THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

CHRISTOPHER KACZOR

[Almost all scholars deny that Aquinas had an account of development of doctrine and most also believe that his theology is simply incompatible with doctrinal development. As a result, Aquinas's theology has fallen out of favor with many contemporary theologians rightly concerned with doctrinal development. The author argues that Aquinas's account of the nature of the articles of faith as derived from Scripture excludes any exhaustive understanding of revelation thereby opening the door to development. Aquinas foreshadowed aspects of the logical, organic, and historical approaches to development of doctrine elaborated by later theologians.]

S ELDOM IS THE NAME Thomas Aquinas associated with doctrinal development. I would like to propose that, contrary to the views of some, Thomistic theology is in fact compatible with development of doctrine and further that Aquinas himself provided resources for understanding development. Thomas's teaching on development as logical deduction, organic assimilation, and historically situated is to be found in no single place and must be gleaned, if it is to be known at all, from various passages in the Thomistic corpus. This article describes and systematizes Aquinas's *obiter dicta* remarks pertaining to the development of doctrine which he always understood as the unfolding of implicit teaching into more explicit formulation and reflects on the importance of the Thomistic account for contemporary thinking on development.

Of course, everyone recognizes that Aquinas developed Christian wisdom in significant ways, and as Bernard Lonergan and Jean Pierre Torrell pointed out,[1] Aquinas's own organization and presentation of this wisdom

CHRISTOPHER KACZOR received his Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame. He is currently assistant professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. A specialist in medieval thought and ethics, he has published articles in a number of journals including *International Philosophical Quarterly, Josephinum Journal of Theology, The Thomist,* and *Theological Studies* (1998). He edited *Proportionalism For and Against* (Marquette University, 2000) and has authored *Proportionalism and the Natural Law Tradition* (CUA Press, 2002).

[1] See, for example, Lonergan's doctoral dissertation *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,* ed. J. Patout Burns, intro. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971). Here Lonergan argued that on the question of operative grace Aquinas changed his mind a number of times.

changed in the course of his career. The autograph manuscripts show that Aquinas constantly revised and edited his work. Historical studies have indicated the development of Aquinas's views from his early commentary on Lombard to his mature *Summa theologiae.*[2]

However, doctrinal development understood as a consideration of how Christian teaching changes and develops over time is usually thought to have arisen in the 19th century with Johann Adam Möhler and most especially John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and to have been reconsidered in the 20th century through the work of Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Avery Dulles. In fact, this focus on history and development in Christian teaching is often understood in opposition to medieval approaches since this attention seems to presuppose an historical consciousness arising in the 19th century.[3] The consensus of many distinguished scholars including Jan Hendrik Walgrave,[4] Per Erik Persson,[5] Henri de Lubac,[6] and Avery Dulles[7] is that Aquinas had no account of development.

Though I do not share their view, their position is a reasonable one. Clearly, Thomas did not consider development of doctrine as an explicit theme of theological reflection as do contemporary theologians. There are no questions expressly devoted to the subject found in the *Summa theologiae* or elsewhere in the *corpus thomisticum.* Development simply was not a locus of medieval discourse. Moreover, a fundamental aspect of Thomistic theology has led some scholars to conclude that indeed Aquinas could not have had resources for a theory of development, namely Aquinas's understanding of theology as rooted in the literal sense of Scripture. How would this exclude development of doctrine?

As Avery Dulles has pointed out,[8] Aquinas's view of theology as based in the literal sense of Scripture and of revelation as propositional limits the

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Alternations are visible sometimes even within one work as the manuscript evidence makes clear. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work,* trans. Robert Royal (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1996) 101.

[2] See A. F. von Guten, "In Principio Erat Verbum: Une évolution de saint Thomas en théologie trinitaire," in *Ordo sapientiae et amoris: Image et message de Saint Thomas d'Aquin,* ed. Carolos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1993) 119–41.

[3] See Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 46.

[4] Jan Hendrik Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* (Philadelphia: Westminister, 1972) 114.

[5] Per Erik Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) 60, 81.

[6] Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996) 258–59.

[7] Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church* 46.

[8] Ibid.

developments that can take place within Thomistic theology. Aquinas believed that public revelation ended after the death of the last apostle and that nothing may be added or taken away from this definitive revelation to them.[9] Aquinas held that knowledge of the holy mysteries of God increased throughout time in preparation for Christ but "at last, at the consummate time, the perfect teaching of Christ [was] set forth on earth."[10] With Christ comes the fullness of revelation and not even the apostles themselves may deliver another faith than that given by Christ.[11] The apostles had the fullness of truth as those who were closest to Christ: "those who first handed on the faith most perfectly understood it since the Apostles were most fully instructed concerning the mysteries of faith."[12] This revelation is transmitted to us in a definitive way through Holy Scripture the essential points of which are summarized in the Apostle's Creed.[13] The teaching of Christ and the Apostles is sufficiently explicated and transmitted in the creed of Nicea.[14] For Dulles, Aquinas's account of a definitive revelation written down in a definitive form does not leave room for development of doctrine.

On the other hand, these considerations must also be tempered with what Aquinas said elsewhere. Aquinas clearly asserted that the Church's understanding of the truths of faith grows deeper over time. Later Fathers of the Church had a more explicit knowledge of the articles of the faith than earlier Fathers and the creeds of the Church grew longer and more detailed. This development of faith the Angelic Doctor viewed as essential: "it was necessary to promulgate confessions of faith which in no way differ, save that in one it is more fully explicated which in another is contained implicitly."[15] The accent for Aquinas is characteristically on continuity, but the recognition of development is clear. The problem of development arises in reconciling this assertion with his account of the special understanding of the apostles. How can more explicit, later expositions of the creed be reconciled with the apostles having the fullness of knowledge? Can a more implicit knowledge be a more full knowledge? If the later Fathers of the Church teach more explicitly what the earlier Fathers taught

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[9] Thomas remarks on the completeness of revelation of Christ in Scripture in *ST* 3, q. 64, a. 2 ad 3; *In III. Sent.* d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, 1 ad 5.

[10] *Summa contra gentiles* 4. 55 [12].

[11] *ST* 3, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3.

[12] *ST* 1-2, q. 1, a. 7, ad 4. Inexplicably, Walgrave does not cite this article that poses the question "Utrum secundum successionem temporum articuli fidei creverint," though he cites the following reference. See also, *Disputed Questions on Truth* 2, q. 14, a. 12 ad 6.

[13] *In III. Sent.* d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, 3; *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 9, ad 1.

[14] *In III. Sent.* d. 25, q. 2, a. 2, 1, ad 5; *De pot.* 10, 4, ad 13.

[15] *ST* 1, q. 36, a. 2, ad 2. Translations of Latin are mine unless noted otherwise.

implicitly, why should the Sacred Page be of greater importance than the writings of the Church Fathers, which have only probable authority according to Aquinas? There are a number of possible ways to answer these questions along with corresponding difficulties for each. These questions and others have led to various models of how doctrine develops.

Avery Dulles in his book *The Resilient Church* describes three prominent models of development. In the logical model, revelation is understood propositionally and further developments must arise through logical deductions from previous teaching. This version of doctrinal development Dulles attributes to Marín-Sola as well as earlier thinkers such as Bishop Bossuet, Luis de Molina and Gabriel Vasquez.[16] In the early 20th century, M. M. Tuyaerts, O.P., and Charles Boyer, S.J., exemplified the logical approach.[17] Although the logical approach enabled theologians to illustrate a tight connection between apostolic teaching and the contemporary doctrine of the Church in the development of some dogmas (i.e. that Mary is the Mother of God), it had difficulties showing that the Immaculate Conception and Assumption were logically entailed from anything in the ancient apostolic tradition. An organic approach to development exemplified by John Henry Newman and Johann Adam Möhler of Tübingen argued that more than mere logical analysis leads to the development of the Church's understanding of revelation. Various theories are given as to what constitutes this "more." Karl Rahner, for example, suggested that we abandon the propositional account of revelation and consider revelation a self-communication of the divine that the faithful understand through a kind of global intuition. Finally, there is the historically situated approach to development advocated by Dulles and Lindbeck which views development of doctrine as reformulations of church teaching in each age to reflect the needs, concerns, and outlooks of each age. Lindbeck writes: "The Church's doctrines are thought of as the products of a dialogue in history between God and his people and as the historically conditioned and relative responses, interpretations and testimonies to the Word addressing man through the scriptural witnesses."[18] The needs of the Church in the moment and the concrete situation dictate the course of the unfolding doctrinal change. Unlike the previous two accounts, this model of development, in some versions at least, explicitly allows for "reversals" or "contradictions" of earlier teaching in later periods when the prior formulations no

[16] Dulles, *The Resilient Church* 47, 49.

[17] M. M. Tuyaerts, *L'Évolution du dogme: Étude théologique* (Louvain: Editions Nova et Vetera, 1919); Charles Boyer, "Qu'est-ce que la théologie? Réflexions sur une controverse," *Gregorianum* 21 (1940) 264–65.

[18] George A. Lindbeck, "Doctrinal Development and Protestant Theology," in *Man as Man and Believer,* ed. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Concilium* 21 (New York: Paulist, 1967) 138–39, as cited in Dulles, *A Resilient Church* 51.

longer adequately respond to current needs. This model also characteristically rejects the propositional account of revelation.

Aquinas's treatment of development, when recognized at all, is usually characterized by admirers and detractors alike as merely deductive. Though Aquinas did not portend the three models in every particular, careful reading of Thomas may discern elements of all three non-mutually exclusive approaches to development, which Thomas understood as an unfolding from implicit teaching to explicit teaching.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE AS LOGICAL DEDUCTION

Interestingly, although Aquinas did recognize that development of doctrine could come about through logical deduction, sometimes it is thought that he recognized no other way in which our understanding of revelation could advance.[19] Indeed, though a few neo-Scholastics argued that logical deduction was the only way to preserve continuity with apostolic teaching, even most neo-Scholastic writers had a richer notion of development.[20] Nevertheless, logical deduction is one aspect of the unfolding from implicit to explicit teaching, an aspect Aquinas did not overlook. Aquinas gave a prime example of this use in the *Prima pars:*

For regularly in sacred Scripture it should be held that what is said concerning the Father, should be understood concerning the Son, even if the exclusive speech is added, save only in those things in which the Father and the Son in opposite relations are distinguished. For since the Lord, in Matt. 11, says: No one knows the Son save the Father, it is not excluded that the Son knows himself. Therefore, when it is said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, even if it were to be added that he proceeds only from the Father, the Son in this way is not excluded because in this respect, that which is the principle of the Holy Spirit, Father and Son are not opposed, but only concerning this, that the former is the Father and the latter is the Son.[21]

Here we have a teaching that follows logically from what has been previously accepted. As Aquinas noted earlier in the passage, the logically posterior teaching is implicit in the prior, explicit teaching: "We ought not to

[19] See Thomas Rausch, "Doctrinal Development," in *New Dictionary of Theology,* ed. Joseph Komonchak et al. (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989) 280–83; and Jan Walgrave, *Unfolding Revelation: The Nature of Doctrinal Development* 114, and passim.

[20] As Henri de Lubac makes clear in his essay "The Problem of the Development of Dogma" the approach to development as involving logical deduction alone was never widely endorsed and had few adherents. The vast majority of neo-Scholastic theologians agreed with Newman that a more organic or "vitalistic" approach was necessary. See de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996) 248–80.

[21] *ST* 1, q. 36, a. 2, ad 1.

say about God anything which is not found in Holy Scripture either explicitly or implicitly. But although we do not find it verbally expressed in Holy Scripture that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son, still we do find it in the sense of Scripture."[22] As Aquinas commented next, whatever predication applies to the Father, applies to the Son, except those predications that distinguish Father from Son. The procession of the Holy Spirit applies to the Father and is not a predication that distinguishes Father from Son. Thus the procession of the Spirit can be predicated of Father and Son. Another example of this type of inference may be seen in the declaration of Mary as Mother of God. From the prior teachings, "Mary is the mother of Jesus" and "Jesus is God," comes the now explicit teaching "Mary is the Mother of God." Aquinas uses a deductive method in his treatment of Christ's will. As Stephen Brown notes: "From the premises that Christ is God and man, for example, he deduced the truth that Christ has two wills, by adding the premise that every intellectual nature has its proper will."[23] Clearly, in Aquinas's writing, the move from implicit to explicit teaching sometimes has this clear, deductive, logical meaning.

However unlike some advocates of the logical model of development, for Aquinas the notion of the "implicit" is much more rich than the notion one finds in certain neo-Scholastic authors who demand that doctrinal developments be logically implicit in prior statements, much in the way that "unmarried" is logically implicit or analytically contained in "bachelor." For Aquinas, the death and Resurrection of Christ is contained implicitly in the existence and especially the providence of God.[24] Indeed, all the articles of faith are implicit in the belief in God and God's providence.[25] Clearly, his notion of implicit must involve more than mere logical derivation. Aquinas would retain the idea that doctrine can be developed by logical analysis, but would want to enrich the movement from "implicit" teaching to "explicit" teaching to include much more than mere logical analyticity.

THE ORGANIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

In the organic approach, doctrine develops through the assimilation and incorporation of "foreign" elements as well as what Newman called "the growth of ideas" which lead to a deeper understanding and explanation of the Gospel message. Although the apostles had greater understanding of

[22] Ibid.
[23] Stephen Brown, "Declarative and Deductive Theology in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Miscellanea mediaevalia* 26 (1998) 648–55, at 649. See also his "Peter of Candia's Hundred-Year 'History' of the Theologian's Role," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991) 156–74.
[24] *ST* 2-2, q. 2, a. 7, ad 3.   [25] *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 7.

faith because of special graces received, in particular that of proximity to Christ, later Church Fathers developed what was implicit in apostolic teaching in a more differentiated theology because of (1) the growth of philosophy, (2) the emendation of the liturgy, and (3) the evolution of language. The Church incorporates these elements over time leading to deeper understandings and fuller expressions of *sacra doctrina.*

In Aquinas's account of theology, philosophical reason enters into this science by demonstrating the truth of the preambles of faith, by removing objections to the faith by showing them to be erroneous or at least unnecessary, by providing useful analogies to clarify what is difficult to understand, and by proving the truth of doubted articles of faith from undoubted ones.[26] The science of theology does not depend on other sciences for its first principles but uses other sciences as aids.[27] In this, theology imitates Scripture itself that employs secular traditions of wisdom. Aquinas remarks on passages in Paul's letter to Titus, in First Corinthians, and in Acts which quote the words of pagans Epimenides, Menander, and Aratus.[28] Clearly, philosophy aids theology, which in turn aids in the formulation of doctrine. The truths of the faith cannot be understood completely without the work of reason. "Reason sees immediately certain things, which are *per se nota,* in which are contained implicitly certain other things which it is not possible to understand save through the work of reason, by explaining those things which are contained implicitly in the principles."[29] As Aquinas noted the deficiency of the human mind, and not of the divinely revealed truth, leads theology to draw on other sciences to clarify its teaching and aid in human assent to this truth.[30]

Aquinas clearly recognized that philosophic knowledge might grow over time. There is progress in understanding from the presocratics, to Socrates and Aristotle, and from them to Avicenna and Averroes.[31] As Aquinas wrote in his *Commentary on the Ethics*:

If someone should busy himself investigating the truth for a period, he will be aided in the discovery of truth by the passage of time. This is true in the case of the same person who will understand subsequently what he had not understood before, and also for different persons, as in the case of a man who learns the things discovered by his predecessors and adds something himself. In this way improvements have been made in the arts, in which a small discovery was made first and afterwards

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[26] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8.   [27] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2.

[28] Thomas Aquinas, *De trinitate,* q. 2, a. 3, sc1.

[29] *Disputed Questions on Truth* 2, q. 11, a. 1, ad 12.

[30] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2; *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2. On this, see too Mark Johnson, "God's Knowledge in Our Frail Mind: The Thomistic Model of Theology," *Angelicum* 76 (1999) 25–46.

[31] *ST* 1, q. 44, a. 2. Thomas continues writing about the progress of philosophy through Plato to Aristotle. See too, *De sub. Sep.* c. 9.

notable advances were made by the efforts of various men, each looking upon it as a duty to supply what is lacking in the knowledge of his predecessors.[32]

There is no reason to think that this process of growth cannot continue indefinitely. Thus we can say safely that theology, in so far as it uses philosophy or any other science in the ways mentioned earlier, may also increase in precision and clarity over time. And in so far as theology develops, our understanding of doctrine itself may become more complete. Progress in philosophy may continually open new horizons; so the process of development cannot, in this life, ever be said to be closed or complete.

Secondly, doctrine may also develop for Aquinas through the liturgy. Although sometimes theology informs liturgical practice,[33] other times liturgical practice informs theology. Aquinas frequently uses the practice of the Church in worship as a *sed contra* authority.[34] For example, in considering the question of whether the Mother of Jesus was sanctified before birth, Aquinas wrote: "The Church celebrates the feast of our Lady's Nativity. Now the Church does not celebrate feasts except of those who are holy. Therefore even in her birth the Blessed Virgin was holy. Therefore she was sanctified in the womb."[35] The liturgy guided Aquinas's theological reflection, especially on the sacraments.

Aquinas was historically aware enough to realize that the liturgy develops over time.[36] Walter H. Principe in "Tradition in Thomas Aquinas's

[32] Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri ethicorum,* b. 1, lectio 11, 133; Litzinger translation.

[33] *ST* 3, q. 83, a. 3, ad 6. "Formerly the priests did not use golden but wooden chalices; but Pope Zephyrinus ordered the mass to be said with glass patens; and subsequently Pope Urban had everything made of silver." Afterwards it was decided that "the Lord's chalice with the paten should be made entirely of gold, or of silver or at least of tin. But it is not to be made of brass, or copper, because the action of the wine thereon produces verdigris, and provokes vomiting. But no one is to presume to sing mass with a chalice of wood or of glass because as the wood is porous, the consecrated blood would remain in it; while glass is brittle and there might arise danger of breakage; and the same applies to stone. Consequently, out of reverence for the sacrament, it was enacted that the chalice should be made of the aforesaid materials." (Dominican Fathers' translation.) Here the most ancient tradition is suppressed (drinking from wooden chalice) and modern ones preferred based on papal authority as well as the fittingness of having liturgical vessels that better take into account the reverence due and the care one should take with the sacred species.

[34] *ST* 3, q. 72, a. 4; q. 72, a. 12; q. 78, a. 6, etc. See also Liam G. Walsh, "Liturgy in the Theology of St. Thomas," *The Thomist* 38 (1974) 557–83 for numerous references as well as a treatment of Thomas's understanding and uses of liturgy.

[35] *ST* 3, q. 27, a. 1, sed contra.

[36] See *ST* 3, q. 80, a. 10, ad 5 and *ST* 3, q. 80, a. 12 for Aquinas's account of historical practices with respect to reception of the Eucharist. See also *Super primam epistolam ad Corinthios,* chap. 11, v. 25, lect. 6.

Scripture Commentaries," noted that ecclesiastical traditions are authoritative but not so authoritative as the Gospel itself by which these traditions are to be judged.[37] And yet as Principe pointed out, the early tradition of the Church establishes *the* form of the sacrament of the Eucharist, though this form is variously expressed in Paul, Matthew, and Luke. As Aquinas remarked: "For the Evangelists intended to recite the words of the Lord in so far as they pertain to history, not in so far as they are ordained to the consecration of the sacraments, which took place in secret in the early Church on account of the infidels."[38] For Aquinas, the liturgy of the Church understood here as an aspect of the tradition coming from the Apostles and developed in the living ecclesial practice informs the reading of Scripture and establishes liturgical practices that are aspects of reflection and indeed loci of authority for theology.

Thirdly, Aquinas was cognizant of the way in which language shapes the formulations of the articles of faith. In various passages, Aquinas understood "implicite" in terms of figures of speech and signs. The move from implicit to explicit is, in this instance, a move from figurative speech to literal speech. He wrote:

Divine things ought not be revealed to man save according to their capacity: otherwise an occasion of a fall is given to them, for they condemn those things which they do not understand. And for this reason it was useful that divine mysteries be handed on to an unsophisticated people under a kind of veil of figures so that thus they might know these things at least implicitly while by these figures they were devoted to the honor of God.[39]

Aquinas understood the meaning of implicit in terms of being known "under a veil of figures."[40] He characterized the use of these figures, here and elsewhere, as a pedagogic tool for instructing the unlearned.[41]

In the passages just mentioned, Aquinas referred to the development from the understanding of God accessible to Old Testament figures to a clearer revelation of God's triune nature in the New Testament. Yet, the development occasioned by language occurs not merely before but also after the apostles. Of this, Aquinas was aware, and, indeed, he was a prime contributor to this shift. The shift is from true but undifferentiated language about God to language that is more exact and precise. Church Coun-

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[37] Walter H. Principe, C.S.B., "Tradition in Thomas Aquinas's Scripture Commentaries," in *The Quadrilog: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism: Essays in Honor of George H. Tavard,* ed. Kenneth Hagen (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1994) 43–60, at 49–50.

[38] *Super primam epistolam ad Corinthios,* chap. 11, v. 25, lect. 6.

[39] *ST* 1-2, q. 101, a. 2, ad 1.

[40] For other examples see: *ST* 1-2, q. 107, a. 3, ad 1; *ST* 2-2, q. 2, a. 8.

[41] *ST* 1-2, q. 2, a. 8

cils before him introduced non-scriptural terms such as *homoousion, Theotokos,* and *Trinitas* in order to clarify the meaning of Scriptural passages vis-à-vis rival interpretations. Aquinas continued this tradition appropriating in so many places Aristotelian terms, or terms such as transubstantiation that arise from Aristotelian roots, to clarify and differentiate positions that truly accord with Scripture and Church teaching from those that do not.[42] G. Geenan, O.P., notes that Aquinas: "felt duty bound to show that, as a matter of fact, these new words [not of Biblical origin] corresponded in their own way to the words of Scripture."[43] Aquinas was well aware of his extraliteral usage. Geenan continues:

"Tradition" has a real place in the theology of Aquinas, since at times it is due to Tradition alone that we can arrive at an understanding of the Scriptures and that we can demonstrate that, even Scriptural texts, which at first sight and *secundum litteram* seem to affirm the contrary of revealed doctrine, express in fact this revealed doctrine such as it is taught by the Church. The "*Filioque*" a formula of extra-scriptural origin, contains "expressly" and explicitly what was not found in Scripture except "*per sensum.*"[44]

The shift from implicit to explicit is first the shift from figurative Old Testament language to literal New Testament proclamation and then the move from literal but less differentiated language to a more precise language that works to exclude rival interpretations of Holy Scripture. Thus, precision of language aids the development of doctrine.

In contrast to certain organic accounts of development, for Aquinas theology must always remain based in the literal sense of Scripture which reveals to us certain propositional truths. Unlike the Apostles, most of us do not have an experience of direct self-communication with the Divine, but rather our communal cognitive understanding of what God has said and done for us comes to us through the mediation of Scripture and tradition. The apostles experienced first hand the risen Christ and proclaimed, through their preaching, this experience to others. Though Aquinas would share with the organic model the insight that the understanding of this revelation in the Church is ongoing through the direction of the Holy Spirit, he believed that revelation is given to those who are not Apostles propositionally unlike some advocates of the organic account of development.

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[42] See e.g. *ST* 3, qq. 73–81, on the Eucharist.

[43] G. Geenan, "The Place of Tradition in the Theology of St. Thomas," *The Thomist* 15 (1952) 133.

[44] Ibid. 133–34.

DEVELOPMENT AS HISTORICALLY SITUATED

Sacred doctrine proceeds from a revelation from God that is for the salvation of humanity.[45] For Aquinas, sacred doctrine is a science that treats primarily God and creatures in so far as they are related to God, who is their efficient and final cause.[46] The articles of faith (*articuli fidei*) which are given by a higher science, the very wisdom of God, articulate the first principles of theology.[47] These articles (the Creed) express those things in the content of Sacred Scripture that are necessary for our belief.[48] It is important to note that this science, this wisdom of *sacra doctrina* is *for a purpose*: "I respond it should be said that *what was needed for human salvation is a certain teaching concerning divine relevation beyond the natural knowledge investigated by human reason.*"[49] If sacred doctrine is to save the individual, it must be proportioned to the individual, for according to the Thomistic axiom everything received is received in the manner of the receiver. Revelation is intended to save singular, distinct persons living in diverse contexts, with various intellectual presuppositions. The expression of sacred doctrine must therefore change so that it can save people in contexts that differ from the context of the apostles. Theology thus becomes an act of *evangelizare* in the medieval sense. Hence, what is implicit in our conception, exposition, and formulation of sacred doctrine must develop in history and become explicit if sacred doctrine is to achieve its purpose.

Perhaps the most powerful historical influence on the formation of doctrine, for Aquinas are the *heretici*. It is often human weakness, misunderstanding, or doubt that prompts doctrinal development.[50] Aquinas followed Augustine in describing the way in which heretics challenging the faith furnish an opportunity for the Church to clarify teachings and make explicit what was previously covert.[51] Aquinas echoed this understanding in a number of places. In the *Secunda secundae* he argued: "since perverse men pervert apostolic teaching and the Scriptures to their own damnation, as it is written in Second Peter 16; therefore there is need with the passage of time of an explanation of the faith against arising errors."[52] Doctrinal

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[45] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 1 sc.   [46] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1.
[47] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 8; *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 6, ad 1.
[48] *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 9, ad 1.
[49] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 1, emphasis in the original.
[50] It should also be noted that doubt furnishes the occasion of distinguishing articles (*ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 6).
[51] Augustine in the *Confessions* wrote: "Improbatio quippe haereticorum facit eminere quid ecclesia tua sentiat et quid habeat sana doctrina" (VII, 19).
[52] *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 10, ad 1.

development is for Aquinas, as for Augustine, an "explanatio fidei contra insurgentes errores" which means in effect that heresy influences the formulation of doctrine not merely as an occasion for reflection but also by substantial contribution, albeit a dialectical one.[53] Thus, doctrine develops in reference to highly specific and historically emergent circumstances.

Aquinas also recognized the influence of historical context on the shaping of doctrine.[54] Though it would be anachronistic to portray Aquinas as having the "historical consciousness" associated with Hegel, Darwin, or Newman, a failure to recognize elements of these insights in the Thomistic corpus would also be mistaken.[55] Aquinas took into account how the historical situation of the Church influenced formulation of the Nicene and the Apostolic creeds:

The creed of the Fathers is declarative of the Apostles' Creed, and was also fashioned when the faith was manifest and the Church at peace, for this reason it is sung publicly at Mass. However, the Apostles' Creed, which was drawn up at a time of persecution, when the faith was not yet public, is said privately in Prime and Compline, as if against the darkness of past and future errors.[56]

The Church, having peace at a later time, declares more publicly its credo (which explains, perhaps, its greater length) which during a time of persecution retained a greater brevity. Aquinas also suggested that the temporal conditions of the Church influence the way in which the liturgy is performed and therefore doctrine presented.[57]

The *Prooemium* of the *Contra errores Graecorum* exemplifies both Aquinas's understanding of historical context and the effect heresy has on doctrine. Having been asked by Urban IV for an expert opinion of a *Libellus de processione Spiritus Sancti et de fide trinitatis contra errores Graecorum* published by Nicholas of Durazzo the bishop of Catrone, Aquinas replied in his own work also entitled, *Contra errores Graecorum.*[58]

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[53] A frequent theme in his treatment of this subject, Aquinas repeated this elsewhere; see *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 10 ad 1.

[54] Pace, Walgrave for instance who writes: "[For medieval theologians,] the 'authorities' of antiquity were not viewed in their historical setting and succession, but only as building blocks for their dialectical constructions or doctrinal systems" (114).

[55] The topic of the existence or lack of an "historical consciousness" among medieval intellectuals and common folk depends in great part on what is meant by the term. A discussion of the possible meanings of the term and its application or lack of application to persons in the Middle Ages is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

[56] *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 9 ad 6.

[57] See *Super primam epistolam ad Corinthios,* chap. 11, v. 25, lect. 6.

[58] For contextualization and interpretation of this work, see James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino,* rev. ed. (Washington: Catholic University, 1983) 389; and

Aquinas noted that expressions that sound orthodox in Greek often do not sound orthodox in Latin. Though the Greeks and Latins share the same beliefs, they do not share the same language in which those beliefs are expressed. One must then, in translating, preserve the meaning, but change the words or mode of speaking.[59] In other words, as the faith is put into the words of various cultures, its linguistic form may change. In addition, the context and audience of remarks must be taken into account in order to understand charitably the true intention of the author. In the preface to *Contra errores Graecorum* he wrote:

Since errors arising concerning the faith gave an occasion to the doctors of the Church that matters of faith might be passed on with greater care for the elimination of arising errors; it is clear that holy teachers who were before Arius did not so speak concerning the unity of the divine essence as teachers who followed. And similarly it happens concerning other errors, not only among diverse teachers but even in that most excellent of teachers Augustine, it appears clearly. For in the works that he composed after the heresy of the Pelagians arose, he spoke more cautiously concerning the freedom of the will than he had in the books which he composed before the aforementioned heresy arose. In those books in which he defends the freedom of the will against the Manicheans, he said certain things which the Pelagians, opponents of divine grace, took up in defense of their errors. And so it is no wonder, after the rise of various errors, if modern teachers of the faith speak more cautiously and seemingly perfectly concerning the doctrine of faith so that all heresy might be avoided. Hence, if some things in the writings of ancient teachers is found which is not said with as much caution as maintained by moderns, they are not to be condemned or cast aside; but it is not necessary to embrace these things, but interpret them reverently.

Errors are the occasion of handing on the teaching of the Church regarding a certain matter with greater care (*majori circumspectione*). This care results in a difference in expression between those teachers writing before heresy versus those after the heresy. Aquinas cited the example of the Fathers before and after Arius regarding the unity of the Divinity. Aquinas noted that that this event occasioned a new article of the creed to emerge: "For Arius believed in the omnipotent and eternal Father: but he did not believe in the equality and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father; and therefore it was necessary to add an article concerning the person of the Son in order to settle this matter."[60] Of course, prior to Arius there was, so

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Mark D. Jordan, "Theological Exegesis and Aquinas's Treatise 'against the Greeks'," *Church History* 56 (December 1987) 445–56; and Leo J. Elders, "Thomas Aquinas and the Fathers of the Church" in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West,* ed. Irena Backus (New York: E. J. Brill, 1997).

[59] See prologue of *Contra errores Graecorum* 45–71.

[60] *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 8, ad 3. Arius enim credidit Patrem omnipotentem, et aeternum: sed non credidit Filium coaequalem, et consubstantialem Patri; et ideo necessarium fuit apponere articulum de persona Filii, ad hoc determinandum.

to speak, no matter to be settled. The clarified and developed teaching only emerges out of an historically contingent moment—the arrival of Arian teaching.

Aquinas saw these shifts in presentation not only with respect to the Church's teaching as a whole but also in respect to individual Fathers of the Church. The teaching of those earlier Fathers that seem erroneous from a later perspective is not to be rejected, but interpreted reverently (*reverenter*). Aquinas repeated this injunction in his *Commentary on John:* "Now although what is said here by these holy men is orthodox, care must be taken to avoid the reproach which some receive for this. For the early doctors and saints were so intent upon refuting the emerging errors concerning the faith that they seemed meanwhile to fall into the opposite ones. For example, Augustine speaking against the Manicheans, who destroyed the freedom of the will, disputed in such terms that he seemed to have fallen into the heresy of Pelagius."[61] Augustine's teachings about the will shifted when the encroaching heresy was Pelagianism rather than Manicheanism. Historical context makes a difference both in understanding past teaching and in presenting present teaching.

For Aquinas, these developments were entirely appropriate for even the Scriptures themselves are partially in response to heretical errors arising in the early Church. Aquinas showed an awareness that the Johannine Gospel responds to a particular crisis of Christian faith. In the prologue to his commentary he wrote:

For while the other Evangelists treat principally of the mysteries of the humanity of Christ, John, especially and above all, makes known the divinity of Christ in his Gospel. . . . He did this because, after the other Evangelists had written their Gospels, heresies had arisen concerning the divinity of Christ, to the effect that Christ was purely and simply a man, as Ebion and Cerinthus falsely thought. And so John the Evangelist, who had drawn the truth about the divinity of the Word from the very fountain-head of the divine breast, wrote this Gospel at the request of the faithful. And in it he gives us the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and refutes all heresies.[62]

Thus, as long as false understandings of revelation occur, there will be a stimulus for understanding more deeply revealed truths. "And these errors, for all that, exercised the talents of the faithful toward a more diligent penetration and understanding of divine truth, just as the evils which occur in creatures are ordered by God to some good."[63]

[61] Thomas Aquinas, *On Faith and Reason,* ed. Stephen Brown (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) 259. *In Johannem,* lecture 7, 174; trans. J. A. Weisheipl and F. R. Archer.
[62] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John,* Part I, trans. J. A. Weisheipl and F. R. Larcher (Albany: Magi, 1980) 26.
[63] *Summa contra gentiles* 4, chap. 55 [9].

Although Aquinas recognized that historically contingent circumstances influence the liturgical and doctrinal life of the Church, unlike Lindbeck's account of development, for Aquinas, a council in restating and reformulating Church teaching does not and cannot reverse or contradict earlier teaching but rather fulfills and makes explicit what was earlier implicit.

It should be said that in any council whatsoever some creed was instituted on account of some error that is condemned in the council. Hence a later council was not making another creed than the first, but that which is implicitly contained in the first creed is explained against the existing heresy through certain additions. Hence in the judgment of the synod of Chalcedon it was said that those who were gathered in the Council of Constantinople handed down the teaching on the Holy Spirit, not insinuating that there was anything lacking in their predecessors who had gathered together at Nicaea, but declaring their understanding of the Holy Spirit against heretics. What therefore in the time of ancient councils was not yet necessary is posited here explicitly. But later it was expressed, with the rising error of certain people, in a Council gathered in the West by the authority of the Roman pontiff, by whose authority the ancient councils were also gathered and confirmed. It was contained nevertheless implicitly when it was said that Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.[64]

Those Fathers of later councils hand down determinations which were "not implying that there was anything wanting in the doctrine of their predecessors who had gathered together at Nicaea, but *explaining what those Fathers had understood of the matter.*" The implicit is the unstated intention of those authors; the explicit is what the later councils, guided by the Spirit, judge the earlier councils would have said had they been confronted with the historical situation. The Church judges the new teaching either a valid interpretation of Scripture or an earlier creed *or* a heresy in respect of these in light of previous precedent as determined by the authority of the pope.[65] For Aquinas, though the particulars of history and the situation occasion the development of doctrine, true developments never involve a rejection of previous teaching. In this, he would have agreed with John Henry Newman who characterized one note of authentic development in his *Essay on Development* as that which "illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds."[66]

A POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO DULLES'S OBJECTION

How might one respond to the objection that arises from Dulles's proper recognition that Thomas thought apostolic teaching was sufficient for our

[64] *ST* 1, q. 36, a. 2, ad 2.

[65] *ST* 2-2, q. 1, a. 10; see also Yves M.-J. Congar, O. P., "Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Infallibility of the Papal Magisterium," *The Thomist* 38 (1974) 81–105.

[66] John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989) 200.

instruction? Does this exclude doctrinal development? For Aquinas, the first principles of theology are the articles of the creed and the creed in turn summarizes what is found in Scripture. Like other medieval theologians, the Angelic Doctor recognized many senses of Scripture. Aquinas rooted his account of theology in the literal sense of Scripture, and what the author intends to communicate constitutes the literal sense.[67] Since God is the author of Scripture, Aquinas following Augustine held that there might be multiplicity of true meanings intended by God in the literal sense of Scripture.[68] Divine authorship of Scripture leads the text to have a profound depth of meaning unlike any other.

When combined with other Thomistic theses, namely God's perfect simplicity and the inability of any human being to comprehend God's essence, it follows that a complete understanding of the many true meanings of the literal sense is and will always remain elusive. God's incomprehensible essence is one with God's understanding, will, and intention. As God is beyond comprehension, so the Word of God is beyond comprehension. Scripture therefore must always remain mysterious in a way no other text is. Thus, even brief phrases of Scripture are filled with deep meaning. For example, in commenting on the passage *factus ex muliere* in his commentary on Galatians, c.4, lesson 2, Thomas unpacks deep christological significance out of this one phrase arguing that it excludes both Nestorianism and Valentinianism as well as shows that Mary is the Mother of God.[69] Examples could be multiplied indicating Thomas's confidence in the pregnant meaning of the literal sense, a meaning that even the human author may not fully appreciate. In the words of Aquinas: "since the prophet's mind is a defective instrument, as stated above, even true prophets know not all that the Holy Ghost means by the things they see, or speak, or even do."[70] Aquinas's account of Scripture's divine authorship ensures that we could never have a definitive understanding of the text, for a human being could never fully comprehend the divine intention which is nothing else than the divine essence.

In addition, there is always need of an explanation of Scripture. "The purpose of Scripture," wrote Aquinas, "is the instruction of people; however this instruction of the people by the Scriptures cannot take place save through the exposition of the saints."[71] There is no new public revelation but there will frequently be need for a fresh explanation of revelation

[67] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 10; *De potentia,* q. 4, a. 1.
[68] *ST* 1, q. 1, a. 10.
[69] Throughout this section I am much indebted to Leo Elder's article, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Holy Scripture" forthcoming in a volume about Aquinas and his sources edited by Timothy Smith.
[70] *ST* 2-2, q. 173, a. 4, [English Dominican Province translation].
[71] *Quodlibet* 12, q. 16, a. unicus [27].

situated in a new time and place and tailored for a specific audience. This needed explanation (*interpretatio sermonum*) by the saints is a gift of the Holy Spirit.[72] Aquinas noted elsewhere in terms of understanding this revelation, "the faith is able to be better explained in this respect each day and was made more explicit through the study of the saints."[73] Given the ever changing audience, the telos of Scripture cannot be reached without an ever adapting interpretation or development. Therefore, it is not just that the nature and the purpose of Scripture for Aquinas allow for doctrinal developments, but rather that the nature and purpose of Scripture invite such development.

RELEVANCE OF AQUINAS'S ACCOUNT OF DEVELOPMENT

The question of development of doctrine is arguably the most important question facing the contemporary Church. How does one simultaneously be faithful to the original *kerygma* while at the same time adapting to existing needs and circumstances? How can one adhere to tradition but not be stymied by it? Which changes faithfully develop previous teaching and which changes undermine what was taught in the past? Omnipresent in the background of particular matters of dispute in the contemporary Church is the issue of doctrinal development.

How does Aquinas fit into this discussion? A number of Catholic thinkers have an inclination to "freeze" theology as if no or only the most minimal development is possible, and this petrifaction sometimes finds a Thomistic justification. In the words of Avery Dulles: "In the past few centuries it began to appear as though the positions of Thomas Aquinas on most points were destined to become the positions of the Church for the rest of time. With its high degree of systematization and its tenacity in adhering to the patristic and medieval tradition, Catholicism became par excellence the Church of historical continuity. . . ."[74] A resistance to development may be linked with a harkening back to Thomas Aquinas, a recommendation one finds often in magisterial pronouncements from Leo XIII through John Paul II. The Second Vatican Council decree on priestly formation writes: "[B]y way of making the mysteries of salvation known as thoroughly as they can be, students should learn to penetrate them more deeply with the help of the speculative reason exercised under the tutelage of St. Thomas."[75] In *Fides et Ratio,* John Paul II adds that: "the Church has been justified in consistently proposing Saint Thomas as a master of

[72] Ibid.; *Summa contra gentiles* 3, 154 [19]; *In 1 Cor.* 12, lect. 2.
[73] *In III Sent.* 25, 2, 2, 1, ad 5.
[74] Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (New York: Image, 1973) 176.
[75] *Optatam totius* no. 16.

thought and a model of the right way to do theology."[76] But some have seemed to equate following Thomas with a strict adherence to 13th century formulations and theologies. However, if Thomas himself has some account of development, then in vain may Thomas be appealed to in rejecting development per se. Thus, a link between Thomas or Thomism and a petrified theology would not be a historically justifiable one. To be faithful to Thomas is to be open to development.

On the other hand, the allegedly rigid Thomistic system that attracts some Catholic intellectuals repels many others. Some theologians may have rejected the Thomistic approach on the assumption that it lacks any historical awareness, is closed as such to new insights, and cannot in principle respond to the chief theological challenges of contemporary times. That Thomas Aquinas no longer enjoys the status he once did, especially in Catholic departments of theology, is evident. This shift away from the Thomistic approach among many contemporary theologians, though not as prevalent among moral theologians, resulted from a number of factors but may be partially based on an presupposition that Aquinas simply cannot contribute to renewal.[77] However, if Aquinas does indeed have some account of development and if the Thomistic method can make use of contemporary historical resources, then the Thomistic approach in theology may be, after all, a legitimate contemporary model and not merely a chapter in historical theology. Theologians of the 21st century when turning to the findings of contemporary archeologists, biblicists, and hermeneuticists or when considering possible developments of doctrine are not thereby committed to abandoning the Thomistic conception of theology.

This Thomistic approach opens up new avenues in the discussion of development of doctrine itself in at least two ways. First, certain organic and historically situated accounts of development of doctrine are sometimes accused of roaming very far from the ancient sources, especially Sacred Scripture. Such perceived distancing from some of the chief sources of Christian wisdom can cause not just ecumenical strains but also seem to belittle the definitive importance of the Scripture for theology. In the

[76] *Fides et ratio* no. 43; see also the pope's address to the International Pontifical Athenaeum Angelicum (17 November 1979) in *Insegnamenti* II, 2 (1979) 1177–89; his address to the participants of the Eighth International Thomistic Congress (13 September 1980) in *Insegnamenti* III, 2 (1980) 604–15; address to the participants at the International Congress of the Saint Thomas Society on the doctrine of the soul in Saint Thomas (4 January 1986) in *Insegnamenti* IX, 1 (1986) 18–24. Also the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Ratio fundamentalis institutions sacerdotalis* (6 January 1970) 70–75 in *AAS* 62.

[77] On the shift away from Thomistic thought in Catholic circles and an evaluation of its rationale, see Ralph McInerny, *Thomism in an Age of Renewal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1968); and John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* no. 61.

words of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*: "Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology."[78] Doubtless contemporary readings of Scripture would often conflict with Thomas's, but the role Scripture plays in Thomistic theology is profound. Thomas's theology arises from ancient creeds that are nothing else than summaries and interpretations of the Scriptures. His approach to development, linked as it is with Scripture, provides the flexibility needed to account for the historical record of Christian teaching without losing unity with the ancient sources.

Secondly, it is characteristically assumed that the propositional account of revelation must be linked to the logical account of development and that in order to adopt the organic or historically situated model of development the propositional account of revelation must be abandoned. Although it may not be entirely adequate to say that Thomas had a "propositional" account of revelation, Aquinas's account of development suggests that one need not abandon the propositional model of revelation in order to have the organic or even the historically situated account of development. Since Aquinas viewed Scripture's literal sense as reflecting the intention not just of the human author but of God, the literal sense ends up with a plenitude of meaning that allows the flexibility needed for the organic and historically situated accounts. In the end, the propositional account of revelation may be found defective, but it cannot be found defective on the ground that it excludes the full range of developmental theories demanded by an honest appraisal of the historical record.

CONCLUSION

Aquinas in some sense had an account of the development of doctrine, understood for him as the unfolding of implicit to a more explicit teaching. Prima facie, there is a difficulty reconciling Aquinas's belief that the Apostles have the most full knowledge of the mysteries of faith and that earlier Fathers have a more implicit faith than later Fathers of the Church. Aquinas acknowledged both truths. The Apostles having intimate association with the Risen Christ as well as special graces allowing them to fulfill their vocation know Jesus in a privileged way. But reflection on the rev-

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[78] *Dei Verbum* no. 24.

elation recorded in Scripture offers believers the chance for a participation in the *scientia* of God, but this *scientia* is an imperfect participation.

The deep riches of Scripture, the primary source upon which Aquinas's theology is based, both excludes reversals or denials of the text as well as opens the possibility for ever deeper understanding of the truths and the Truth therein contained. Aquinas, indeed, foreshadowed aspects of the logical, organic, and historical approaches to development of doctrine elaborated by later theologians. Unlike Newman, Aquinas did not provide "notes" or other criteria for distinguishing true developments from corruptions of doctrine. However, like Newman, he recognized that theology and doctrine are open to development. Although the substance of faith remains the same, the number of articles, the faith's explicit formulation and articulation, develops over time. Though it would be exaggerated to suggest that Aquinas handled the theme with the same sophistication or historical awareness as later authors such as Newman or Rahner, it would also be exaggerated to suggest St. Thomas had no sense whatsoever of the development of doctrine.[79]