

## Liturgical Prayer and the Theology of Mercy in Thomas Aquinas and Pope Francis

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### Abstract

Thomas Aquinas' theology of mercy is deeply marked by the liturgical tradition of the Order of Preachers, incorporating many explicit and implicit references to liturgical prayers in praise of God's mercy. This article explores the liturgical context of Thomas Aquinas' theology of mercy, demonstrating the influence of the Dominican liturgy on Thomas' understanding and articulation of mercy and showing the subsequent influence of Thomas on Pope Francis' theology of mercy.

### Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, attributes of God, collect, Pope Francis, Dominican liturgy, liturgy, mercy, omnipotence

Thomas Aquinas' theology of mercy is deeply marked by the liturgical tradition of the Order of Preachers, incorporating many explicit and implicit references to liturgical prayers in praise of God's mercy. Like countless Dominicans before and after him, Thomas would have participated in the liturgical ceremony of reception into the order by prostrating himself on the floor of the chapter room and answering the question "What do you seek?" with the evocative plea "God's mercy and yours."<sup>1</sup> In this article, I will explore the thirteenth-century liturgical context of Thomas Aquinas' treatment of mercy, demonstrating the pervasive influence of the Dominican liturgy in Thomas' understanding and articulation of mercy. I will first give

1. Antoninus Hendrik Thomas, ed., "Constitutiones Antiquae Ordinis Fratrum Predicatorum," in *De oudste Constituties van de dominicanen: Voorgeschiedenis, tekst, bronnen, ontstaan en ontwikkeling (1215–1237)*, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 42 (Louvain:

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a brief description of the relationship of Thomas' Dominican liturgical context to the broader Western liturgical tradition. I will then give an overview of the pervasive role of liturgical orations within Thomas' writings. Next, I will focus on two liturgical prayers which appear to have been particularly influential on Thomas' understanding of mercy, giving a diachronic account of their appearance in Thomas' writings. I will conclude with a consideration of the influence of Thomas Aquinas' liturgical theology on the understanding of mercy articulated by Pope Francis in the bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the Prayer of Pope Francis for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

## Dominican Liturgical Practice in the Thirteenth Century

Before, during, and after the twenty-year period that constituted his academic career, Thomas Aquinas was continually engaged in the liturgy of the church. As a Dominican friar and priest, Thomas was obliged and privileged to recite the canonical hours of the Divine Office and to celebrate the Eucharist according to the rite of the Order of Preachers standardized in the mid-thirteenth century. Far from being a mere obligation, however, the liturgy appears to have been a fruitful source and foil for Aquinas' meditation on the Christian faith. As Yves Congar has pointed out, Aquinas *loved* to cite certain liturgical texts (particularly those related to divine mercy) and to search for support for Christian doctrines in the liturgical practices of the church.<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Order of Preachers developed a standardized liturgical practice that would endure in a substantially similar form through the early seventeenth century and thenceforth in a modified form until the adoption of the *Missale Romanum* after the General Chapter of 1968.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas entered the order before the definitive promulgation of the revised Dominican liturgy in 1256, and

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Bureel van de R.H.E. Universiteitsbibliotheek, 1965), 304–69 at 324 (dist. 1, ch. 14): “Recipiendi ad nos venientes, secundum tempus quod discretio prelati vel quorundam seniorum providerit, ducantur in capitulum. Qui cum adducti fuerint, prosternant se in medio capituli. Et interrogati a prelato quid querant, respondeant: *Misericordiam Dei et vestram.*”

2. In the context of discussing the collect “Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas,” Congar states that “S. Thomas aime citer ce texte,” offering several references to his use of it; see Yves Congar, “La miséricorde, attribut souverain de Dieu,” in *Les voies du Dieu vivant: Théologie et vie spirituelle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1962), 61–74 at 70. In the context of discussing Aquinas' broader appeal to the liturgy, Congar states that “il aime à chercher dans cet usage, dans des faits ou des textes liturgiques, une indication en faveur de doctrines ou de croyances chrétiennes”; see Yves Congar, “Faits, problèmes et réflexions à propos du pouvoir d'ordre et des rapports entre le presbytéral et l'épiscopat,” *La Maison-Dieu* 14 (1948): 107–28 at 107.
3. For a brief overview of the history of the Dominican liturgy, see Innocent Smith, “Dominican Chant and Dominican Identity,” *Religions* 5 (2014): 961–71. Cf. Simon Tugwell, *Humberti de Romanis Legendae Sancti Dominici*, Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica 30 (Rome: Institutum Historicum Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 2008), 1–51; Eleanor Joyce Giraud, “The Production and Notation of Dominican Manuscripts in Thirteenth-Century Paris” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2013), 1–14.

thus would have experienced the pre-1256 Dominican liturgy in addition to his experience or awareness of the local variations of the liturgy practiced at Montecassino,<sup>4</sup> Naples, Paris, Cologne, Orvieto, and Rome.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas Aquinas' early life in the Dominican Order has remarkable correspondences with the development of the uniform Dominican liturgy. At the time of Thomas Aquinas' entry into the Order of Preachers in April 1244, the friars were in the midst of a process of liturgical standardization that would not reach its definitive form until 1256 with the promulgation of a uniform Dominican liturgy. During his years at Paris from 1245 to 1248, Thomas would have become familiar with Humbert of Romans, who served as the provincial of the Province of France from 1246 to 1254 and who crafted an Office lectionary and who may have participated in the liturgical revision undertaken by four friars from different provinces of the order in 1246.<sup>6</sup> During his period of teaching as a bachelor of the *Sentences* at Paris from 1252 to 1256 and as a master in theology from 1256 to 1259, Thomas was living with the friars who were producing the uniform liturgy promulgated in 1256 under the direction of Humbert, now serving as Master of the Order (1254–1263).<sup>7</sup> Given the sensitivity which he shows to liturgical texts throughout his writings, his famous liturgical piety,<sup>8</sup> and the liturgical genius he displays in his own original liturgical compositions for the Office of Corpus Christi, it seems likely that Thomas would have been well abreast of the liturgical developments going on in his midst in Paris in the 1240s and 1250s.

In the course of the preparation of a *tesina* on the subject of Thomas Aquinas and the liturgy,<sup>9</sup> I produced an index of the orations found in the *Missale conventuale* of

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4. Cf. Thomas Forrest Kelly, *The Ordinal of Montecassino and Benevento: Breviarium sive Ordo Officiorum, 11th Century*, Spicilegium Friburgense 45 (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2008).
  5. For a comprehensive biographical account of Thomas Aquinas, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Vol. 1, The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2005).
  6. See Tugwell, *Humberti de Romanis Legendae Sancti Dominici*, xx; cf. Edward Tracy Brett, *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Society*, Studies and Texts 67 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 9.
  7. Tugwell, *Humberti de Romanis Legendae Sancti Dominici*, 15, argues that Humbert directed the process of revision at Paris in 1255. Giraud, "The Production and Notation of Dominican Manuscripts in Thirteenth-Century Paris," 51–88, draws attention to similarities between academic book production practice in mid-thirteenth-century Paris and the production of the exemplar manuscripts for the Dominican liturgy of 1256.
  8. Thomas was known for celebrating the Mass with great devotion each day and would often attend a second or third Mass as well. On several occasions he seems to have experienced mystical raptures in the course of celebrating the Mass. For documentation concerning Thomas' liturgical piety, see Kenelm Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959), 19–20, 41–46, 55–56, 63. Cf. André Duval, "Les larmes de frère Thomas," *La vie spirituelle* 147 (1993): 721–25; English translation: "The Tears of Brother Thomas," trans. Cassian Derbes, *Dominicana* 54:2 (2011): 62–69.
  9. Innocent Smith, "In Collecta Dicitur: The Oration as a Theological Authority for Thomas Aquinas" (S.T.L. Tesina, Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception [Washington, DC], 2015).

the mid-thirteenth century Dominican liturgy,<sup>10</sup> including a full transcription of each oration, a collation of the Dominican prayers with the sources found in the *Corpus Orationum* and the collection of orations by Placide Bruylants,<sup>11</sup> and preliminary indications of similarities between the Dominican orations and other manuscripts indexed in the *CO* collection. Based on this research, several indications can be given concerning the relationship between the Dominican repertoire of orations to the broader Latin liturgical tradition.

The *Missale conventuale* includes 1021 orations: 363 *oratio*, 311 *secreta*, 311 *post-communio*, and 36 *super populum* orations. Of the 1021 orations, 1012 may be identified with prayers presented in *CO* (out of the 6829 prayers included in *CO*), and 982 have correspondences with the Bruylants collection (out of the 1197 included in Bruylants).

The Dominican repertoire of liturgical orations appears to be substantially similar to the broader tradition of the Latin liturgy and has many correspondences with the Gregorian sacramentary tradition that forms the basis of the Missal of the Roman Curia (fundamentally subsumed into the *Missale Romanum* of 1570–1962). Nevertheless, many distinctive features appear in the Dominican repertoire, including distinctive phrasing in many prayers (sometimes shared in common with other sources indexed in *CO* and sometimes not) and some individual prayers that are not found widely in other collections.<sup>12</sup>

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10. An abbreviated form of this index with incipits and explicits for each oration is forthcoming in Innocent Smith, “The Orations of the Medieval Dominican Liturgy,” in *The Medieval Dominicans: Books, Buildings, Music, and Liturgy*, ed. Eleanor Giraud and Christian Leitmeir (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).
  11. Edmond Eugène Moeller, Jean-Marie Clément, and Bertrandus Coppieters ‘t Wallant, eds., *Corpus Orationum*, 14 vols., Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 160–160M (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992–2004); Placide Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel Romain: texte et histoire*, 2 vols. (Louvain: Centre de Documentation et d’Information Liturgiques, 1952); reprinted with changed pagination but identical enumeration in Manlio Sodi, Alessandro Toniolo, and Placide Bruylants, eds., *Liturgia Tridentina: Fontes–Indices–Concordantia: 1568–1962*, Monumenta Liturgica Piana 5 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 1–556. Although in many respects superseded by the *Corpus Orationum*, Bruylants’s collection remains relevant for future research on liturgical orations due to its conclusion of certain prayers that are somewhat haphazardly omitted by *CO* (for instance, the solemn prayers of Good Friday) as well as its attention to later editions of the *Missale Romanum*, including the important variations between the 1570 and 1604 editions of the *Missale Romanum*. In each entry shared in common by *CO* and Bruylants, the number of the Bruylants edition is helpfully indicated by the editors of *CO* with the prefix “Br.”
  12. Interesting parallels may be found between certain textual variations (compared with the *CO* versions) of the prayers in the *Missale conventuale* and the following sources indexed in *CO* (for further information on these manuscripts referred to here by their *CO* sigla, see the introductory material in each volume of *CO*): Adelp, Aquilea, Arbuth, Bec, Cantuar, Gemm, Herford, Lateran, Leofric, Lesnes, Mateus, Nivern, Otton, Pamel, Praem, Rossian, Sarum. Several of these sources (Arbuth, Aquilea, Herford, and Sarum) are indexed from post-thirteenth-century sources and thus may be influenced by the Dominican liturgy, although in some cases (especially Sarum) they may predate the Dominican liturgy in liturgical sources other than those indexed in *CO*.

## Liturgical Orations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas

In my study of Aquinas' liturgical citations, I have been able to identify nearly fifty places in his corpus where Thomas explicitly or implicitly refers to twenty-three distinct liturgical orations taken from throughout the liturgical year and ceremonies of the medieval Dominican liturgy. Thomas appeals to the liturgy in a variety of theological contexts. In the case of liturgical orations, he appeals most often to these texts in the context of discussing the sacrament of the Eucharist (12 times),<sup>13</sup> divine attributes of omnipotence and mercy (10 times),<sup>14</sup> and eschatology (9 times).<sup>15</sup> In addition to these contexts, Thomas avers to liturgical orations while discussing sin,<sup>16</sup> prayer,<sup>17</sup> angelology,<sup>18</sup> Christology,<sup>19</sup> charity,<sup>20</sup> grace,<sup>21</sup> and joy.<sup>22</sup> Thomas refers to liturgical collects most frequently within the *Summa Theologiae* (19 times) and the *Scriptum super Sententiis* (18 times), in addition to ten references within his scriptural commentaries and two references in quodlibetal and disputed questions. Given their relative frequency elsewhere in his writings, it is significant that Thomas apparently never refers to a liturgical collect within the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.<sup>23</sup> My research confirms that Thomas draws on a variety of texts that he prayed on a regular basis within his daily liturgical experience as a Dominican friar and priest, but also shows that these prayers would have also been familiar to those participating in other Latin liturgical traditions. When Thomas' liturgical documentation is considered within the wider context of thirteenth-century theology it reveals a marked interest in liturgical sources understood as authoritative statements of the church.

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13. See *In 4 Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 1, ad 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1, s.c. 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 2, arg. 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 2, arg. 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 12, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 2, arg. 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 12, q. 3, a. 1, qc. 1, s.c. 1; *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 73, a. 1 (hereafter cited as *ST*), s.c.; *ST* 3, q. 73, a. 2, arg. 1; *ST* 3, q. 73, a. 2, ad 1; *ST* 3, q. 79, a. 3, arg. 1; *ST* 3, q. 83, a. 1, co.; *ST* 3, q. 83, a. 2, arg. 5.
14. See *In 4 Sent.*, d. 46, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 3, arg. 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 46, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 1, s.c. 2; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 46, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 3, s.c. 2; *ST* 1, q. 25, a. 3, arg. 3; *ST* 1–2, q. 113, a. 9, s.c.; *ST* 2–2, q. 21, a. 2, co.; *ST* 2–2, q. 30, a. 2, arg. 1; *ST* 2–2, q. 30, a. 4, co.; *In Mt.*, c. 9 l. 6; *In Mt.*, c. 20 l. 2.
15. See *In 2 Sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 8, co.; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 4, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 6, arg. 2; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 45, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 4, arg. 1; *In 4 Sent.*, d. 45, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 2, ad 4; *ST* 1, q. 23, a. 7, co.; *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 7, a. 9, sc 7; *Quodlibet* 3, q. 11, ad s.c.; *In Ier.*, c. 33, §6; *In Heb.*, c. 7, l. 4.
16. See *In 2 Sent.*, d. 36, q. 1, a. 4, s.c. 1; *In Job*, c. 5; *In Ps* 48, §3.
17. See *In 1 Tim.*, c. 2 l. 1; *ST* 2–2, q. 83, a. 17, co. (citing two distinct prayers).
18. See *In 1 Sent.*, d. 37, q. 3, a. 1, s.c.; *ST* 1, q. 52, a. 1, s.c.
19. See *In 3 Sent.*, d. 3, q. 5, a. 1, arg. 3; *ST* 3, q. 31, a. 5, arg. 1.
20. See *In 3 Sent.*, d. 30, q. 1, a. 2, arg. 2.
21. See *In Mt.*, cap. 18 l. 3.
22. *ST* 2–2, q. 82, a. 4, s.c.
23. Cf. Gilles Emery, "The Treatise of St. Thomas on the Trinity in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*," in *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti: Sapientia, 2003), 71–120, at 92: "Finally, it should be pointed out that with the exception of the Filioque, Thomas at no point calls upon the authority of the church, the Councils, or the Fathers [in writing on the Trinity in the *Summa contra gentiles*]. Throughout all these pages, Scripture provides its own interpretation."

## Orations about Mercy in Thomas Aquinas

Throughout his writings, Thomas makes a relatively large number of references to two particular collects which are thematically and textually related. For ease of reference, I will refer to the first as the “Omnipotence” collect, and the second as the “Proper” collect.

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### *CO 1952: Oratio for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity (“Omnipotence” Collect)*

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Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas, multiplica super nos gratiam tuam, ut ad tua promissa currentes, caelestium bonorum facias esse consortes.<sup>24</sup>

○ God, who show your omnipotence most of all in sparing and being merciful, abundantly bestow your grace upon us, that running toward your promises, you may make us to be sharers of heavenly goods.

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### *CO 1143: Oratio for the Reception of the Discipline / Gradual Psalms (“Proper” Collect)*

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Deus, cui proprium est misereri semper et parcere, suscipe deprecationem nostram, et quos delictorum catena constringit, miseratio tuae pietatis absolvat.<sup>25</sup>

○ God, to whom it is proper to be merciful always and to spare, receive our prayer, and by the compassion of your love may you loose those whom the chain of sins binds.

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## The “Omnipotence” Collect

The “Omnipotence” collect is found as early as the Gelasian sacramentary and appears in a wide range of medieval liturgical sources assigned to the Tenth, Eleventh, or Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost. In the medieval Dominican liturgy, it is assigned to the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, the liturgical equivalent of the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.<sup>26</sup> It also appears in the contemporary Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite for the 26th Week of Ordinary Time and in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite (1962 *Missale Romanum*) for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.

The prayer begins by stating that God’s omnipotence is shown most fully by his actions of sparing and being merciful; it then asks that God abundantly bestow his grace so that the faithful may become sharers of heavenly goods towards which they hasten as

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24. *Missale conventuale O.P.*, Rome, Santa Sabina, Archivum Generale Ordinis Praedicatorum, XIV L1 (henceforth: SS XIV L1), fol. 407r; cf. *CO 1952* (CCSL 160B:116–17).

25. *Breviarium O.P.*, SS XIV L1, fol. 140v; *Collectarium O.P.*, SS XIV L1, fol. 49v–50r; cf. *CO 1143* (CCSL 160A:134–35).

26. Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ*, 133, draws attention to the use of this oration in *ST* 1, q. 25, a. 3 ad 3 in the context of discussing Thomas’ understanding of nature and grace. Despite his otherwise careful attention to Thomas’ Dominican context, Bauerschmidt identifies the text without qualification as a “quotation from the Roman liturgy, the collect for the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.” For further details on the history of this prayer and the variety of its assignations, see Anthony Ward, “The Collects of the Weeks I–XXVI ‘per Annum’ in the Present Roman Missal,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 120 (2006): 457–506 at 501–2. For a helpful theological commentary on this prayer, see Gerard Moore, *Vatican II and the Collects for Ordinary Time: A Study in the Roman Missal* (1975) (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars, 1998), 375–86.

to things that have been promised to them. The text of the prayer is permeated with scriptural language about God and his relationship with human beings. In the opening phrase of the collect, God's omnipotence is linked with his actions of sparing and being merciful; as the collect states, these actions show or reveal his omnipotence to the greatest degree possible. The link between God's power and his mercy appears frequently in the Scriptures (see especially Exod 34:6 and Num 14:17–19); in the Book of Wisdom in particular, alternate forms of the two verbs used in the collect (*miserando* and *parcendo*) are used to describe the connection of God's omnipotence and his mercy or sparing. In Wisdom 11:24, God's ability to do all (*omnia potes*) is linked with his mercy: "sed misereris omnium quoniam omnia potes." Wisdom 12:16 speaks of the power (*virtus*) of the Lord as the beginning of his justice, and links his position as Lord of all with his action of sparing all (*omnibus te parcere facis*): "virtus enim tua iustitiae initium est et ob hoc quod omnium Dominus es omnibus te parcere facis." Although many collects speak of God's omnipotence and mercy, only this collect and the "Proper" collect which we will consider below link the two words forms of "being merciful" and "sparing."

After the opening expression of praise for the Lord's omnipotence and mercy, the following words request that God bestow or increase (*multiplica*) his grace upon the faithful: "multiplica super nos gratiam tuam." This is closely related to the Septuagint-influenced Latin translation of Psalm 35:8 (iuxta LXX): "multiplicasti misericordiam tuam Deus."<sup>27</sup>

The collect concludes with a statement that the faithful are presently running towards the Lord's promises (*promissa*) and a request that they be made sharers or partakers (*consortes*) of heavenly goods. This may be an elliptical reference to 2 Peter 1:4, which uses the words "promissa" and "consortes" in close proximity: "per quem maxima, et pretiosa nobis **promissa** donavit: ut per hæc efficiamini divinæ **consortes** naturæ" ("by which he has granted to us his precious and very great **promises**, so that through them you may become **partakers** of the divine nature").

### The "Proper" Collect

This prayer appears as early as the Gregorian sacramentary, where it is assigned as an "oratio pro peccatis," and is widely found in the medieval liturgy with a variety of ascriptions.<sup>28</sup> In the medieval Dominican liturgy, it was used in two contexts: during

27. Placide Bruylants, *Les oraisons du Missel Romain: Texte et histoire*, 2 vols. (Louvain: Centre de Documentation et d'Information Liturgiques, 1952), §418, 2:117. Some later liturgical sources substitute the word "misericordiam" for "gratiam," perhaps on account of the scriptural resonance of the passage. Curiously, although the original "gratiam" version is found in the 1570 edition *Missale Romanum*, the 1604 edition instead provides "misericordiam," which is also found in the 1474 editio princeps of the *Missale Romanum*. The "misericordiam" version remained through the 1962 edition, whereas the 1970 *Missale Romanum* restores the word "gratiam."

28. *CO* includes a number of orations which share the opening words with this prayer: *CO* 1139–44 (CCSL 160A:133–36). Some later liturgical sources substitute the word "misericordiam" for "gratiam," perhaps on account of the scriptural resonance of the passage. Curiously, although the original "gratiam" version is found in the 1570 edition *Missale Romanum*, the 1604 edition of the *Missale Romanum* instead provides "misericordiam,"

the reception of the discipline after Compline, and in connection with the recitation of the gradual psalms on Saturdays.<sup>29</sup>

Although this prayer is less directly related to Scripture than the one we have just considered, it too presents a memorable articulation of the theme of divine mercy. The prayer begins by stating that it is “*proprium*,” that is, proper, particular, or characteristic, to God to be merciful and to spare. Further, the opening statement specifies that these actions of being merciful and sparing are undertaken “*always*,” that is, they are consistently characteristic of God. After describing this characteristic of God, the prayer makes two requests.

First, the prayer makes an imperative request that God “*receive our prayer*,” using the Latin words “*suscipe deprecationem nostram*,” a phrase which also appears in the *Gloria in excelsis* of the *Ordo missae*. It is worth noting that this is not a “*stock phrase*” of collects, but it appears in only one other collect in the *Corpus Orationum* (CO 2268), in that case in the form “*suscipe deprecationem servorum tuorum*.”

Second, the prayer concludes by adding a subjunctive request: “*and, by the compassion of your love may you loose those whom the chain of sins binds*.” The term that I have translated as “*compassion*,” “*miseratio*,” is closely related to the theme of mercy articulated in the opening of the prayer. By linking the word “*miseratio*” with “*pietatis*,” the collect shows that God’s mercy or compassion is a result of his love. The phrase “*delictorum catena*,” or “*chain of sins*,” appears in at least two other orations (CO 3762 and CO 3893), and appears in a related form in another prayer as “*vincula delictorum*” (CO 4227). The second request of the prayer thus asks that God’s merciful love overcome the chain of sins by which some have been bound.

### *Appearances within Thomas’ Writings*

Although both collects were available in liturgical traditions beyond that of the Order of Preachers, the Dominican liturgy was the tradition in which Thomas would have most frequently encountered these prayers during his life as a Dominican friar. At least once a year, on the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, Thomas would have prayed the “*Omnipotence*” collect at Mass and at each of the liturgical hours throughout the day, in addition to possibly repeating the prayer each ferial day throughout the week. Thomas would have prayed the “*Proper*” collect roughly twice a week, at Compline and during prayers for benefactors. Throughout Thomas’ writings, words and themes from these two collects reappear in various discussions of God’s mercy and justice, revealing a complex web of thematic and textual links between Scripture and liturgy. I will now give a diachronic account of Thomas’ use of these collects. I will start with the *Scriptum* on the *Sentences*, then treat of the commentary on Job, the *Prima pars* of

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which is also found in the 1474 editio princeps of the *Missale Romanum*. The “*misericordiam*” version remained through the 1962 edition of the *Missale Romanum*, whereas the 1970 *Missale Romanum* restores the word “*gratiam*.”

29. For the gradual psalms ceremony, see Franciscus-M. Guerrini, *Ordinarium juxta ritum Sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum jussu Rev.mi Patris Fr. Ludovici Theissling eiusdem Ordinis Magistri Generalis editum* (Rome: Collegium Angelicum, 1921), 114–15, §466. For the reception of the discipline, cf. *Ordinarium*, 122, §482.



the *Summa Theologiae*, the commentary on Matthew, and finally the *Prima secundae* and *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*. It is helpful to look at these references chronologically because the references in the *Scriptum* are more explicit about their liturgical nature than some of the references in the later *Summa Theologiae*. With a diachronic approach, we can discern the liturgical influences of the later works even when, in his later writings, Thomas is less explicit about the liturgical origins of his articulation of divine mercy.

## Scriptum super Sententiis

In the *Scriptum super Sententiis*, written from 1252 to 1256, Thomas cites both collects in close succession in his commentary on distinction 46 on the fourth book of the Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.<sup>30</sup> This distinction is devoted to the relationship between God's justice and God's mercy, showing that Aquinas' emphasis on their interrelatedness is rooted in an earlier tradition. Articles one and two of the second question of Thomas' commentary are dedicated to exploring aspects of divine mercy. In the first case, Aquinas cites the "Omnipotence" collect in the context of an argument; in the second case, he cites the "Proper" collect in the context of a *sed contra*. In each case, Thomas is clearly aware that both collects are thematically related to the question of God's mercy, and yet he is attentive to the nuances of the two collects by employing them in different ways.

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*In 4 Sent., d. 46, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 3, arg. 1 (ed. Fretté, 400)*

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Videtur quod opus divinae misericordiae ad attributum potentiae reducat. Quia opus Dei ad illud attributum reducit quod maxime per ipsum manifestatur. Sed opus misericordiae maxime manifestat Dei potentiam; unde in collecta dicitur: *Deus qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas. Ergo misericordiae opus ad omnipotentiam reducit.*

It appears that the work of divine mercy may be reduced to the attribute of power. For the work of God is reduced to that attribute through which he is most of all made manifest. But the work of mercy most of all manifests the power of God; thus it is said in a collect: *O God, who show your omnipotence most of all in sparing and being merciful.* Therefore the work of mercy is reduced to omnipotence.

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In the first case, Thomas uses the emphasis on God's power in relation to his mercy in the "Omnipotence" collect as a way of raising a doubt about his intended solution of linking God's mercy to his goodness more than to his power. The response to this objection provides Thomas with the opportunity to offer a textual commentary on the collect. Taking up the words of the liturgical text in his response,

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30. For a brief introduction to Thomas' commentary on the *Sentences*, see Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, 39–45. For this section of the *Scriptum*, I use the edition of Stanislaus Eduardus Fretté, *Doctoris Angelici Divi Thomae Aquinatis ... Opera omnia*, vol. 11 (Paris: Vivès, 1882). In the following examples from the texts of Thomas Aquinas, all English translations are my own, and all uses of italics to indicate liturgical sources and other quotations in the Latin and English texts are mine.

Thomas argues that God's mercy manifests that he is not subject to a higher power, for he can loose any penalty that he himself has constituted.<sup>31</sup> God's goodness is manifest by his sparing, and thus the work of mercy is attributed to God's goodness more than to his power. In the process of recognizing the authority of the collect as a premise for argument, Thomas shows that it is necessary to explain the authentic meaning of the liturgical text in order for the full depth of its theological authority to be manifest.

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*In 4 Sent., d. 46, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 1, s.c. 2. (ed. Frettté, 403)*

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Praeterea, proprium non derelinquit id  
cujus est proprium. Sed Deo proprium  
est misereri, ut dicitur in collecta:  
*Deus cui proprium est misereri semper et  
parcere. Ergo semper miseretur. Sed hoc  
non esset nisi praemium conferret ultra  
meritum, et mala citra condignum. Ergo  
videtur quod ita semper accidat.*

Further, that which is proper does not abandon  
that of which it is proper. But it is proper to God  
to be merciful, as is said in a collect: *O God, to  
whom it is proper to be merciful always and to spare.*  
Therefore he is always merciful. But this would  
be nothing but a reward conferred beyond what  
is merited, and [a response] to evil which is less  
than what it deserves. Therefore it appears that  
it always happens thus [that God always shows  
mercy by punishing less than is deserved and  
rewarding more than is merited].

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In the second case, Thomas uses the "Proper" collect as a chance to emphasize the act of being merciful as being specifically *proper* to God. In this *quaestiuncula*, Thomas deals with the question of whether God always shows mercy in punishing less than is deserved and rewarding more than is merited. By using the liturgical prayer without comment as an authority in a *sed contra*, Thomas seems to present this text as an unambiguous authority that is useful for theological argument. Although Thomas employs them in different ways, the use of both collects in close proximity indicates that Thomas is aware of their relationship as well as their differences. In other passages Thomas will employ these texts or related themes in ways that show how the two are linked in his mind, but this passage reveals his understanding of the distinction between the two texts.

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31. *In 4 Sent., d. 46, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 3, ad 1 (ed. Frettté) 11:402: "Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod Deus dicitur parcendo et miserendo suam omnipotentiam maxime manifestare, non tam quoad substantiam facti, quam quoad licentiam faciendi; ille enim qui est alicui superiori potestati subjectus, non potest licite dimittere poenas a superiori potestate constitutas. Ex hoc ergo quod Deus poenas dimittit, et supra debitum largitur; ostenditur quod ipse ex propria potestate et auctoritate omnia operatur; et quod ipse non est superiori potestati subjectus. Sed quantum ad substantiam facti praecipue manifestatur bonitas in parcendo; et ideo opus misericordiae bonitati est attribuendum."*

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*In 4 Sent., d. 46, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 3, s.c. 2 (ed. Fretté, 404)*

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Praeterea, illud quod est proprium alicui, principalius ei convenit quam id quod est alienum ab eo. Sed proprium opus Dei est *misereri et parcere*; et opus punitionis est alienum ab eo, ut patet Exod. 22. Ergo misericordia principalior est in opere Dei quam iustitia.

Further, that which is proper to something is more principally fitting to it than that which is averse to it. But the proper work of God is to be *merciful and to spare*; and the work of punishment is averse to him, as Exodus 22 makes clear. Therefore mercy is more principal in the work of God than justice.

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In the third *quaestiuncula* of the same article of the *Sentences* commentary in which the Proper collect was explicitly cited, Thomas addresses the question of whether justice or mercy is more “principal” in the work of God. In the second *sed contra*, Thomas implicitly cites the “Proper” collect, adapting the words of the prayer to state that the proper work of God is to be merciful and to spare: “*proprium opus Dei est misereri et parcere.*” Here he links the text with the concept that the work of punishment is alien from God, although his citation of Exodus 22 is not self-evident in supporting this point (cf. Exod 22:22–24). Given the close proximity of these citations, Thomas appears to assume that it is unnecessary to recall the liturgical origin of the concept that it is proper to God to be merciful and to spare, having averred to this origin moments before in his writing. For our purposes, the close proximity of these explicit and implicit uses of the same prayer provide a helpful backdrop for seeing the implicit influence of the prayer on Thomas’ ultimately more influential treatment of related issues in the *Summa Theologiae*.

### *In Job*

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*In Job 40:14 (ed. Leonina 26/2:217)*

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Considerandum est autem quod Deo unum solum opus est proprium suae bonitati conveniens, scilicet benefacere et miserere; quod autem puniat et adversitates inducat, hoc contingit propter malitiam creaturae rationalis, quae primo est in diabolo inventa et per eius suggestionem est ad homines derivata [...].

It is to be considered that only one work is proper to God as being fitting to his goodness, namely to bless and to be merciful. That he should punish and introduce adversities, this happens on account of the evil of the rational creature, which was first found in the devil and through his suggestion was derived to men.

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In his commentary on Job 40:14, written ca. 1263–1265,<sup>32</sup> Thomas states that mercy and benefaction are proper to God, perhaps again making an implicit allusion to the “Proper” prayer. In this case, Thomas suggests that God’s actions of mercy are a positive and proper aspect of his goodness, whereas his actions of punishment are

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32. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, 431. See *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita 26 (Rome: Santa Sabina, 1965).

instead a response to evil freely undertaken by the devil, and consequently by human beings. As in the case of the implicit citation in the *Sentences*, Thomas here thinks of mercy as a “work of God” which is proper to him.

## Prima pars—Summa Theologiae

ST 1, q. 25, a. 3, arg. 3

Praeterea, de Deo dicitur quod omnipotentiam suam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestat. Ultimum igitur quod potest divina potentia, est parcere et misereri. Aliquid autem est multo maius quam parcere et misereri; sicut creare alium mundum, vel aliquid huiusmodi. Ergo Deus non est omnipotens.

Further, it is said of God that he shows his omnipotence most of all in sparing and being merciful. Therefore the greatest thing that divine power is capable of is sparing and being merciful. But there are other things that are much greater than sparing and being merciful, such as creating another world, or things of this sort. Therefore God is not omnipotent.

In light of Thomas’ citations of the two prayers concerning God’s mercy in commentary on the *Sentences*, it is striking that he does not cite either in the corresponding articles dedicated to God’s mercy in question 21 of the *Prima pars*, composed ca. 1265–1267.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Thomas quotes the Omnipotence collect in the context of discussing God’s omnipotence in question 25 of the *Prima pars*. Rather than emphasizing the liturgical character of the text, Thomas simply introduces the text of the prayer as something which is “said of God.” Thomas cites the prayer in a hypothetical argument against God’s omnipotence: if God’s omnipotence is most clearly manifest by his acts of mercy and sparing, then surely he cannot be so great after all, as there are other actions which would seem to require more power than acts of mercy. As in the case of the objection utilizing the Omnipotence collect in the *Sentences* commentary, in the reply to the objection Thomas offers several explanations of the liturgical text, here focusing not on the distinction of God’s goodness and God’s power, but on defending the act of mercy as a true witness to God’s power.

## Commentary on Matthew

In between the composition of the *Prima pars* and the *Secunda pars* of his *Summa*, Thomas makes two implicit references to the “Proper” collect in his commentary on Matthew, composed ca. 1269–1270.<sup>34</sup>

33. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, 426.

34. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, 339. *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura*, ed. Raphael Cai (Turin: Marietti, 1951).

*In Mt, c. 9 l. 6 (ed. Cai, p. 126, §805)*

Et primo tangit quomodo miserebatur; secundo ponit exemplum. Et primo ponit misericordiam Christi; secundo causam. Dicit ergo *videns* etc. scilicet pia consideratione, *miseratus est eis*, quia proprium est ei misereri; Ps. CXLIV, 9: *miserationes eius super omnia opera eius*.

First [Matthew] treats how [Jesus] was being merciful; second, he gives an example. And first he highlights the mercy of Christ, second the cause. He says, therefore, *seeing*, etc., namely with loving consideration, *he was merciful to them*, because it is proper to him to be merciful; Ps. 144:9: *his mercies are over all his works*.

*In Mt., c. 20 l. 2, (ed. Cai, p. 257, §1675)*

Et petunt quod est proprium Deo, scilicet *miserere nostri*. Ps. CXLIV, 9: *miserationes eius super omnia opera eius*.

And they ask what is proper to God, namely to be merciful to us. Ps 144:9: *his mercies are over all his works*.

In each of these cases, Thomas clearly links the concept of God being merciful with the revelation of Psalm 144:9, a psalm verse which he will later quote in conjunction with a reference to the Omnipotence collect in *ST* 1–2, q. 113, a. 9, s.c. and to the Proper collect in *ST* 2–2, q. 30, a. 2, arg. 1. Thomas here speaks of mercy as being proper to God with a precision that appears to derive from the collect rather than from the scriptural authority itself, a conclusion which is supported by his explicit appeals to this collect elsewhere. In one sense, he seems to be using Scripture to interpret his concept derived from the liturgy, and in another sense the liturgy is specifying and expanding the text of the Scripture. Although Thomas is aware that each text has different emphases, he sees that both the Omnipotence collect and the Proper collect helpfully illuminate and are illuminated by Psalm 144:9.

## Prima secundae

*ST* 1–2, q. 113, a. 9, s.c.

Sed contra est quod in Psalmo CXLIV, dicitur, *miserationes eius super omnia opera eius*. Et in collecta dicitur, *Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas*. Et Augustinus dicit exponens illud Ioan. XIV, *maiora horum faciet, quod maius opus est ut ex impio iustus fiat, quam creare caelum et terram*.

On the contrary is that which is said in Ps 144[9], *his mercies are over all his works*. And it is said in the collect, *O God, who show your omnipotence most of all is sparing and being merciful*. And Augustine says, commenting on the words *greater than these shall he do* of John 14[12], that *it is a greater work that God should make an impious man just than to create heaven and earth*.

In question 113 of the *Prima secundae*, composed ca. 1271,<sup>35</sup> Thomas explicitly cites the Omnipotence collect as a liturgical prayer in the context of a *sed contra*, linking it

35. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, 333, 426.

with two other authoritative texts: Psalm 144:9 and a passage from Augustine's Tractate 72 on John. The subject of this article is whether the justification of the impious is the greatest work of God. By situating the text of the collect between a scriptural authority and a particularly important patristic authority, Aquinas suggests that he places a high estimate on the theological authority of this collect. By linking God's mercy with the act of justification, Thomas shows that any consideration of our "justice" with respect to God ultimately relies on his prior mercy to us, a point which Thomas makes explicitly in his treatment of divine mercy in the *Prima pars*.<sup>36</sup>

## Secunda secundae

ST 2–2, q. 21, a. 2, co.

Et ideo praesumptio est peccatum. Minus tamen quam desperatio, quanto magis proprium est Deo misereri et parcere quam punire, propter eius infinitam bonitatem.

Thus presumption is a sin. But it is less a sin than desperation, inasmuch as it is more proper to God to be merciful and to spare than to punish, on account of his infinite goodness.

In question 21 of the *Secunda secundae*, composed ca. 1271–72,<sup>37</sup> Thomas makes an implicit reference to *CO* 1143 in the context of stating that presumption is a lesser sin than despair, for it is more proper to God (*proprium est Deo*) to be merciful and to spare than to punish. Although Thomas does not explicitly aver to the liturgical origin of this concept, it seems apparent that he is thinking of the liturgical text, particularly given the linking of both "misereri" and "parcere" in close succession, in addition to the association of the concept of mercy with something that is proper to God. As in the case of the Job implicit citation, Thomas here compares mercy and punishment, suggesting that although God does both he more properly has mercy than punishes.

ST 2–2, q. 30, a. 2, arg. 1

Videtur quod defectus non sit ratio miserendi ex parte miserentis. Proprium enim Dei est misereri, unde dicitur in Psalm., *miserationes eius super omnia opera eius*. Sed in Deo nullus est defectus. Ergo defectus non potest esse ratio miserendi.

It seems that the reason for having mercy is not a defect on the part of the one showing mercy. For it is proper of God to be merciful, hence it is said in the Psalm [144:9]: *his mercies are over all his works*. But in God there is no defect. Therefore it is not possible for a defect to be the reason for having mercy.

In question 30 of the *Secunda secundae*, which treats of the human virtue of mercy, Thomas makes three implicit references to the two collects we have been considering. In article 2 of question 30, which considers whether mercy is only shown because of a

36. See *ST* 1, q. 21, a. 4, response.

37. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, 333, 426.

defect on the part of the one who shows mercy. Thomas implicitly cites *CO* 1143 by the assertion in an objection that it is a property of God (*proprium enim Dei*) is to be merciful. In this text, Thomas links the reference to the oration with a reference to Psalm 144:9, the same scriptural authority which he had cited in conjunction with *CO* 1952 in the *Prima secundae*. Thomas resolves the objection not by denying the liturgical aspect of the objection, but by affirming that the union of love which God has for us causes him to overcome our defects through his mercy.

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*ST* 2–2, q. 30, a. 4, co.

Secundum se quidem misericordia maxima est. Pertinet enim ad misericordiam quod alii effundat; et, quod plus est, quod defectus aliorum subleuet; et hoc est maxime superioris. Unde et misereri ponitur proprium Deo, et in hoc maxime dicitur eius omnipotentia manifestari.

In itself, mercy is the greatest [of the virtues]. For it pertains to mercy that it should overflow to another; and, what is more, that it should support the defect of others; and this is most of all characteristic of one who is superior. Hence to be merciful is put forward as being proper to God, and in this his omnipotence is said to be most of all manifested.

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In article 4 of question 30 of the *Secunda secundae*, Thomas asks whether mercy is the greatest of the virtues. In the response to this question, Thomas distinguishes between what is the greatest of virtues for God and for human beings. For God, who is the greatest of all beings, mercy is the greatest of all virtues, whereas for human beings, the charity which unites them to God is greater than mercy which relieves the wants of others. Nevertheless, Thomas affirms that of all the virtues which deal with our neighbors, mercy is the greatest.

In this context, Thomas weaves together the two collects which he has cited separately in various other context, showing his appreciation of the link between the two orations by stating that mercy is both proper to God and most clearly manifests his omnipotence. Mercy is thus both proper to God and the action by which his omnipotence is most of all manifested. Although Thomas does not explicitly specify that he is quoting from the liturgy in either case, in both cases he uses language that makes it clear that he is drawing on authoritative sources. In the case of the Proper collect, Thomas states that it is “put forward” (*ponitur*) that mercy is proper to God, and in the case of the Omnipotence collect Thomas states that “it is said” (*dicitur*) that his omnipotence is most of all manifested through his mercy. Having traced Thomas’ use of each of these collects from his earliest writings through his most mature articulation, we can see this passage as a sort of culmination of his appropriation of the message of the liturgy regarding God’s mercy.

## **Influence of Thomas Aquinas’ Liturgical Theology on Pope Francis**

I will now proceed to give a brief treatment of the subsequent influence of Thomas’ liturgical theology of mercy. Of the many aspects that could be explored, I will limit myself to showing the concrete influence of this phenomenon on a central theme of Pope Francis’

pontificate: that of mercy. As Pope Francis has written, “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith.”<sup>38</sup> From the beginning of his pontificate, by retaining the episcopal motto “Miserando atque Eligendo” (“by having mercy and by choosing”), Pope Francis has called upon the church and the world to give renewed attention to the mystery of God’s mercy.<sup>39</sup> In proclaiming the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (December 8, 2015–November 20, 2016), Pope Francis invited the church to “gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.”<sup>40</sup> Although mercy is widely seen as a central theme of Francis’ pontificate, scholarship on his theology has left the liturgical sources of his understanding of this topic unexplored.<sup>41</sup>

In paragraph 37 of his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis recalls the teaching of Aquinas that “as far as external works are concerned, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues.”<sup>42</sup> In this context, Francis calls attention to the passage of Thomas’ *Secunda secundae* that we have analyzed above. Although Francis does not draw attention to the implicit liturgical citations within Thomas’ treatment of mercy, it is interesting to note that he hones in on this passage which is so deeply infused with the witness of the liturgy.<sup>43</sup>

38. Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus* (April 11, 2015), 1; [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_bolla\\_20150411\\_misericordiae-vultus.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html).

39. It might be noted in this context that Francis’ episcopal motto, although ultimately from a text by the Venerable Bede, came to his attention by means of the Office of Readings of the *Liturgia Horarum*. See Innocent Smith, “The Pope’s Well-Worn Breviary,” *Dominicana* (January 29, 2014), at <https://www.dominicanajournal.org/the-popes-well-worn-breviary/>.

40. Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 3.

41. On mercy as a central theme of Francis’ pontificate, see e.g. Thomas Schüller, “Justice and Mercy: An Enigmatic Yet Crucial Relationship for the Application of Canon Law,” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 20 (2018): 51–58 at 51: “Not a single day goes by without Pope Francis making charity and mercy—central characteristic traits of any Christian—the pivot of his sermons, exhortations and proclamations, formal and informal alike.” Although a number of authors have engaged with themes related to Pope Francis and the liturgy, I have not found any in-depth treatments of his use of liturgical sources. For an array of perspectives on Francis and the liturgy, see the seven articles on the theme of “Pastoral Liturgy and Pope Francis” in a recent issue of the journal *Liturgy*; cf. Katharine E. Harmon, “Pastoral Liturgy and Pope Francis: Introduction,” *Liturgy* 33, no. 2 (2018): 1–2.

42. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 37. For an interesting assessment of the influence of Aquinas on another document of Pope Francis, which includes helpful hermeneutical principles that are broadly relevant for understanding the relationship between Francis and Aquinas, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, “Saint Thomas Aquinas in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” *The Thomist* 80 (2016): 499–519.

43. It should be noted that the rendering of the quotation of Aquinas in the official English translation of Francis’ text omits the words “put forward” and “is said,” rendering a better flowing sentence but obscuring the subtle reference to the authoritative nature of Thomas’ pronouncements, while the Italian version translates the references made in the Latin text.



Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 37 (November 24, 2013)

37. San Tommaso d'Aquino insegnava che anche nel messaggio morale della Chiesa c'è una *gerarchia*, nelle virtù e negli atti che da esse procedono.[39] Qui ciò che conta è anzitutto "la fede che si rende operosa per mezzo della carità" (*Gal* 5,6). Le opere di amore al prossimo sono la manifestazione esterna più perfetta della grazia interiore dello Spirito: "L'elemento principale della nuova legge è la grazia dello Spirito Santo, che si manifesta nella fede che agisce per mezzo dell'amore." [40] Per questo afferma che, in quanto all'agire esteriore, la misericordia è la più grande di tutte le virtù: "La misericordia è in se stessa la più grande delle virtù, infatti spetta ad essa donare ad altri e, quello che più conta, sollevare le miserie altrui. Ora questo è compito specialmente di chi è superiore, ecco perché si dice che è proprio di Dio usare misericordia, e in questo specialmente si manifesta la sua onnipotenza." [41]

37. Saint Thomas Aquinas taught that the church's moral teaching has its own "hierarchy," in the virtues and in the acts which proceed from them.[39] What counts above all else is "faith working through love" (*Gal* 5:6). Works of love directed to one's neighbour are the most perfect external manifestation of the interior grace of the Spirit: "The foundation of the New Law is in the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is manifested in the faith which works through love." [40] Thomas thus explains that, as far as external works are concerned, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues: "In itself mercy is the greatest of the virtues, since all the others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies. This is particular to the superior virtue, and as such it is proper to God to have mercy, through which his omnipotence is manifested to the greatest degree." [41]

[39] Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 66, a. 4-6.

[40] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 108, art. 1.

[41] *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, art. 4. Cfr *ibid.*, q. 30, art. 4, ad 1: "Non esercitiamo il culto verso Dio con sacrifici e con offerte esteriori a suo vantaggio, ma a vantaggio nostro e del prossimo. Egli infatti non ha bisogno dei nostri sacrifici, ma vuole che essi gli vengano offerti per la nostra devozione e a vantaggio del prossimo. Perciò la misericordia, con la quale si soccorre la miseria altrui, è un sacrificio a lui più accetto, assicurando esso più da vicino il bene del prossimo."

[39] Cf. *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 66, a. 4-6.

[40] *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 108, a. 1.

[41] *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 30, a. 4: "We do not worship God with sacrifices and exterior gifts for him, but rather for us and for our neighbour. He has no need of our sacrifices, but he does ask that these be offered by us as devotion and for the benefit of our neighbour. For him, mercy, which overcomes the defects of our devotion and sacrifice, is the sacrifice which is most pleasing, because it is mercy which above all seeks the good of one's neighbour" (*S. Th.*, II-II, q. 30, a. 4, ad 1).

In his Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis returns to the quotation of Aquinas which he had highlighted in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In this case, he draws attention to the relation of the liturgy to the words of Aquinas, juxtaposing Thomas' text with one of the two collects from which it draws inspiration.

*Francis, Misericordiae Vultus (April 11, 2015)*

“Misereri ponitur proprium Deo, et in hoc maxime dicitur eius omnipotentia manifestari.”[5] Sancti Thomae Aquinatis verba ostendunt quemadmodum divina misericordia non sit debilitatis signum, sed potius omnipotentis Dei qualitas. Hac de re liturgia sua in perantiqua collecta precationem inducit dicens: “Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas...”[6] In hominum historia Deus erit semper Is qui adest, proximus, providus, sanctus et misericors.

[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2–2, q. 30, a. 4.

[6] Dominica XXVI per annum. Haec collecta, iam VIII saeculo adhibita, inter eucologicos textus *Sacramentarii Gelasiani* invenitur (anno 1198).

6. “It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way.”[5] Saint Thomas Aquinas’ words show that God’s mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. For this reason the liturgy, in one of its most ancient collects, has us pray: “O God, who reveal your power above all in your mercy and forgiveness...”[6] Throughout the history of humanity, God will always be the One who is present, close, provident, holy, and merciful.

[5] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2–2, q. 30, a. 4.

[6] XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Time. This Collect already appears in the eighth century among the euchological texts of the Gelasian Sacramentary (1198).

Finally, in his prayer for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis adapts the opening line of the “Omnipotence” collect in the central section of the prayer:

*Francis, Prayer of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy [excerpt]*

Tu vero es vultus visibilis Patris invisibilis, Dei qui **omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas**: fac ut Ecclesia sit vultus visibilis tui, Domini sui, surrecti et in gloria viventis.<sup>44</sup>

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God **who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy**: let the church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.<sup>45</sup>

Given the genre of this text, it is understandable that Francis does not draw attention to the liturgical source of this line by means of a footnote or other reference, but the liturgical origin of the phrase is clear in light of Francis’ frequent appeals to this collect. Taken as a whole, these three passages reveal that the “Omnipotence” collect has directly and indirectly (by means of Thomas Aquinas) helped form Francis’ understanding and articulation of the divine attribute of mercy.


44. The Latin text of the prayer may be found at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/la/prayers/documents/papa-francesco\\_preghiere\\_20151208\\_giubileo-straordinario-misericordia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/la/prayers/documents/papa-francesco_preghiere_20151208_giubileo-straordinario-misericordia.html).

45. The English text of the prayer may be found at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/prayers/documents/papa-francesco\\_preghiere\\_20151208\\_giubileo-straordinario-misericordia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/prayers/documents/papa-francesco_preghiere_20151208_giubileo-straordinario-misericordia.html).

## Conclusion

In this article, we have considered the pervasive influence of two liturgical prayers upon Thomas Aquinas' articulation of mercy and seen how this articulation has in turn continued to influence the contemporary magisterium of the church in the writings of Pope Francis.<sup>46</sup> The liturgical prayer of the church (*lex orandi*) deeply influenced the theological understanding and articulation of the faith (*lex credendi*) of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Eight centuries later, Pope Francis has continued to draw on the *lex orandi* of the liturgy itself as well as on the *lex credendi* articulated in Aquinas' theology. Thomas Aquinas thus presents a fruitful model for theology informed by the liturgy, allowing the beautiful and profound insights of the liturgy to continue to speak through the work of the theologian. As Pope Francis has shown, these liturgically informed insights are not only of value for theological reflection, but can inform the pastoral work of the church. Thomas' model of theological reflection, inspired by a living contact with the church's liturgy—theology not only on its knees, but also at the altar, at the pew, and in the choir stall—thus finds a renewed place in the life of the church today.

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46. For further reflections on the formative relationship between liturgical prayer and theology focusing on the theories of two important twentieth-century liturgists and the liturgical documentation of the Second Vatican Council, see Innocent Smith, "Vagaggini and Congar on the Liturgy and Theology," *Questions Liturgiques* 96 (2015): 191–221.
47. Cipriano Vagaggini provides a helpful articulation of the fundamental relationship between faith and liturgy deriving from the principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*: "the manner in which prayer is said in the liturgy indicates what must be believed; and that which must be believed influences the manner of praying." See Cyprian Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle and W. A. Jurgens, from the fourth Italian edition revised and augmented by the author (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1976), 509. Relying on the work of Federer and Capelle, Vagaggini gives further attention to the historical context of the origins of this principle on 511, 529–31, 611–14. For a challenging but helpful alternative view on the history and value of this principle, see Daniel G. Van Slyke, "Lex Orandi Lex Credendi: Liturgy as Locus Theologicus in the Fifth Century?" *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 11 (2004): 130–51.