

Thomas Aquinas, Prophecy, and the 'Scientific' Character of Sacred Doctrine

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Abstract

This paper explores the claim made by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 3 that 'sacred doctrine' is 'scientific.' After reviewing some of the key historical commentators on the question, I propose an examination of Thomas' treatment of the gift of prophecy as providing an important clue into discerning more clearly his evolution from an Aristotelian understanding of knowledge or 'science' (*scientia*) to a fuller sense of the term *scientia* as used by Thomas. Chief among these is a clue into how Thomas resolves the difficulty between necessity and history. His treatment of prophecy in the *Summa Theologiae* gives one a glimpse into how Thomas is a historical thinker, despite weighty authorities such as Etienne Gilson arguing otherwise. Closer attention to prophecy permits one to rethink Thomas' account of sacred doctrine in Question One and appreciate how pivotal the fact of divine revelation having been made to prophets in history is for its 'scientific' character.

Keywords

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, prophecy, theological method, Aristotelian science, history

One of Thomas Aquinas' key claims in Question One of his *Summa Theologiae* is that sacred doctrine is a 'science,' in Latin *scientia*. More specifically, he argues that sacred doctrine is a science whose principles (or basic starting points) are subalternate to the principles of another higher science. That the principles of the science are subalternate to those of another is not a feature that is unique to sacred doctrine. In fact, one finds that many of what Thomas terms the 'philosophical sciences' are subalternate sciences. The classic example he draws on is the relationship between music and arithmetic.¹

¹ *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter = ST), *Summa theologiae. Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 4-12, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum (Rome: Ex

The science of music relies on arithmetic to provide a certain number of its principles which music alone cannot discover. Without these principles derived from arithmetic, the science of music would be impossible (or at least seriously deficient). Certain conclusions reached in arithmetic give music a type of grounding in something that is known, and this grounding remains something that can stand on its own outside the scientific structure of music. In relation to music, arithmetic remains independent, and for this reason Thomas says that arithmetic is the ‘higher science’ of the two, since it does not rely on music for any of its own conclusions. Thomas employs this example of the subalternation of music to arithmetic as an analogy for the type of subalternation found in sacred doctrine. Just as music relies on arithmetic for some of its principles, so too does sacred doctrine rely on the higher science of God and the blessed for its principles.

Thomas was one of the first prominent Christian thinkers to ascribe to sacred doctrine the character of a subalternate science. He was not, however, the first person to raise the question of whether sacred doctrine or theology could classify as a ‘science.’ In his now classic study *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle*, Marie-Dominique Chenu outlines how theological methods in the thirteenth century came to experiment more and more with integrating practices of scriptural theology that were firmly rooted in the Church’s monastic tradition with Aristotelian epistemology.² William of Auxerre in the 1220’s offers one of the earlier reflections on the newly developing question concerning a possible ‘scientific status’ for sacred doctrine.³ Ultimately, William thought that sacred doctrine could not properly be classified as a ‘science’ without compromising the nature of Christian faith. Faith, William thought, was about things that were not self-evident to people; the things of faith equally could not be proven by reason and, thus, could only be believed. While William held that sacred doctrine could be ‘argumentative’ and dialectical, he did not go so far as to call it a ‘science.’⁴ In the other philosophical sciences, the order of argument was to start with things that are known by reason and move through argumentation or dialectic to more probable conclusions. In faith, it seems the opposite was true. Faith began not with something known, but with something believed, moving later

Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888-1906), I, q. 1, a. 2, co. All English translations of Thomas’ texts throughout are my own.

² Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle*, 3rd ed. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1969). See also Chenu’s treatment of the earlier developments in the twelfth century in his *La théologie au XIIIe siècle*, preface by E. Gilson (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957).

³ See the summary taken largely from Chenu in Geoffrey Turner, ‘St Thomas Aquinas on the “Scientific” Nature of Theology,’ *New Blackfriars* 78 (1997), pp. 464-476, especially pp. 465-66.

⁴ Chenu, *La théologie comme science*, pp. 34-37.

through rational argumentation to some better understanding of what is believed in faith. For William of Auxerre, to assert that sacred doctrine was a science would seem to undermine the primacy of faith in sacred doctrine.

Most of Thomas' predecessors in the thirteenth century were more inclined to refer to sacred doctrine as wisdom rather than as a science. Alexander of Hales thought that a science dealt with causes and effects.⁵ This was fine for the subject of philosophical or natural theology. However, Christian theology, he thought, relied on the testimony of Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers. The task of sacred doctrine was not to examine causes and effects but to examine how the different parts of Scripture shed light on each other and to resolve any conflicting exegesis found in the Fathers.

When Aquinas raises the question of whether sacred doctrine is a "science" in his most famous theological work, he is already inheriting a decades-old debate. One of his most critical decisions is to integrate the notion of the subalternate science into his notion of sacred doctrine. Certain scholars like John Jenkins have pointed here to Thomas' reliance upon Aristotle's theory of the subalternate science from the *Posterior Analytics* (I,9, 76a4-31) and have portrayed his familiarity with Aristotle's thought as the important breakthrough that led him to classify sacred doctrine as a science.⁶ There is much that is true in such a portrayal, and these scholars are right to characterize Thomas' decision to identify sacred doctrine with Aristotle's notion of scientific knowledge, or *episteme*, as a critical juncture. The fact that this identification seems to have occurred as early as his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* has also been slowly confirmed, lending support to the centrality it had for his entire career.⁷

However, more recent scholarship seems somewhat content to observe Thomas' debt to Aristotle without probing the deeper structures of sacred doctrine's subalternate principles. If there is any probing of sacred doctrine's subalternate structure, as is the case in Jenkins' book, it is often stimulated by comparisons to Aristotle's own theory of scientific knowledge. This over-emphasis on comparing Thomas to Aristotle may be a reflection of the current divisions of labour between the professional philosophers like Jenkins who are interested

⁵ See Chenu, *La théologie comme science*, pp. 37-41.

⁶ John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 66-77.

⁷ See A. Oliva, *Les débuts de l'enseignement de Thomas d'Aquin et sa conception de la 'Sacra Doctrina', avec l'édition du prologue de son 'Commentaire des Sentences' de Pierre Lombard*, Bibliothèque thomiste 58 (Paris: Vrin, 2006) and before that J.A. Weisheipl, 'The Meaning of Sacred Doctrine in the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1,' *The Thomist* 38 (1974), pp. 49-80.

in Thomas and theologians. What remains critical for probing deeper into Thomas' notion of sacred doctrine as a subalternate science, I contend, is a close examination of how Thomas sees the actual giving of the first principles of sacred doctrine. The first principles of sacred doctrine, unlike the principles of natural reason, are not discoverable by human reason; instead, they are given by God and arrive initially at fixed points in human history through certain individuals chosen to be prophets. Prophets are those who initially instruct individuals about what they should believe. Prophecy, thus, is foundational in Thomas' accounts of faith and sacred doctrine, since it is under the light of faith that sacred doctrine is done.

I maintain that Aquinas' account of prophecy in the *Summa Theologiae* offers a key entry point into Question One and his conception of sacred doctrine, an entry point which has been infrequently exploited in recent scholarship. The first part of this paper will offer a brief analysis of Question One that pays special attention to appeals to prophecy and revelation. The second part goes on to examine how prophecy enables Thomas to include in his notion of sacred doctrine a historical awareness and, more specifically, an awareness of the history of salvation, which is reflected in the scientific structure of sacred doctrine through its preference for arguments from authority.

I. *Question One and Revelation*

God's revelation to humanity as a historical fact accounts for the existence of sacred doctrine's scientific structure, as far as Aquinas sees it. When one looks at a landscape, the bedrock that lies underneath the visible surface is rarely seen, even though it is the bedrock which gives the landscape its definite shape and contours. Similarly, in Thomas' account of sacred doctrine we rarely catch a glimpse of revelation as something studied directly. The fact that divine revelation exists and has occurred precedes any investigation of it, and once it has occurred and is acknowledged, the revelation itself comes to be examined under sacred doctrine.

For historical reasons, neither Aquinas nor any theologian of the thirteenth century ever wrote a disputed question *de revelatione*. Belief in revelation and in its transmission (at least partially) through Sacred Scripture was the common starting point of his time. As a science, sacred doctrine depends on the fact of revelation made to certain individuals. The 'things revealed in prophecy' designate the status of divinely revealed things that have been received by a human mind through a special grace.

1.2 *The Prologue and Intention of the Summa Theologiae*

In the prologue to the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas states that his intention is ‘to treat the things which pertain to Christian religion in a way that is suitable for the teaching of beginners.’ After outlining some of the shortfalls of other books—their multiplication of useless questions, articles, and arguments; their lack of concern for the ‘order of the discipline’ by following the exposition of books or disputes; and their frequent repetitiveness, all of which bring about aversion and confusion in students—Aquinas explains that he hopes to avoid such impediments and intends ‘with the confidence of divine help to describe in detail the things which pertain to sacred doctrine briefly and clearly following what the material will allow.’

The occasion for the *Summa Theologiae*, as Aquinas himself reports, arose in part from his dissatisfaction with the current pedagogical practice involved in the instruction of ‘beginners,’ which he most likely had observed and experienced first hand. The prevailing opinion among scholars sees in the prologue Aquinas indicating his intention to compose ‘a handbook suitable for novices’ in order to remedy these pedagogical shortcomings.⁸ However, when one considers the attention to pedagogical matters present in the prologue, it seems possible to consider the intended audience of the new *Summa Theologiae* would have already been studying sacred doctrine for some time. For this reason, John Jenkins’ modified thesis seems persuasive: Thomas’ intended audience were not absolute beginners, but were students already somewhat familiar with sacred doctrine.⁹

After introducing the work’s intention in the prologue, Aquinas goes on to delimit this intention in Question One by asking ‘what kind’ (*qualis sit*) of doctrine it is and ‘to what things it extends’ (*ad*

⁸ Weisheipl, p. 54; compare with L.E. Boyle ‘The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas—Revisited,’ in S.J. Pope, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), pp. 1-16, at pp. 6-9. Boyle thinks the ‘beginners’ referred to in the prologue were Thomas’ students at the Santa Sabina *studium*, who would have been under his sole care and direction; see the cautious agreement with Boyle’s thesis of Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, revised edition, translated by R. Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 142-48.

⁹ Jenkins, pp. 79-85; Jenkins maintains that ‘the content of the ST is not that of a work gauged for neophytes in a field’ (p.83). Mark Jordan remains somewhat critical of Jenkins’ arguments against Boyle’s thesis; see Mark D. Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas after His Readers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 117, n. 4. Jenkins, Jordan thinks, relies ‘too much on contemporary evaluations of the work’s scope or difficulty.’ He also thinks Jenkins over-reads the importance of ‘Aristotelian paradigms of *scientia*’ in the *Summa Theologiae*. Nevertheless, while disagreeing with Jenkins over his methods and ‘over-reading,’ Jordan draws a conclusion that comes quite close to Jenkins’ own view. Jordan too thinks that the *Summa Theologiae* is ‘an ideal pedagogy’ designed ‘for middle learners in a vowed community of Christian pastors’; see Jordan, p. 120.

quae se extendat). The investigation of Question One is aimed at allowing the reader to comprehend the intention of the work ‘under some fixed boundaries.’ Aquinas first observes that a kind of teaching beyond the philosophical disciplines is necessary for human *salus*; this teaching is sacred doctrine. He next asks whether sacred doctrine is a science. He thinks it is, but sacred doctrine is a subalternate science that takes its principles from a higher science, namely, the science of God and of the blessed. The subalternation of sacred doctrine to higher principles depends on these principles being taught by God to prophets and apostles through revelation. This subalternation of sacred doctrine to God’s knowledge thus relies on the events of divine revelation, and this dependence on revelation is reflected in sacred doctrine’s very scientific nature. As a science, it takes revelation as the aspect (*ratio formalis*) under which it considers everything.

II.1 *Article One: The necessity of another doctrine & the existence of sacred doctrine*

The first article of Question One asks whether another doctrine besides the philosophical disciplines ‘is necessary to be held.’ Even though most scholars agree that the structure of the first question relies on Aristotle’s account of a science from his *Posterior Analytics* along with Boethius’ important transmission of Aristotle, it is significant to note that Aquinas’ first article does not immediately try to assimilate sacred doctrine into an Aristotelian model of science.¹⁰ Whether there exists any doctrine at all that fails to fall under the purview of the philosophical disciplines is first explored. At the outset we can notice three important characteristics of this article: first, there is the way Aquinas conceives of the relation between the philosophical disciplines and the light of reason (*ratio*), which discovers them; second, there is his emphasis on the need to know ‘another doctrine’ that falls outside the scope of reason; and third, there is his identification of the guiding aim of this doctrine with human salvation (*salus*).

II.2 *Philosophical disciplines are discovered by the light of reason*

Philosophy is not seen as a single discipline. Aquinas, in fact, does not use the noun *philosophia* but rather the adjective *philosophicas*, which modifies ‘disciplines.’ Why does Aquinas speak of ‘philosophical disciplines’ here rather than ‘philosophy’? The word *disciplina*

¹⁰ Oliva, pp. 274-75; see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 76a4-31, 89b24f.

focuses our attention on the method of learning where a student depends on a teacher to offer instruction or *disciplina* with regard to a subject. In a discipline, the subject matter is organized and presented in a way that helps the student to learn it. The matter is adapted. The likely answer glossed from his other writings points to the fact that Aquinas saw philosophy, properly understood, as ordered almost entirely to the knowledge of God.¹¹ This knowledge of God that comes in philosophy is acquired through the light of human reason.

Yet, while philosophy may be ordered almost entirely to God, this ordering is understood only during the last stage of learning philosophy, that is, when one studies metaphysics. This seems to restrict access to the knowledge of God to only those who are able to persevere through a strict and prolonged course of philosophical studies. In such a course, easier disciplines are learned first like logic, physics, and ethics, and then the student is gradually led to the study of metaphysics, the last subject to be learnt but the one which orders all the other disciplines.¹² The true orientation of philosophy, that is, its orientation to the knowledge of God, then is only realized in metaphysics, but metaphysics itself does not contain all the other disciplines, even though it can judge them. So, when referring to the ‘philosophical disciplines,’ Aquinas includes along with metaphysics all the disciplines that lead up to it, which are many and which only a few ever master.

It is perhaps useful to note that Aquinas does not call them ‘philosophical doctrines’ but ‘disciplines.’ A discipline refers to the receiving of knowledge (*cognitio*) from another, and in its general sense, it can be about any type of knowledge.¹³ Still, this phrase ‘philosophical disciplines’ occurs rarely in Thomas’ corpus.¹⁴ It seems to be a unique phrasing for this particular article, perhaps to contrast it with *doctrina*, which refers more to the action exerted by the teacher who helps us know.¹⁵ Doctrine places the focus more on the action of the teacher than on the act of reception by the student.¹⁶

¹¹ See *Summa contra gentiles*, ed. P. Marc et al. (Rome: Marietti, 1961), I, 4: ‘cum fere totius philosophiae consideratio ad Dei cognitionem ordinetur.’

¹² See *ibid.*

¹³ *Expositio libri Posteriorum. Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 1*/2 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1989), I, 1. 1.

¹⁴ In fact, it occurs most frequently in ST,q.1,a.1: 10 out of the 14 times. It occurs twice in article 5 of Question One, once at ST,I,q. 88,a.2,obj. 2, and once at *Super Boetium De Trinitate. Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 50 (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1992), q.5,a.1,ad.3. See Thomas’ *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, prologue,q.1,a.1, for the phrasing ‘*physicas disciplinas*’; for the expanded meaning of *physicas*, see Oliva, p. 276, n. 88.

¹⁵ According to the Index Thomisticus web-site, the phrase *sacra disciplina* never occurs in Thomas’ work.

¹⁶ See G.F. Van Ackeren, *Sacra Doctrina: The Subject of the First Question of the Summa theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1952), p. 85.

Certain sciences, in fact, do not always require a teacher. Aquinas devoted an entire disputed question to the subject of the teacher during the first three years (1256-1259) of his teaching at Paris.¹⁷ In this disputation, he explores what it actually means for someone to teach and to be taught. A person can acquire knowledge (*'scientia'*), he explains, in one of two ways. First, it can happen in discovery, when a person comes to know something by applying the faculty of reason, going from something known to something unknown.¹⁸ If discovery does not suffice, one can rely on the second way when someone else 'supports' (*'adminiculatur'*) externally a person's natural reason, and this is what Thomas calls a 'discipline,' or perhaps better translated here as 'instruction.'

This meaning of the word 'discipline' as an external instruction, however, does not seem to capture entirely what Aquinas is getting at in Question One. After all, he is referring to *'philosophical disciplines.'* What then makes a discipline 'philosophical'? The philosophical disciplines in Question One are not just a particular type of instruction, but the philosophical aspect refers to the entire body of instruction one receives in philosophy. The philosophical disciplines, thus, aim to cultivate the work of natural reason as one strives to acquire a science (*'scientia'*). The rooting of these disciplines in natural reason is the key: philosophical disciplines 'are discovered according to human reason,'¹⁹ they 'are investigated through reason,'²⁰ and they treat things 'insofar as they are knowable by the light of natural reason.'²¹

II.3 *The need for another doctrine*

The second objection argues that there is sufficiency among the philosophical disciplines because they cover everything, that is, 'every being.' It begins by noting that there can be no teaching except about being. The philosophical disciplines seem to be able to treat and explain adequately everything. There is even a philosophical discipline that treats God: theology or *scientia divina*. It follows then that there is no need for another doctrine beyond the philosophical disciplines.

¹⁷ See Torrell on this generally firm dating for the *De Veritate*. Torrell, pp. 59-67.

¹⁸ *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate. Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, t. 22 (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1970-1976), q.11,a.1,co: 'ita etiam est duplex modus acquirendi scientiam: unus, quando naturalis ratio per seipsam devenit in cognitionem ignotorum; et hic modus dicitur inventio; alius, quando naturali rationi aliquis exterius adminiculatur, et hic modus dicitur disciplina.'

¹⁹ ST,I,q.1,a.1, sed: 'quae sunt secundum rationem humanam inventae.'

²⁰ Ibid,co: 'quae per rationem investigantur'; see ST,I,q.1,a.1,obj.1: The philosophical disciplines treat 'things which are subject to reason' ('ea quae rationi subduntur').

²¹ Ibid,ad.2: 'secundum quod sunt cognoscibilia lumine naturalis rationis.'

In the answer to this objection Aquinas looks at how some sciences like astronomy and physics are distinguished not by their conclusions but by the way each science comes to know its conclusions. The astronomer and physicist both conclude that the earth is round. The astronomer does this by mathematics, objects abstracted from matter. The physicist does this by considering the material objects themselves, in this case the earth. Thus, each discipline is distinguished from another by the different way something is knowable.²²

In his *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, Aquinas treats this issue of the differentiation of the philosophical disciplines or ‘sciences’ more thoroughly. The mode of abstraction in the mind, he explains, leads to the difference in science.²³ Aquinas portrays in an analogous way the distinction between philosophical theology (*theologia*), which knows things by the light of natural reason, and sacred doctrine, which knows things ‘by the light of divine revelation.’²⁴ Both philosophical theology and sacred doctrine can treat the same subjects, but this does not mean that sacred doctrine becomes philosophical theology. The modality by which one comes to know something will keep sacred doctrine distinct from philosophical theology.

At first, the article does not specify in what way another doctrine is necessary. The first sentence merely states: ‘it seems that it is not necessary to have another doctrine beyond the philosophical disciplines.’ It is not until the body of the article that we learn that it is necessary ‘for human salvation’ (*ad humanam salutem*) that there exist ‘some doctrine according to divine revelation.’²⁵

II.4 *Salvation as the raison d’être of sacred doctrine*

This leads to our last observation about the first article, and it is how ‘salvation’ (*salus*) remains the driving force of sacred doctrine. From the first sentence of the article’s response, it is clear that Aquinas takes it as a given that man is intended for salvation: ‘it was necessary for human salvation (*salutem*) that there be a kind of doctrine according to divine revelation beyond the philosophical disciplines.’²⁶ The word we have translated as ‘salvation,’ however, does not really

²² ST,I,q.1,a.1,ad.1: ‘diversa ratio cognoscibilis diversitatem scientiarum inducit.’

²³ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q.5.

²⁴ ST,q.1,a.1,ad 2.

²⁵ See ST,II-II,q.2,a.3, sed, which cites the authority of Heb 11:6, ‘sine fide impossibile est placere Deo.’ See Thomas’ earlier *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, I, q.1,a.1, sed. Here again the authority of Heb 11:6 is cited in the article on the necessity of sacred doctrine. There does seem to be some link between this article in Question One and Aquinas’ later treatment of faith, which Domingo Báñez observed; see Weisheipl, pp. 57–58.

²⁶ ST,I,q.1,a.1,co.

capture the meaning of *salus* in this article. Aquinas keeps open a meaning of *salus* that includes a sense of salvation that might have occurred had Adam and Eve never sinned. His reluctance to circumscribe the conception salvation is seen in greatest relief not in Question One. Due to the dialectical and summarizing structure of the *Summa Theologiae*, the particular question as to whether human beings would have needed salvation even had they never sinned remains latent and unarticulated in Question One. The question only comes to be meaningfully articulated in the Christological questions of the *Tertia Pars*. Tellingly, it arises during the questions on the fittingness of the Incarnation.²⁷

Arguments of fittingness make rational appeals in the light of divine liberty and divine revelation. They play an important part in the scientific structure of sacred doctrine. When posing the question whether Christ would have become incarnate had Adam and Eve never sinned, Aquinas must appeal to the fact that events like the Incarnation ‘arise from God’s will alone,’ and ‘they cannot be known to us except insofar as they are treated in Sacred Scripture,’ that is, only insofar as they have been revealed.²⁸ God’s will is made known through Scripture. This is why Aquinas cites in the article’s *sed contra* 1 Tim 1:15, ‘Christ came into this world to save sinners.’ The authority of Augustine commenting on Lk 19:10 also weighs heavily on his response: ‘The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which had been ruined; if man had not sinned, the Son of Man would not have come.’ In the response, Aquinas observes that some people (*quidam*) are of the opinion that had man never sinned, Christ still would have become incarnate. Without contradicting them outright, Aquinas says that ‘it seems that the assertion’ of Augustine and others like him ‘is preferable.’ Note the subtlety of this reply as it leaves open the question, while still affirming that Augustine’s opinion is preferable because it takes its starting point from Scripture. He does not try to constrain conceptually the Incarnation and leaves others to have different opinions:

Now, in Sacred Scripture the reason for the Incarnation is in every place assigned to the sin of the first man. So, the work of the Incarnation is more fittingly said to be ordered by God as a remedy for sin; so that, had no sin existed, there would have been no Incarnation. *However, God’s power is not thus limited; for even had sin not existed, God could have become incarnate.*²⁹

²⁷ ST,III,q.1, *De convenientia incarnationis*.

²⁸ *Ibid*,a.3,co.

²⁹ ST,III,q.1,a.3 (my emphasis). See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Vol. 2: Spiritual Master*, translated by R. Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), pp. 71-72. Torrell also notes that in a parallel passage from his earlier *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, III, d.1,q.1,a.3, Thomas seems even more favourable

Because this question of the fittingness of the Incarnation comes up against divine liberty, we cannot adopt too rigid a conceptual approach to the solution. Divine liberty points more profoundly to divine liberality. ‘In this way,’ comments Torrell:

the coming of the Word into the flesh is no longer caused solely by the *felix culpa*—which is sometimes hard to separate from a certain anthropocentrism—but Christ also appears as the summit and crowning of a universe entirely ruled by the communication of the Divine Being and the Good.³⁰

Torrell’s analysis indicates that we have hit upon a profound insight into how God is present and acts in the world. The Incarnation is indeed for our salvation, but so also is the work of the Holy Spirit and even the mediation of the angels and the sending of prophets.

Thomas’ thoughts on the fittingness of the Incarnation allow us now to return to the question of the human need for salvation with a better appreciation for divine liberty and goodness. Human beings are not the cause of their own salvation, just as they are not the cause of their own existence, but they are in some way orderable to salvation. Salvation is not something intrinsic to mankind but is caused by another. ‘The whole of human salvation,’ Aquinas writes, is in God.³¹ So, man needs God in the most complete sense of the word ‘need.’

Yet, Thomas observes that God exceeds the comprehension of human reason. This leaves a problem for humanity. If our end is God, we cannot know this end by reason alone. Human beings need to know their end, so that their actions and intentions can be ordered to that end. For this reason, it is necessary that there be a doctrine through divine revelation by which human beings may know God, as their final end, and such divine revelation comes to human beings initially through prophets.

III.1 Article Two: *Sacred doctrine is a science*

In asking whether sacred doctrine is a science, the second article attempts to establish the relationship between sacred doctrine and its starting points or first principles. Aquinas assumes that every science proceeds from some principles. The first objection holds this implied assumption and tries to exclude sacred doctrine as a science

to this later view: ‘Others say that, granted what is produced by the incarnation of the Son of God is not only liberation from sin, but also the glorification (*exaltatio*) of human nature and the coronation (*consummatio*) of the whole universe, the incarnation could have occurred for these reasons, even without sin. And this may be held as probable.’

³⁰ Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas*. Vol. 2, p. 73.

³¹ ST,I,q.1,a.1.co.

by stating that every science must proceed from principles known *per se*. To know something *per se* is to say that it is self-evident. For instance, that a whole is always larger than any of its parts is something self-evident. Once I know what a whole is and what a part is, the proposition is self-evident, and I need not appeal to anything else to prove it. The objection goes on to argue that because sacred doctrine has the articles of faith as its first principles, it cannot be a science; the articles of faith are not *per se* known but are believed.

Aquinas, however, counters this objection by expanding the definition of a science. There are two kinds of sciences. The first kind of science starts from principles known ‘by the natural light of the intellect.’ Examples of these are geometry and arithmetic. The second kind of science starts from principles known ‘by the light of a higher science.’ Aquinas here gives the example of music which takes its principles from arithmetic. The sciences that fall under this second class are subalternate sciences. Sacred doctrine is a subalternate science because it takes its principles from a higher science, namely, ‘the science of God and the blessed.’³²

What makes something a science for Aquinas is not the fact that its starting points are known or seen, but rather whether or not something is scientific depends on the mode by which its first principles are held and how one proceeds from them. Music and sacred doctrine are subalternate sciences whose principles are not known *per se*. They depend on other sciences for their first principles. Because of this, their own first principles are led back (*reducere*) or reducible to some higher science.³³

To be led back to first principles is one path that the intellect takes, and it is called analysis. Analysis goes from effects to causes. To go from principles to conclusions is the opposite path the intellect takes, and this is called synthesis, since it goes from causes to effects, from universal things to particular things.³⁴

This brief appeal to the different intellectual paths of analysis and synthesis may help shed some light on the second objection raised in the article, which denies that any science can treat singular things like the individual deeds of Abraham and Isaac. The reply acknowledges at first that singular things are not dealt with principally in sacred doctrine.³⁵ He explains that sacred doctrine can treat singular things

³² For more on the notion of the subalternate science, see *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q.5, a.1, ad.5.

³³ ST, q.1, a.2, ad.1.

³⁴ *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q.6, a.1, iii, co.

³⁵ See *ibid*, q.5, a.2, ad.4: singulars are objects of science secondarily and indirectly, ‘as by a sort of reflection.’ See ST, I, q.86, a.1, co: ‘Now what is abstracted from individual matter is the universal. Hence our intellect knows directly the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were *by a kind of reflection*, it can know the singular, because, as we have said above,

secondarily in two different ways. In one way, singular things are introduced as ‘examples from life’ like the moral example of Abraham and Isaac. Aquinas draws attention to the fact that this method of using examples from life is also used in the moral sciences. They provide models for how to live. In another way, singulars are introduced so that ‘the authority of those men may be announced through whom the divine revelation proceeds to us, upon which sacred Scripture or doctrine is founded.’ An example of this use of singulars would be sacred doctrine’s treatment of miracles that confirm the authority of a true prophet such as Elijah’s calling down fire upon Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18) or Christ’s own authority by raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11).

In this second way, Thomas thinks sacred doctrine treats singular events which announce the authority of individuals through whom divine revelation proceeds. Note that in the above phrasing divine revelation is active and proceeds through certain people. Sacred doctrine does not establish or prove the authority of such individuals, but it merely ‘announces’ (*ad declarandum*) their authority as channels of divine revelation. This phrasing, I maintain, reflects Thomas’ understanding of how divine revelation is the cause of sacred doctrine’s scientific structure when it treats singulars. When it comes to singular events, sacred doctrine primarily communicates the authority of those individuals from whom we receive divine revelation; it does not try to establish rationally this authority. This is why later on in Question One Thomas will assert that in sacred doctrine, unlike in philosophy, the argument from authority is the strongest (*efficacissimus*) form of argument.³⁶ It is the strongest form of argument because the knowledge that is most proper to sacred doctrine—knowledge that is beyond the ken of human reason and which orients one to salvation—only comes through a person’s belief in divine revelation that has been entrusted to prophets and apostles. Thus, the scientific structure of the argument from authority imitates in a way the relationship between God and the prophet, who receives divine knowledge directly through a special grace.

It is also significant to observe here that by including singulars in his model of sacred doctrine as a science, Aquinas appears to be going beyond Aristotle. Aristotle seems to have maintained in his *Metaphysics* that history could not be a science in the proper

even after abstracting the intelligible species, the intellect, in order to understand, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species, as is said in *De Anima* iii, 7.’ See *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q.2,a.2,ad5: ‘et hoc modo se habent articuli fidei, qui sunt principia huius scientiae, ad cognitionem divinam, quia ea quae sunt per se nota in scientia, quam Deus habet de se ipso, supponuntur in scientia nostra et creduntur ei nobis haec indicanti *per suos nuntios*, sicut medicus credit physico quattuor esse elementa’ (my emphasis).

³⁶ ST,I,q.1,a.8,ad 2.

sense of the term because it deals with singular facts and contingent events, rather than with things that must necessarily be.³⁷ Aristotle's exclusion of history and historical events from the realm of science would appear to create a tension within the very scientific structure of Thomas' notion of sacred doctrine. The issue of the certitude of a science also comes into question. Certitude for Aristotle does not come from singular things, which are unique instances of things and in some way accidental, but only from necessary things, which are always the same and universal. Thus, to base an argument on something individual and contingent is for Aristotle to provide the weakest degree of certitude for an argument. Thomas is by no means shy about highlighting the following paradox, namely, that in philosophy the argument from authority is the weakest argument and the one least compatible with philosophy's scientific structure; meanwhile, in sacred doctrine, the argument from authority is the strongest form of argument and the one that is most in keeping with sacred doctrine's scientific structure.

Aquinas in some way acknowledges Aristotle's observation that the object of any science has to be something immutable. According to Aristotle, singulars cannot be known because they are not always the same and do not usually act in the same way. Aquinas, however, carefully modifies Aristotle's teaching on singulars and universals. As we saw earlier, Thomas does give singulars a place in the science of sacred doctrine.³⁸ They are not treated principally in this science, but they either give moral examples or announce the authority of those people through whom divine revelation comes. The introduction of moral examples makes the most sense in the *Tertia Pars*, when Aquinas turns to the Incarnation and the life of Christ, who 'demonstrated to us in Himself the way of truth, by which we can arrive at the beatitude of immortal life by rising again.'³⁹ Moral examples also have an important application in prophecy. Thomas thinks that one of the functions of prophecy is to direct human morals so that they are properly oriented to mankind's final end.⁴⁰

The second usage of singulars in sacred doctrine is more apropos for our discussion. Singulars, Aquinas says, announce the authority of those who have received revelation. This has direct bearing on our central theme of prophecy. Sacred doctrine does not attempt 'to prove' but to 'to announce' (*declarare*) the authority of prophets and apostles. By introducing singulars into sacred doctrine, Aquinas

³⁷ See *Metaphysics*, 1003a15, 1026a33-b11, 1027a20-21, 1065a2-7.

³⁸ ST,q.1,a.2,ad.2.

³⁹ ST,III, prologue. The scientific nature of sacred doctrine is the key to understanding the location of Aquinas' Christology in the *Tertia Pars*. See Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas*. Vol. 2, pp. 102-105.

⁴⁰ ST,II-II,q.171,prologue.

admits that in the case of revelation all one can do is start from the individual things that have been revealed.

The sections on prophecy follow this type of analysis. Aquinas starts from examples of prophecy in Scripture and moves cautiously to some general taxonomy for prophetic phenomenon without limiting divine power.⁴¹ Aquinas' analysis does not try to demonstrate a rigid conceptual structure for prophecy, but rather he tries to reduce the individual instances back to something more general. The individual examples of prophecy are reduced to some kind of knowledge—either knowledge held by seeing sensible things or a knowledge of images or of intellectual things.

It is the mode of knowing, what Aquinas refers to as 'the light of prophecy,' which makes the knowledge of a prophet supernatural and unifies all prophetic knowledge under one genus. Thomas' notion of light is his way explaining the manner in which something becomes known to someone. The different sciences are differentiated ultimately by the different mode by which something is known.⁴² Since sacred doctrine is known through the light of faith which is based on a belief in the divine revelation entrusted to prophets, Aquinas can call sacred doctrine 'a kind of teaching according to divine revelation.'⁴³

III.2 *Revelation and Prophecy*

Because the events of revelation help to constitute sacred doctrine as a science, it will now be fruitful to examine more closely how Aquinas treats this revelation, which is recorded in Scripture and expressed in the articles of faith. We have already observed that in his writings Thomas rarely reflects on divine revelation as an independent subject. His questions on prophecy offer the most extensive inroads into how he conceived of divine revelation.⁴⁴ For Aquinas, prophecy is the medium through which knowledge revealed by God comes to mankind. It plays an essential role in constituting the explicit act of faith, which undergirds the science of sacred doctrine.

Thomas' approach to prophecy is largely analytic as he tries to see what sets prophecy apart from the will, in the first instance, and

⁴¹ See V. White, 'St. Thomas's Conception of Revelation,' *Dominican Studies* 1 (1948), pp. 1-34, at pp. 11-12. This approach acknowledges that God revealed Himself in such and such a way but had the power to have done it differently. There is also an attempt in these sections to show the fittingness of prophecy as recorded in Scripture.

⁴² ST,I,q.1,a.1,ad.2.

⁴³ ST,I,q.1,a.1,co.

⁴⁴ See P.E. Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. by R. Mackenzie (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 20; White, pp. 4-5.

later on what sets it apart from other types of knowing both natural (as in the case of philosophy)⁴⁵ and supernatural (as in the case of faith).⁴⁶ One of difficulties Thomas faces is the staggering amount of things the word ‘prophecy’ (*prophetia*) can refer to. It can refer to knowledge about future contingents just as much as it can refer to knowledge about the past or present. It can include knowledge about the divine nature, about the angels or demons, or about human acts to be done. The vast range of objects that can fall under prophetic knowledge share no common feature as objects; instead, they are only united to each other by the fact that they can be known through the light of prophecy, which can only come directly from God. The light of prophecy is the proper mode by which any object is known to a prophet.

IV *The questions on prophecy in the ST: Prophecy as a gratuitous grace concerning knowledge*

Prior to the questions on prophecy in the *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas treats the conditions and situations that pertain commonly to all humans; these include the individual virtues and vices, both theological and cardinal. The start of the questions on prophecy marks a shift in the *Secunda Secundae*, where Aquinas begins to consider conditions and situations that pertain not to all human beings, but only ‘to certain special people.’⁴⁷ Among these conditions, he lists three chief differences: (1) different gratuitous graces (*gratias gratis datas*), (2) different lives, either active or contemplative, and (3) different offices or states.

In an earlier question, Aquinas distinguishes gratuitous grace from sanctifying grace.⁴⁸ Sanctifying grace unites one directly with God. Gratuitous grace does not sanctify the one who receives it; rather it is given for the benefit of others either to instruct them in revelation or to confirm that revelation. Because gratuitous grace can neither sanctify someone nor cause one to have lasting union with God, Thomas thinks sanctifying grace is nobler than gratuitous grace.⁴⁹

Aquinas alludes to a degree of unity among the gratuitous graces that we see reflected in prophecy’s relationship to the other gratuitous graces. The gratuitous graces can relate to three different activities:

⁴⁵ ST,II-II,q.172,a.1 and 3.

⁴⁶ ST,II-II,q.173,a.1.

⁴⁷ ST,II-II,q.171, prologue.

⁴⁸ ST,I-II,q.111,a.1.

⁴⁹ ST,I-II,q.111,a.5. See I-II,q.111.a.1,co: sanctifying grace ordains humans immediately to their final end, while gratuitous grace ordains them to what is preparatory to that end.

knowledge (*cognitio*), speech (*locutio*), and operation (*operatio*).⁵⁰ Prophecy, according to Aquinas, encompasses everything that falls under knowledge. Yet, while prophecy ‘first and principally pertains to knowledge,’ he also thinks prophecy can pertain to speech and the operation of miracles. A prophet, having been given supernatural knowledge of things, announces these things ‘for the edification of others.’⁵¹ The things a prophet knows by divine revelation can be above human knowledge, and if they are, they ‘cannot be confirmed by human reason,’ although they can be confirmed ‘by the operation of divine power.’⁵² From this, Aquinas notes that the operation of miracles also pertains to prophecy, since a miracle functions ‘as a confirmation of certain prophetic announcements.’ While the unity of the gratuitous graces cannot at present be explored further, it remains important to observe how Aquinas’ analysis integrates prophecy with the other gratuitous graces of speech and working miracles.

IV.1 *Historical Background and State of the Question*

An understanding of Thomas’ historical context can be helpful for identifying the key features of Thomas’ thought on a given subject. It seems advantageous at this point to draw attention to Thomas’ scholastic and broader historical context as an aid for interpreting the *Summa*’s questions on prophecy. The *Disputed Questions De veritate* also has a question on prophecy that falls within the larger collection. Developed as a form of teaching in the context of twelfth- and thirteenth-century theological education, the disputed question enables Thomas to introduce, examine, and integrate various authorities who have weighed in on a given subject.⁵³ The *Summa* questions also adopt the disputed question form, although they are stripped down to the essential points in order to facilitate the *Summa*’s larger pedagogical aim of helping students to acquire knowledge of sacred doctrine as a whole. Both Thomas’ writings on prophecy in the *De veritate* and the *Summa Theologiae* contribute to what had already become an established *quaestio* in thirteenth-century scholastic debates.

⁵⁰ ST,II-II,q.171,prologue.

⁵¹ ST,II-II,q.171,a.1.co.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For more on the disputed question as a genre and the appropriate secondary literature, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Thomas d’Aquin, Questions disputées sur la vérité, Question XII, La prophétie (De prophetia)*, French translations by S.-T. Bonino, introduction and commentary by J.-P. Torrell, Bibliothèque des textes philosophiques (Paris: Vrin, 2006), p. 7.

Recent scholarly attention to Thomas' questions on prophecy has largely been pursued along two general lines. The first line is historical, and the second is mostly limited to debates surrounding the concept of scriptural inspiration in dogmatic theology. Along the first line, historical interest in Thomas' treatment of prophecy first arose during the late nineteenth century and tended to focus on the task of situating Thomas in relation to the Jewish and Arabic thinkers of his age.⁵⁴ A 1879 study by Adalbert Merx attempted to explore how Thomas' thinking on prophecy related to the Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides.⁵⁵ Merx argued that when it came to the notion of prophecy, Thomas was almost entirely dependant on Maimonides' account of prophecy from his *Guide for the Perplexed*. Merx's account proved largely influential until it was challenged twenty years later by Joseph Mausbach, who argued that Merx had exaggerated Maimonides' influence over Aquinas.⁵⁶ Mausbach pointed out that the Church Fathers were cited by Aquinas just as much as Maimonides was. These early historical studies of Merx and Mausbach tended to focus almost exclusively on the judeo-arabic sources of Thomas' notion of prophecy.⁵⁷ They were less interested in exploring how Thomas' writings on prophecy related to other areas of his thought. Paradoxically, these studies, so devoted to uncovering the historical sources of Thomas' thought, created a somewhat stagnant debate that failed to engage both Thomas' thinking as a whole and its relationship to living theological questions.

Another sub-branch of historical interest arose through the influence of Mausbach around the Christian and especially Latin sources for Thomas' thinking on prophecy. Several historical studies were produced that attempted to trace the sources of Thomas' teaching from the time of the Church Fathers down through the scholastic debates of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Among the Church Fathers, Serafino Zarb argued that St. Augustine was a foundational source for Thomas' understanding of prophecy.⁵⁸ He provided a

⁵⁴ For an overview, see L. Elders, 'Les rapports entre la doctrine de la prophétie de saint Thomas et "le Guide des égarés" de Maïmonide,' *Divus Thomas* 78 (1975) pp. 449-456. For an evaluation of this current of research into the judeo-arabic sources of Thomas' notion of prophecy, see also Torrell, *Thomas d'Aquin, Somme théologique, La Prophétie, 2a-2ae, Questions 171-178*, second edition, French translation by P. Synave and P. Benoit, revised by J.-P. Torrell with new introduction (Paris: Cerf, 2005), pp. *15-*19 [new introduction].

⁵⁵ A. Merx, *Die Prophetie des Joel und ihre Auslegung von der ältesten Zeit bis zu den Reformatoren* (Halle, 1879), pp. 353-368, at p. 366.

⁵⁶ J. Mausbach, 'Die Stellung des hl. Thomas von Aquin zu Maimonides in der Lehre von der Prophetie,' *Theologische Quartalschrift* 81 (1899), pp. 553-579.

⁵⁷ See Torrell, *La Prophétie*, p. *16.

⁵⁸ S.M. Zarb, 'Le fonti agostiniane del trattato sulla profezia di S. Tommaso d'Aquino,' *Angelicum* 15 (1938), pp. 169-200.

close textual comparison between Aquinas' questions on prophecy and Augustine's twelfth book of his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*. Augustine tried to come to terms with the different kinds of biblical prophecy by employing a threefold classification scheme that was based on three kinds of vision. Prophecy could thus be broken down into bodily visions, imaginative visions, and intellectual visions. Thomas employs the same classification scheme. The works of Bruno Decker,⁵⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar,⁶⁰ Jean-Pierre Torrell,⁶¹ and Marianne Schlosser⁶² have also offered important developments in reconstructing this second historical current of Thomas' Latin scholastic context. What these studies portray very clearly is that Thomas' thinking on prophecy did not come out of a vacuum. His thought emerged out of an already complex environment of theological debate where Scripture was being studied intensively along with the Church Fathers. There were even clear signs that the latest available philosophical texts from Jewish and Arab authors and, of course, the translations of the 'rediscovered' Aristotelian corpus were being studied.⁶³ Torrell, in particular, has argued for a more theologically oriented reading of Thomas' corpus, seeing him first and foremost as a theologian who did not fall out of heaven like an angel but who was very much a man of his times. Most importantly for the purpose of this paper, recent historical treatment reveals how Thomas was aware of his historical situatedness to some extent.

The historical reconstruction that has emerged from this final group of studies has lent particular weight against the claims of certain scholars of the early twentieth century who maintained that Thomas Aquinas was indifferent to history.⁶⁴ The German philosopher, Alois

⁵⁹ On the development of the theory of prophecy in early thirteenth-century scholastic theology, see B. Decker, 'Die Analyse des Offenbarungsvorganges beim hl. Thomas im Lichte vorthomistischer Prophetietraktate. Ein historischer Kommentar zu *S. theol.* II-II q. 173 a. 2 (*De ver. q. 12 a. 7*),' *Angelicum* 16 (1939), pp. 195-244.

⁶⁰ H.U. von Balthasar, *Thomas und die Charismatik: Kommentar zu Thomas von Aquin, Summa Theologica Quaestiones II II 171-182, Besondere Gnadengaben und die zwei Wege menschlichen Lebens* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 1996): a commentary on ST,II-II,q.171-182 with a sustained inquiry into the scholastic background and an appendix with recorded allusions in these questions to the Aristotelian corpus.

⁶¹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Théorie de la prophétie et philosophie de la connaissance aux environs de 1230: la contribution d'Hugues de Saint-Cher (Ms. Douai 434, Question 481)* (Leuven: Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, 1977) and *Recherches sur la Théorie de la Prophétie au Moyen Âge. XIII-XIVe siècles. Études et Textes*, *Dokimion* 13 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions universitaires, 1992).

⁶² M. Schlosser, *Lucerna in caliginoso loco: Aspekte des Prophetie-Begriffes in der scholastischen Theologie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000).

⁶³ This excluded obviously those works of the *organon* already known.

⁶⁴ For an overview of the state of the questions on Thomas and the theology of history, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Nouvelles recherches thomasiennes*, *Bibliothèque thomiste* 61 (Paris: Vrin, 2008), pp. 131-175.

Dempf, for instance, in 1929 could write that Thomas had no real need for history because he ‘only saw the supra-temporality of the truth.’⁶⁵ Étienne Gilson also observed on one occasion: ‘St. Thomas’ indifference to history was prodigious.’⁶⁶ Even more recently Otto Hermann Pesch could conclude that Thomas never reflected systematically on history and its relationship to theology.⁶⁷

The topic of Thomas’ historical self-understanding received some attention in the middle of the twentieth century mostly among Francophone theologians interested in engaging with Marxist philosophy of history.⁶⁸ Many of these engagements tended to adopt a somewhat polemical tone. Gaston Fessard, for instance, argued that Thomas had no historical perspective whatsoever, and that only a rapprochement with Hegel could equip theology (in this context Roman Catholic theology) with an adequate philosophy of history. Without any philosophy or theology of history to offer, Fessard held that Thomas’ thought would only prove ineffectual for theology going forward.

Thomas’ notion of prophecy, I maintain, pushes against much of this scholarship that characterizes him as being largely a-historical. Thomas’ infrequent writings on prophecy actually offer significant insights into his historical self-understanding. They also provide another crucial insight: Thomas’ historical consciousness was internalized in his very notion of sacred doctrine. This internalization may have been so thorough that even astute readers of Thomas like Gilson and Pesch may have failed to adequately appreciate it.

Another line of inquiry into Thomas’ treatment of prophecy arose in the middle of the twentieth century surrounding the notions of scriptural inspiration and inerrancy.⁶⁹ These debates were held predominantly among Roman Catholic theologians and were occasioned in large part by the publishing of Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical on scriptural inspiration, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. The scholars who weighed into the debates tended to read and interpret Thomas’

⁶⁵ A. Dempf, *Sacrum imperium. Geschichts- und Staatsphilosophie des Mittelalters und der politischen Renaissance*, fourth edition (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), p. 381: ‘Er [Thomas] sah zunächst nur die Überzeitlichkeit der Wahrheit . . . Er ist förmlich der überzeitliche Mensch, der keine Geschichte braucht.’

⁶⁶ É. Gilson, ‘Cajetan et l’humanisme théologique,’ *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 30 (1955), pp. 113-136, at p. 133.

⁶⁷ O.H. Pesch “‘Behold, I am Doing a New Thing” [Is 43.19]? History of Salvation and Historic Moments of Transition in Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther,’ *Science et Esprit* 53 (2001), pp. 123-142, at p. 130.

⁶⁸ See G. Fessard, *De L’actualité historique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, de Brouwer, 1959), especially vol. 1, pp. 13-20 and vol. 2, pp. 257-393 [cited by Torrell, *Nouvelles recherches*, p. 133].

⁶⁹ P. Benoit and P. Synave, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II Q. 171-178*, translated by A. Dulles and T.L. Sheridan (New York: Desclée, 1961); P. Benoit, *Inspiration and the Bible*, trans. by J. Murphy-O’Connor London: Sheed, 1965); P. Zerafa, ‘The Limits of Biblical Inerrancy,’ *Angelicum* 39 (1962), pp. 92-119.

questions on prophecy in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner. They often did not pursue lines of inquiry that tried to situate these questions within the structure of the *Summa* as a whole. Pierre Benoit's commentary on II-II,q.171-178 is an example of such a work. The largest section of Benoit's commentary by far is an essay on scriptural inspiration that runs over 80 pages, nearly half of all the commentary material in the volume.⁷⁰ Biblical inspiration and inerrancy may need to be rethought in a light other than Thomas' theory of prophecy.

Without over-simplifying the content and occasion of these debates, it seems that many of these studies into the notion of biblical inspiration were vexed by deeper questions surrounding the role historical scholarship should play in dogmatic theology. Standing behind these debates, then, are concerns about the relationship between philosophy and theology, and more specifically the relationship between the philosophy of history and theology.

Aquinas, of course, never explicitly raises the question of biblical inspiration. The issue from Thomas' point of view is more or less settled by the end of Question One of the *Summa Theologiae* when he says succinctly 'the author of Sacred Scripture is God.'⁷¹ To him it is somewhat obvious that questions of biblical inspiration have obvious repercussions for sacred doctrine. After all, he devotes the last two articles of Question One to the unique features of the Bible as the proper authority within sacred doctrine. Developments, of course, have arisen since Aquinas' time in how people (especially theologians) read Scripture. The most important of these developments for nineteenth-and-twentieth-century discussions was the application of historical criticism to the Bible.

There is good evidence from Thomas' writings on prophecy to suggest that he was aware that the human person was a historical creature. He devotes an entire article in his questions on prophecy to the issue of the increase of prophecy over time.⁷² It is within this article that Thomas offers an outline of the history of salvation that divides it into three stages: the time 'before the law,' the time 'under the law,' and finally the current time 'under grace.' In each different stage of history, prophecy increased as faith in God also increased. Before the law, Abraham and the other fathers 'were instructed prophetically' about the faith as individuals. During the time under the law, prophetic revelation was made 'more excellently' than before. This was because now not only specific individuals and families needed to know what to believe about God, but an entire people needed to be instructed about faith in God. Thus, Moses, because he had a greater duty to instruct more people about faith in God, was

⁷⁰ Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration*, pp. 84-168.

⁷¹ ST,I,q.1,a.10,co: 'auctor sacrae Scripturae est Deus.'

⁷² ST,II-II,q.174,a.6.

himself more perfectly instructed about ‘the simplicity of the divine essence,’ receiving even the name of God ‘I am who am’ (Ex 3:14). Finally, in the time of grace, the fullness of the mystery of the Trinity was revealed by the incarnate Son of God.

Thomas accounts not only for temporal changes but also observes that the circumstantial conditions of a people often change, and this change often alters their moral horizon. Prophetic revelation adapts also to the changing conditions of human affairs so as to direct human actions and ensure people are seeking their supernatural end. Thomas thinks that human communities will always need prophets to help direct and orient their actions towards the common good: ‘in every age humans were divinely instructed about what they ought to do according to what was expedient for the salvation of the elect.’⁷³ From the above, we can conclude that Thomas was not entirely devoid of historical awareness. He seems, in fact, at times to display a sophisticated awareness of the history of salvation. Even in his exegetical practices, Thomas could be historically ‘critical’ with respect to his use and interpretation of texts. For instance, he seems quite at home with issues of textual authenticity, when he calls into question the traditional attribution of the *Liber de Causis* to Aristotle.

V. Conclusion

One catches a rare glimpse of Thomas’ historical awareness when he treats the issue of prophecy. His notion of prophecy remains always close to his notion of salvation history. Prophecy at its most basic opens to the human person the possibility of a relationship with the eternal God. It opens to human beings the possibility of understanding themselves within salvation history. This notion of ‘being-a-part-of-salvation-history’ comes acutely to the surface in the notion of prophecy. We have endeavoured to argue that this notion of ‘being-a-part-of-salvation-history’ is expressed implicitly within Thomas’ notion of sacred doctrine through his references to the channels of divine revelation being announced in the prophets and apostles.

The prophet, through a special grace, comes to see all human history from a God’s-eye-point-of-view. Those who believe the testimony of prophets enter into this historical experience in some way. Their beliefs become rooted in the same fixed points of history, and they start to imitate the knowledge that prophets hold through their belief. In doing so, they also come to imitate God’s own knowledge of the history of creation. Thus, prophecy helps the student of sacred doctrine, who is seeking to understand God in His nature, to see that

⁷³ ST,II-II,q.174,a.6,co.

one must always go through history in order to seize supra-historical truth.

We can make one final observation. If it is true that prophecy reminds the believer that one must go through history to seize upon supra-historical truth, then a striking parallel emerges with what Thomas says in Question One about the relationship between the two chief senses of Scripture. Here Thomas claims that every interpretation of Scripture begins first with the historical or literal sense.⁷⁴ The second sense of Scripture, the spiritual sense, is founded upon the literal sense and ‘supposes it.’ Thomas’ practice of reading Scripture finds some parallel with how he sees the relationship between the history of salvation and the eternal divine nature. This may suggest that his notion of prophecy could help contemporary readers of Thomas to better appreciate the unity of the articles of Question One and the viability of his notion of sacred doctrine for reuniting fragmented fields in contemporary theological studies.

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⁷⁴ ST,I,q.1,a.10.co.