacrifice of the cross. In *ST* 3, q. 83, a. 1, he poses the question, “Is Christ sacrificed in this sacrament?” Then he considers a possible objection: “in Christ’s sacrifice priest and victim are the same. . . . Yet in the mass the priest and victim are not the same.” In the body of the article Thomas lays the foundation for his reply: “the celebration of this sacrament is a definite *image* representing Christ’s Passion, which is his true sacrifice”; when this commemoration is made “the work of our redemption is carried on.” Then, in answer to the third objection, he asserts that “the priest also bears Christ’s *image* (*sacerdos gerit imaginem Christi*), in whose person and by whose power he pronounces the words of consecration. . . . And so in a measure (*quodammodo*) the priest and the victim are the same.” Just as this sacrament in a certain way represents Christ’s passion, so the priest in a certain way represents Christ.<sup>61</sup>

According to Ferrara’s “apophatic” interpretation of acting *in persona Christi*, the “visible” sign is not the priest but the “anamnesic form,” that is, the “formal differentiation and subordination of speakers” which is evident when the priest, in the recitation of the words of consecration, quotes Christ” (212). We have already seen that the authority of Thomas cannot be claimed for this interpretation.<sup>62</sup> Ferrara

<sup>58</sup> Ansgar Vonier writes: “At no time do we deal in the Eucharist with Christ in his natural condition, *in propria specie*. . . . He must be there *in specie aliena* in order to safeguard the veracity of the sacrament as a sign” (*A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* [Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1960] 32).

<sup>59</sup> Jean Marie Tillard provides an excellent survey of the use of this concept in Catholic teaching since Vatican II; see his “Sacrificial Terminology and the Eucharist,” *One in Christ* 17 (1981) 306–23. One function of this biblical concept is to exclude the error that the Eucharist only “calls to mind” the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 314.

<sup>61</sup> Roguet speaks of a “dynamic, accidental, and transitory representation” of Christ by the priest in the eucharistic celebration (*L’Eucharistie* 399).

<sup>62</sup> This is the fundamental flaw in Ferrara’s thesis. More generally, there is something inherently problematic about the concept of an “apophatic” sacrament, for sacramental reality is inextricably linked with the Incarnation.

thinks Thomas's apophatic interpretation of *in persona Christi* rules out the Declaration's reading that the priest "takes the role" of Christ. I maintain that both Thomas and *Inter insigniores* refer to sacramental representation, not dramatic representation. But, granted that acting *in persona Christi* differs from dramatic representation, is there any basis in Thomas for thinking it requires gender correspondence between the priest and Christ?

### *Gender Symbolism and the Sacramental Sign*

Sacramental representation, I have argued, belongs to a different order than dramatic representation. The priest who "takes Christ's role" in the celebration of the Eucharist does what Christ did and pronounces his words. For this to have its sacramental effect, he must be ordained, but he need not be a good candidate for the lead role in "Jesus of Nazareth." Nevertheless, when *Inter insigniores* defends the fittingness of symbolic correspondence of gender, it appeals to Thomas's principle that sacraments represent what they signify by way of natural resemblance.<sup>63</sup>

Is there any evidence from Thomas that this principle extends to persons, as well as to things? The Declaration claims the authority of Thomas when it invokes this sacramental principle at a crucial point in its theological argument.<sup>64</sup> Three examples indicate how he takes this into consideration.

In the first example, Thomas judges that only someone in grave need of physical healing is competent to receive the sacrament of extreme unction (today, anointing of the sick), because the spiritual healing conferred by the sacrament is signified by way of bodily healing.<sup>65</sup> He would exclude, as unable to signify the grace of the sacrament, persons who are healthy or facing execution. There is obviously no reference to gender here, but this example serves to illustrate the principle. His point is that without a sick person the sacramental sign of Extreme Unction cannot be constituted. The visible sign of a person in need of healing is a precondition for signifying the grace of the sacrament which pertains not only to liceity but to validity. Thomas invokes this example to argue against the ordination of women, a case that turns on the relation of gender symbolism to sacramental reality.<sup>66</sup> It is perti-

<sup>63</sup> *Inter insigniores*, section 5 (12), citing Aquinas, *In IV Sent.* d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, q. 1 ad 4. Also see *ST Suppl.* q. 39, a. 3 ad 4.

<sup>64</sup> The Commentary notes that both Thomas and Bonaventure "require that the sign should have natural meaningfulness" (32). It also makes clear that maleness is thought to link the priest to Christ at the level of the visible sign (*sacramentum tantum*); the sacramental character of ordination (*res et sacramentum*), which is spiritual and invisible, is what constitutes the priest Christ's representative.

<sup>65</sup> *ST Suppl.* q. 32, a. 1.

<sup>66</sup> He teaches that the ordination of a woman would be invalid as well as unlawful. A

ment to our question, then, in that it establishes that persons enter into sacramental signification and that their bodily condition may be a relevant factor.

The second example is found in the question "whether a woman can baptize?"<sup>67</sup> In this case, Thomas explores the possible requirement of natural resemblance based on gender, but declares it irrelevant to the constitution of the sign. The person whose sexuality may possibly be symbolically meaningful in the constitution of this sacramental sign is the minister, not the recipient. The objectors think women are prohibited from baptizing on account of their sex, even in an emergency.<sup>68</sup> The first and second objections recall that women are prohibited from exercising public, authoritative pastoral functions.<sup>69</sup> The third argues that since spiritual regeneration imitates natural regeneration (the water symbolizes the waters of the mother's womb while the one who baptizes holds the position of the father), it is symbolically unfitting for a woman to baptize.

Thomas answers the question in the affirmative on the authority of Pope Urban II: a woman is permitted to baptize in case of necessity. Theologically, he solves this on the grounds that a woman who baptized would act as Christ's minister. Because Christ is the chief baptizer, and because "in Christ there is neither male nor female," a woman can baptize in an emergency, just as a layman can.<sup>70</sup> This solution relies on the argument that Christ is the principal cause, and the minister his instrument, a principle which also proves the capacity of the non-baptized to administer baptism.<sup>71</sup> The priest (or bishop) is the ordinary minister of the sacrament, but the principle of instrumentality is invoked in the case of emergency because baptism is necessary for salvation.<sup>72</sup> In response to the first two objections, Thomas teaches that public and authoritative pastoral services not ordinarily permitted to women are allowed in case of emergency. In response to the third he rejects the objector's premise about the need to signify spiritual generation by appropriate gender roles and repeats his appeal to instrumentality: the minister acts not by her own power but only as an instrument of Christ.

This example is extremely pertinent to our topic. At first it appears

woman is incompetent to receive orders, he explains, in the same way that a healthy person is incompetent to receive extreme unction.

<sup>67</sup> *ST* 3, q. 67, a. 4.

<sup>68</sup> This was commonly taught and enforced until the eleventh century.

<sup>69</sup> Here the gender symbolism is directly related to arguments which depend on a faulty anthropology, so I will not comment on them.

<sup>70</sup> The chief reason offered to explain the capacity of a layman is the fact that baptism, being necessary for salvation, must be accessible.

<sup>71</sup> See *ST* 3, q. 67, a. 5 on the capacity of a non-baptized person. This is another reminder that the notion of "minister" is analogous, not univocal.

<sup>72</sup> *ST* 3, q. 67, a. 3 makes this explicit. Article 4 alludes to this when it says that "just as a layman can baptize, as Christ's minister, so can a woman."

to support Ferrara's position. Thomas argues that there is no need for a symbolic correspondence of gender between Christ and the minister of baptism because the minister functions only as an instrument (by implication, not a representative) of Christ. Thomas excludes the necessity for "natural resemblance" based on the minister's capacity for symbolizing the "active," fatherly role in carnal generation. The spiritual generation of baptism, in other words, requires neither the sign of physical maleness nor the signification of authority that the medieval authors assumed was proper to males.

Ferrara cites this example in support of his case that Thomas's principle of instrumental causality, applied to the sacraments, positively excludes the representation of Christ by the minister (202). But I believe Ferrara's argument from baptism fails precisely because he overlooks the difference between acting by the power of Christ and acting by the power *and* in the person of Christ. Acting as the "minister of Christ" is not the same as acting *in persona Christi*.<sup>73</sup> In baptism, the form of the sacrament is pronounced by the minister, speaking in his own person, not *in persona Christi*. This confirms the teaching of *Inter insigniores* that the symbolic correspondence of gender is required only "in actions which demand the character of ordination."<sup>74</sup>

The third example is the question "whether the female sex is an impediment to ordination?"<sup>75</sup> Thomas bases his answer on the Pauline prohibition of women's teaching in Church and having authority over men, traditionally interpreted as excluding women from orders. He adds a point that would not touch on the validity of the sacrament, but only its fittingness, the traditional objection that women should not receive tonsure (1 Cor 11). He begins his theological argument by stating the principle that a sacrament requires the signification of the reality, then proceeds to develop an analogy. Just as in extreme unction it is necessary to have a sick person in order to signify the need of healing, so in orders the male sex is necessary, both for the liceity and validity of the sacrament, in order to signify eminence of degree. Since, in his view, a woman is unable to signify eminence of degree because she is in a state of subjection, she cannot receive the sacrament of order. This reasoning supplies evidence that Thomas relates the masculine symbolism of "being head" and the feminine symbolism of "being subject" explicitly to the question of sacramental realism.<sup>76</sup>

Is Thomas's understanding of the symbolic value of sexual difference

<sup>73</sup> *ST* 3, q. 78, a. 1, c; q. 82, a. 1, c and ad 2.

<sup>74</sup> Section 5 (13) and Commentary (31). A. G. Martimort discusses the implications of this point in his essay, "The Value of a Theological Formula 'In persona Christi,'" in *The Order of Priesthood: Nine Commentaries on the Vatican Decree Inter Insigniores* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1978) 85-97 at 92-94.

<sup>75</sup> *In IV Sent.* d. 25, q. 2, a. 1; see *ST Suppl.* q. 39, a. 1.

<sup>76</sup> The Commentary on *Inter insigniores* explicitly disowns such explanations to the extent that they are based on the conviction that women are inferior to men (22, 31). The Declaration itself is more cautious (section 1 [5]).

limited to this hierarchical consideration? Attention to the objections and responses suggests that it is not. The first objector argues that since women are eligible for the office of prophet, which is greater than than the priesthood, they should be eligible for the office of priest. Thomas's response points out the difference: prophecy is not a sacrament, so there is nothing to prevent a woman from receiving it; there is no signification involved, only the reality. He adds: "in matters pertaining to the soul woman does not differ from man as to the thing [res] (for sometimes a woman is found to be better than many men as regards the soul)." This underlines that what is in question is not one's potential for achieving spiritual pre-eminence, but precisely what is signified by one's sexuality.<sup>77</sup> This response is said to provide the solution to the second and third objections.

The second objector reasons that since women can achieve pre-eminence in other ways, such as by martyrdom or by religious life, and since they can exercise authority as abbesses (or, in the Old Testament, as judges of Israel), they should be eligible for orders. The third, closely aligned with the first, points out that since the power of orders resides in the soul, and "sex is not in the soul," sexual difference should be irrelevant to the reception of the sacrament. Again, Thomas replies that the impediment to ordination lies not in an incapacity for the reality of spiritual pre-eminence but in an incapacity, rooted in the bodily nature of being a woman, for symbolizing it. Thomas teaches, then, that female sex is an impediment to orders at the level of bodily signification. This is an impediment specific to sacramental signification.<sup>78</sup>

Thomas does not link this explicitly with an incapacity to signify Christ who is male, or with his speculations regarding the reason for a male incarnation. He does, however, claim that a certain resemblance to what is signified is a condition for sacramental signification which sometimes pertains to the validity of the sacrament, and that this principle extends to persons, for they participate, as minister or recipients, in the constitution of sacramental signs. The natural gender symbolism of women and men, in their bodily conditions (sickness) and bodily constitutions (sexuality), may also enter into these signs. In an emergency, women may baptize as "ministers of Christ." The principle of instrumentality governs this, for no external (sexual correspon-

<sup>77</sup> Contemporary feminist analysis inclines some to read into this a "soul-body" dualism, or to see in it reference to "biological sex" as opposed to "socially-constituted gender." It is likely that Thomas views this in the more classical manner (admittedly, entangled with "hierarchical" considerations), viz., that the bodily condition of being male or female bears a certain symbolism. While he does not agree, e.g., that spiritual generation in baptism needs to be symbolized by an appropriately male minister, he evidently accepts as a given the fact that male and female capacities for generation have symbolic value.

<sup>78</sup> Notice that Thomas does not prohibit women from exercising authority over men in the secular order (*ST Suppl.* q. 39, 1 ad 3).

dence) or internal (sacramental character) configuration to the person of Christ is required of the minister. In the case of priestly ordination, however, the principle of signification comes into play; it explains why the sacrament cannot be validly conferred on a woman. Whereas we rightly reject the hierarchical understanding of sexual differentiation Thomas appeals to, it is possible that we can imagine another, non-hierarchical, way of understanding the complementarity of the sexes that may illuminate the reasonableness of this determination.

*Inter insigniores* neither accepts nor employs Thomas's "subordinationist" explanation of masculine-feminine symbolism. It draws instead on his general principle that sacramental signs must be perceptible and recognizable, and on his teaching that they represent what they signify by way of natural resemblance. Thomas does not, like Bonaventure, appeal explicitly to the need for symbolic correspondence between the priest and Christ on the level of sex. When he calls him the "image" of Christ, he refers to the fact that the priest is configured to Christ, in ordination, by means of a sacerdotal character, an invisible, spiritual sign (*res et sacramentum*). But since the sacrament of orders must be visible on the level of the sign (*sacramentum tantum*), he may also have in mind the fact of being ordained and of "taking the role of Christ" vis-a-vis the community.<sup>79</sup>

*Inter insigniores* specifies that symbolic correspondence of gender is required of the priest "in actions which demand the character of ordination and in which Christ himself, the author of the Covenant, the Bridegroom and Head of the Church, is represented, exercising the ministry of salvation."<sup>80</sup> It locates the "natural resemblance" to Christ effected by the priest's maleness not at the level of dramatic representation, but at the level of sacramental signification. This outward sign makes his actions vis-a-vis the congregation perceptible as Christ's actions. Maleness links the priest to Christ at the level of the sign, a sign established by the fact of the Incarnation and bound up with the mystery of God's covenant love.

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas required that the sign have natural meaningfulness in these two respects (Commentary, 32). He considered the priest's action *in persona Christi* chiefly in its distinction from and relation to his action *in persona Ecclesiae*. See Marliangeas, *Clés* 89-140. Thomas is more inclined to conceptualize the relation of Christ to the Church as that of Head to Body than that of Bridegroom to Bride. It appears to me that this explains why gender symbolism, taken in the sense of the natural differentiation of the sexes, does not occupy a significant place in his reasoning.

<sup>80</sup> Section 5 (13). Thomas uses these same three images—head, shepherd, bridegroom—in discussing the need for holy orders as a service to the Church's unity, linking the sacramental and hierarchical ministry of the ordained to Christ's service (*Summa contra Gentiles* 4.76.7).