

# THOMAS AQUINAS

*Selected Commentaries on the Old Testament*





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EDITED WITH REVISED TRANSLATIONS,  
AN INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES BY

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To my children: Julie, Lewis, and Leo

*Before there was anything else, there was a father's eternal love for his child.*



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# INTRODUCTION

## THE AIMS AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS COLLECTION

Saint Thomas's Old Testament commentaries remain some of his most neglected writings. Historically, this has been due, in part, to their inaccessibility and widely varying quality. Some of the commentaries have only recently become available in English, and often, the translations retain the terseness, clutter, and opacity of the original Latin manuscripts. Again, some of the commentaries, especially those on Jeremiah and Lamentations, are written in the cursory style of a medieval bachelor and thus make for unprofitable reading, offering little more than summary descriptions of a biblical text. Moreover, the extant commentaries on the Song of Songs that have been attributed to him are spurious.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding these obstacles to finding and accessing them, many of his Old Testament lectures merit more attention than they have received from students and scholars of Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, many of his lectures on the Psalms and Job, in particular, must be counted among Thomas's finest biblical commentaries. They contain discussions and emphases, moreover, that cannot be found elsewhere in his work.

This volume aims to promote appreciation for Thomas's Old Testament exegesis by making his best commentaries more accessible. To this end, it offers a topically organized selection of the most theologically profound lectures from his premier Old Testament commentaries—those on the Psalms, Job, and Isaiah. Moreover, the translations used in this collection have undergone extensive editing and revision to enhance their accuracy, elegance, clarity, stylistic consistency, and overall readability. Lastly, hundreds of explanatory footnotes have been added to facilitate study, along with two indices and a bibliography.

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1. For a list and description of Thomas's authentic biblical commentaries, see James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1974) 368–74; and, more recently, Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 337–41. William of Tocco claimed that Thomas wrote a Song of Songs commentary on his deathbed, but many have doubted the truth of this claim. For a speculative study exploring the place of the Song of Songs in Thomas's thought and the possible content of a Song of Songs commentary, had Thomas written one, see Daria Spezzano, "Its Lamps Are Lamps of Fire and Flames": Thomas Aquinas on the Song of Songs," in *Thomas Aquinas: Biblical Theologian*, ed. Roger Nutt and Michael Dauphinais (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), 107–32. See also Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Reading the Song of Songs with St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Andrew Levering (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

Where possible, the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition, of the Bible has been used in place of the Douay-Rheims translation for biblical quotations appearing in non-bold italic font. For the primary biblical texts of the commentaries in this collection, the Douay-Rheims translation has been retained as the version that most closely follows the Vulgate editions that Thomas himself used and referenced. Together with its companion volume, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Commentaries on the New Testament*, this collection offers a curated introduction to Thomas's biblical commentaries, suitable for newcomers, students, and scholars alike.

The topical organization of this collection broadly mirrors the fourfold order of God's agency in the world that Thomas identifies in the prologue to his commentary on the Psalms: creation, governance, restoration, and glorification.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 1 thus focuses on creation and the ordering of the cosmos, with particular attention to the place of humankind within the created order. The overarching purpose of Thomas's cosmology is to inspire wonder at the glory of God and to dispel any doubts about the reality and goodness of divine providence.

Chapter 2 studies the predicament of human existence, confronting the specters of human frailty, suffering, sin, death, and the injustice we observe in human fortunes on earth. In this chapter, we encounter Thomas's argument that death cannot be absolute, given the unavailability of ultimate happiness in this life.

Chapter 3 explores the closely related topics of divine revelation and prophecy and the role of angelic mediation in both. In this chapter, Thomas also discusses natural revelation and the question of whether and what we can know about God apart from what he has disclosed through the words and deeds of his self-revelation in Christ.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the problem of sin and its solution in Christ. Here, Thomas studies the nature of sin and Christ's remedying self-sacrifice, the spiritual benefits of which are conveyed to the world through the Church and its sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

Chapter 5 addresses the last things: death, the end of the world, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, and the life to come.

In the following sections of this introduction, I explore Thomas's conception of literal signification and his conviction that Christ features often as a

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2. Thomas Aquinas, "The Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms" (1). All parenthetical numbers included in citations of Thomas's Old Testament commentaries refer to page numbers in this volume.

referent of Old Testament writings in their literal meaning. Then, I provide summary overviews of Thomas's commentaries on the Psalms, Job, and Isaiah.

## CHRIST AND THE LITERAL MEANING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

By a purely historical kind of description, the Old Testament is a collection of ancient books chronicling the history, culture, and god of ancient Hebrew peoples. In the Christian perspective, this ancient anthology is accounted Sacred Scripture and inseparably part of the self-revelation of God that reaches its culmination in the event and person of Christ. Nevertheless, Christians have conceived the interrelationship between Christ and the Old Testament in different ways, and some have imagined a closer and more immediate relationship than others. At a minimum, Christians usually relate these Hebrew Scriptures to Christ, the Hebrew messiah, in terms of a backstory—a historical and cultural record providing the deep context for Christ's person, life, and work.

That the Old Testament represents the historical and cultural context of Jesus Christ is, of course, undeniable. Nevertheless, the earliest Christians—including those who lived when the Old Testament contained all of the Sacred Scriptures Christians recognized—saw a more direct relationship between the Old Testament and Christ than that of a mere backstory. In their estimation, the Old Testament was fundamentally *about* Christ. He was the obvious referent of so many of its oracles and the antitype of so many of its characters. These early Christian readers were, of course, conscious of the immediate historical and cultural circumstances, for instance, out of which its messianic hopes and imagination emerged. For them, however, a certain plurality of reference was the special characteristic of Old Testament Scripture, such that a passage could speak simultaneously about its own contemporary circumstances and also about matters in the distant future. One example of this polyvalence can be found in the book of Joel, whose apocalyptic descriptions equally describe the end of the world and a recent locust infestation that had devastated the region of Judah at the time of the book's composition.

That Christ is referenced *in* and *with* the pre-Christian events and figures of the Old Testament is a fundamental tenet of ancient Christian exegesis. The same presupposition defines Thomas's approach to the Old Testament. Indeed, this collection is designed to highlight his conviction that Christ is its overarching theme. However, what is particularly striking about Thomas's approach is his conviction that Christ *can be* and frequently *is* the referent of the Old Testament not only in figurative, spiritual, or symbolic senses but in its

literal meaning.<sup>3</sup> To understand what this means and how Thomas can assert it, however, we must consider how he defines literal signification.

Thomas has two ways of defining literal signification. In one way, following Augustine, he says that the literal sense of an expression is the meaning of its *words* as opposed to the further meaning of the *things* that they signify. The things to which the words literally refer, themselves, can have a further meaning, which Thomas, with much of the Christian tradition, calls the “spiritual” or “mystical” meaning. The word ‘lion,’ for instance, might signify a particular large cat (or its kind), but the cat itself can, in turn, signify Christ, for example.<sup>4</sup>

In Thomas’s second way of defining literal signification, it is the meaning an author or speaker intends in using an expression. But, of course, the meaning an author intends may not be the same as what his expression itself denotes. This is to say that an author’s or speaker’s intended meaning need not always be the one we—or that Thomas himself, for that matter—would ordinarily call the literal one. Hence, in some cases, this second definition of the literal sense cuts against the first, as Thomas himself indicates when he says, “In metaphorical speech, *the literal sense is not what is signified by the words* but what the speaker means to signify by them.”<sup>5</sup>

It is clear, then, that Thomas means something rather different and more expansive by *literal meaning* than what we might expect.<sup>6</sup> The literal meaning of a metaphor, as the previous quotation indicates, might, in fact, be a metaphorical meaning and not the one we would customarily identify as literal. This point is crucial for anyone approaching Thomas’s Old Testament commentaries, as their emphasis on the literal sense can sometimes give a misleadingly narrow impression of his intent. Indeed, Thomas’s expansive conception of the literal meaning allows him to treat as literal what other medieval authors might have classified as spiritual meanings. Thomas’s focus on the literal meaning of the Old Testament, at any rate, does not preclude explicitly Christian interpretations. To the contrary, Thomas follows the Second Council of Constantinople (553) and its condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which grounds his

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3. In connection with this point, see Matthew Levering, “Mystagogy and Aquinas’s *Commentary on Isaiah*: Initiating God’s People into Christ,” in *Initiation and Mystagogy in Thomas Aquinas: Scriptural, Systematic, Sacramental and Moral, and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Henk Schoot, Jacco Verburgt, and Jürgen Vjigen (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2019), 17–40.

4. For Thomas’s discussion of the lion metaphor in Scripture, see *Super sent.* 1 prologue 5.

5. Thomas Aquinas, *On Isaiah* 6.1.206 (84) (emphasis added).

6. For more on Thomas’s peculiar conception of the literal sense, see Piotr Roszak, “Exegesis and Contemplation: The Literal and Spiritual Sense of Scripture in Aquinas’ Biblical Commentaries,” *Espiritu* 65 (2016): 481–504; and Mary Healy, “Aquinas’s Use of the Old Testament in His Commentary on Romans,” in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 183–95.

assertion that Christ is a possible literal referent of Old Testament Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Thus, he identifies Christ as the literal referent of many characterizations of David and Solomon that exceed what can be truly said of them. In fact, Christ is the overarching theme of the Old Testament, in Thomas's interpretation, even in its literal sense.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the prophecies of Isaiah speak so clearly of Christ that, in concert with Jerome, Thomas remarks, "He seems to compose not a prophecy but a gospel."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, of the Psalms, he says, "All the things that pertain to faith in the Incarnation are related so plainly in this work that it seems to be a gospel rather than a prophecy."<sup>10</sup>

Another striking example of Thomas's Christocentric literal interpretation of the Old Testament is found in his commentary on Psalm 21 [22]. Here, Thomas argues that David's descriptions of suffering and dereliction in the Psalm refer literally to Christ's Passion and only figuratively to David and his tribulations.<sup>11</sup> In his interpretation, this Psalm is emblematic of Old Testament passages that seem to reference contemporary historical events and persons but say more than could be true of them alone. When any such passage is more applicable to Christ, the Church, or the life to come, Thomas's rule of thumb is to regard these as its primary and literal referents, and the contemporary Old Testament ones as its figurative meaning.

This picture would be rather implausible if we had to suppose that, for any passage to have a Christian literal meaning, its human author must consciously intend this meaning. Given how Thomas defines the literal sense, we would indeed have to suppose just this if the human author were the only—or even the most important—one to be considered. However, Thomas holds that God is the primary author of Sacred Scripture and, thus, that it is God's authorial intention that defines its literal sense first and foremost. "The author of Holy Scripture is the Holy Spirit," Thomas declares.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the intention of the human authors of Scripture can be quite secondary for Thomas, who says, "In Sacred Scripture, the human tongue is like the tongue of a child saying the words another provides."<sup>13</sup>

7. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms" (5); *On Psalms* 21.176 (123).

8. For a study of the place of Christ in Thomas's commentary on Job, see Franklin T. Harkins, "Christ and the Eternal Extent of Divine Providence in the *Expositio super Job ad Litteram* of Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages*, ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Aaron Canty (Leiden, BE: Brill, 2015), 161–200.

9. See Thomas Aquinas, "The Prologue of Saint Thomas to Isaiah" 2 (11).

10. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms" (1).

11. *On Psalms* 21.176 (123).

12. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to Isaiah" 1 (1).

13. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms" (3).

Even when Thomas considers a human author of Scripture to have possessed some kind of prophetic foreknowledge or to have spoken prophetically in the person of Christ—as he takes David to have done in Psalm 21—it is the divine agency in and behind the human that makes this kind of prophetic knowledge and speech possible. Thomas’s robust sense of the divine agency behind Scripture makes the scope of possibility for its literal sense rather vast—so vast, in fact, that he seems to have less need to speak of spiritual senses at all. The literal meaning can be metaphorical and allegorical if and where God intends to speak in these ways through the authors he employs and inspires, even if they themselves have no such intention.

The prominence of the Spirit’s agency in the Old Testament’s authorship implies a fundamental unity both among its constituent books and together with the New Testament. For Thomas, both testaments are united in their divine authorship and in their author’s intention of revealing himself. Moreover, Christ is the person in whom God has most fully revealed himself and whom the whole arc of the Old Testament anticipates. Thus, Thomas sees Christ as the primary subject of the Old Testament as well as the New—and not merely by a kind of retrospective, Christian interpretation that we would have to conceive in terms of a spiritual meaning but even in its literal sense.

### POSTILLA SUPER PSALMOS

The *postilla*<sup>14</sup> on the Psalms is a *reportatio* of lectures that Thomas likely gave at the end of his career during his teaching tenure at the Dominican *studium* at Naples in 1272–73 and while he was composing the *Tertia Pars* of his famous *Summa theologiae*.<sup>15</sup> It thus reflects Thomas’s mature thought on a wide range of theological topics, including Christ, prayer, grace, divine revelation, and the moral life. The work, in fact, may represent the final university course of

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14. The term *postilla* derives from the Latin phrase *post illa verba textus*, which means ‘following those words from the text.’ *Postilla* became the generic term for a style of biblical commentary that originally took the form of marginalia or comments appearing in the margins of a manuscript explaining certain of its terms and phrases. In time, however, the term *postilla* came to indicate an intended use within a liturgical context and finally became synonymous with homiletic exposition. An intended liturgical use is suggested by the description given to the commentary by Bartholomew of Capua, one of Thomas’s biographers, who labeled the commentary “*Lectura super quatuor nocturnos psalterii*,” indicating their connection to the nocturnal office of Matins. To the contrary, Weisheipl suggests the description of the commentary as a *postilla* is somewhat misleading. Moreover, he points out that the commentary “exclusively follows the order of the Vulgate and not that of the Divine Office,” which seems to suggest that its intended use was more academic than liturgical (*Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 303).

15. However, Weisheipl describes the commentary on the Psalms as “the only academic work that can be attributed to this period [the academic year of 1272–73] with certainty” (*Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 302).



his teaching career.<sup>16</sup> It ends abruptly after the commentary on Psalm 54, and its incompleteness reflects the abrupt cessation of his scholarly activities on December 6, 1273, the date of a mystical experience after which he came to regard his whole literary corpus as “straw.”<sup>17</sup>

The goal of the Psalms, as Thomas explains, is to elevate the mind to God in prayer and praise.<sup>18</sup> In his commentary, he pursues this same goal in several ways while shedding light on the nature of these acts of worship. He magnifies the Psalms’ exaltation with lengthy meditations on the glory and greatness of God in his fourfold work of creation, governance, restoration, and glorification.<sup>19</sup> In his elaboration of the meaning of the Psalmist’s praise, Thomas’s discussions roam widely into topical spaces that one might not expect a biblical commentary to enter, including astronomy, biology, etymology, mythology, metaphysics, and epistemology, to name just a few of the disciplines he brings into the discussion.<sup>20</sup> This kind of topical breadth is perhaps to be expected of a commentary on a book that touches the whole scope of God’s work in his created order. On this count, he declares, the book of Psalms “contains the whole of Scripture.”<sup>21</sup>

Thomas also emphasizes the glory of God by comparison with the glory of human beings. God is exceedingly greater than we are, and this says a great deal, given Thomas’s exalted anthropology. Human beings are rational beings, possessed of an immortal soul and the capacity to know and love God.<sup>22</sup> This makes us “close” to the angels in dignity and as fellow bearers of God’s image.<sup>23</sup> We are elevated as “king” of all material creatures below us.<sup>24</sup> Most of all,

16. This is the view of Pierre Mandonnet in “Chronologie des écrits scripturaires de saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue Thomiste* 34, no. 55 (1929): 489–519. See also Torrell’s discussion of the dating of the lecture series in *Saint Thomas Aquinas* 1:258–59.

17. Bartholomew of Capua, “From the First Canonisation Enquiry” 79, in *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London: Longmans & Green, 1959), 82–126, at 109. For secondary studies of Thomas’s commentary on the Psalms, see Thomas F. Ryan, *Thomas Aquinas as Reader of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); James R. Ginther, “The Scholastic Psalms’ Commentary as a Textbook for Theology: The Case of Thomas Aquinas,” in *Omnia disce: Medieval Studies in Memory of Leonard Boyle*, ed. A.J. Duggan, J. Greatrex, and B. Bolton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 211–29.

18. “Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms” (2).

19. “Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms” (1).

20. Indicating the sophistication of the book’s many philosophical excursions, the Italian philosopher Carmelo Pandolfi has described Thomas’s commentary on the Psalms as “the most philosophical text” and “the existential book par excellence.” *San Tommaso filosofo nel “Commento ai Salmi”*: *Interpretazione dell’essere nel modo ‘esistenziale’ dell’invocazione* (Rome: Studio Domenicano, 1993), 29.

21. “Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms” (1).

22. *On Psalms* 8.55 (26).

23. *On Psalms* 8.56 (26–27).

24. *On Psalms* 8.56 (27).

however, our dignity lies in the honor the Son bestowed when he became one of us in the Incarnation—an honor not even the angels can boast.<sup>25</sup>

We are also gifted with a natural knowledge of God, as Thomas explains in his commentary on Psalm 13:1 (DRB): “The fool hath said in his heart: ‘There is no God.’” However, this knowledge is a natural gift that we can refuse in a way that enfeebles our minds and corrupts our hearts.<sup>26</sup> “A certain knowledge of God is naturally implanted in human persons, but they forget the Lord through sin.”<sup>27</sup>

Thomas’s commentary, like the book of Psalms itself, deals extensively with the problem of sin and the way to redemption. For Thomas, sin is, “first of all, an offense against God,” with the character of a “stain” embedded in the soul of the sinner, who, therefore, lives in a state of vulnerability to the kind of punishing effects inseparable from sin.<sup>28</sup> Redemption from sin is God’s work, but it requires human cooperation in the form of sincere repentance, which, in turn, demands a certain degree of self-knowledge and finds expression in the act of confession and in the sinner’s prayer to God for deliverance.<sup>29</sup> These acts of conversion are prerequisites for salvation, but even they are only possible by God’s intervention and gifts—gifts that, first, create a repentant disposition in the sinner and, then, move him to act in accord with it.<sup>30</sup>

God’s work of salvation is accomplished for us through Christ’s Passion and death, which “washes away all filth and all sins” and gives meaning and sacramental efficacy to the Eucharist.<sup>31</sup> The Psalms manifest God’s glory, perhaps most magnificently, for Thomas, in their exquisite descriptions of Christ’s salvific Passion, the most explicit and exemplary of which are found in Psalm 21 (page 120 below), which Thomas explores in detail. This and other persecution Psalms are primarily and literally about the Passion of Christ and only figuratively about David and the persecution he faced at the hands of Saul and Absalom.

In his suffering, Christ not only wins salvation for his human brethren but also enters into a greater solidarity with them. In his expressions of anguish and dereliction, Thomas says Christ speaks “in the person of the sinner or of

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25. *On Psalms* 8.56 (28).

26. *On Psalms* 13.96 (76–78).

27. *On Psalms* 21.198 (142).

28. *On Psalms* 31.295 (113).

29. See *On Psalms* 31.297 (115–16).

30. *On Psalms* 31.301 (117–18).

31. *On Psalms* 21.186 (134). For Thomas’s discussion of the Eucharist in its connection to the Passion, see *On Psalms* 21.196–97 (140–42).

the Church.”<sup>32</sup> In his Passion, the mystical union of Christ and the Church thus becomes most manifest, in which “Christ transforms himself into the Church, and the Church is transformed into Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

The effects of Christ’s Passion—and indeed, the effects of the Eucharist—extend beyond the Church. Among these, Thomas lists knowledge of God and conversion. Both are effects of the Passion, and both effects are produced by the instrumentation of the Eucharist, which serves as its memorial.<sup>34</sup>

These salvific effects redound to the greatness of God, but none are more impressively evident than those that occur in the Church and, indeed, constitutively so. “The greatness of his works is evident in all of his creations, but it is especially apparent in the gifts of grace by which the Church has been established.”<sup>35</sup> The Church is founded on Christ analogous to the way Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion.<sup>36</sup> It has received attestation and accolades from many of the greatest “kings of the earth” (Ps. 47:5 DRB).<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that the story of the Church has been one of pure triumph and grace. Nevertheless, in Psalm 47:14’s injunction, “Set your hearts on her strength and distribute her houses,” Thomas finds an admonition not to let the corruption of certain members lead us “to condemn the whole Church” or overlook the magnificence that God has imparted to it in his grace and for his glory.<sup>38</sup>

#### EXPOSITIO SUPER IOB AD LITTERAM

As an *expositio*, Thomas’s commentary on Job represents a much more polished and editorialized presentation of material that he originally gave in lectures delivered at the Dominican priory of San Domenico in Orvieto from 1261 to 1265, near the middle of his career as a master of the sacred page.<sup>39</sup> Thomas

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32. *On Psalms* 21.176 (125).

33. *On Psalms* 21.176 (125).

34. *On Psalms* 21.198 (142).

35. *On Psalms* 47.474 (147).

36. *On Psalms* 47.475 (147).

37. *On Psalms* 47.476 (148–49).

38. *On Psalms* 47.479 (153).

39. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 153; Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:120–22. For more secondary literature on Thomas’s commentary on Job, see the essays in *Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering, Piotr Roszak, and Jürgen Vijgen (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020); and Martin D. Yaffe’s “Interpretive Essay,” in *Thomas Aquinas: The Literal Exposition on Job; A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, trans. Anthony Damico (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1989), 1–65. See also Mauricio R. Naváez’s study of Thomas’s expository methodology in his “Intention, *Probabiles Rationes* and Truth: The Exegetical Practice in Thomas Aquinas; The Case of *Expositio Super Iob ad Litteram*,” in *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas: Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions, and New Perspectives*, 141–69.

identifies the literal meaning of Job as the subject of his commentary, in contrast to Gregory the Great's famous sixth-century spiritual commentary on Job, whose clarity and eloquence, Thomas declares, left nothing further to be said about the book's spiritual sense.<sup>40</sup>

In Thomas's interpretation, Job represents the authoritative disputation on divine providence, composed and included in Scripture by divine providence for human instruction.<sup>41</sup> He makes clear that he imagines the dialogue between Job and his counselors in terms of a *disputatio* or debate of the sort that were standard educational programming in the universities of Thomas's time.<sup>42</sup> Thomas sees a *disputatio* structure in the dialoguing speeches that constitute most of the book and in God's concluding statement in Job's favor, which he interprets in terms of the decision of a presiding judge.<sup>43</sup>

Thomas reasons that Job must reflect real history, given the way other Scriptures reference it, but he admits that questions of historicity and authorship are irrelevant to the work's pedagogical intention, which is "to show that human affairs are ruled by divine providence."<sup>44</sup> The central problem of Job's narrative is the fact that a person's earthly fortune does not always correspond to the moral character of his life. For most interpreters, the primary question at stake is what this lack of correspondence implies about God's providence and justice. For some, it indicates the absence of any divine providence—that either God does not exist or, if he does, he has not given or maintained a just moral order in his creation. Supporting this kind of nihilism, Thomas observes, were the pre-Socratic materialists, who "attributed everything to luck and chance."<sup>45</sup> Thomas, of course, rejects this view, which, he notes, "causes a great deal of harm to humanity, for if divine providence is denied, there will remain no reverence or true fear of God among people."<sup>46</sup> And yet, he must reckon with the fact that "good and evil befall both the good and the wicked indiffer-

40. See Thomas Aquinas, "The Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job" 6 (9).

41. See "Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job" 3 (8–9).

42. See "Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms" (2), where he identifies disputation as the genre of the book of Job. For more on the disputation format in terms of which Thomas interprets the dialog of Job, see John F. Boyle, "St. Thomas, Job, and the University Master," in *Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering, Piotr Roszak, and Jörgen Vijgen (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 21–41. Ruth Meyer credits Thomas's teacher, Albert the Great, as the first to explicitly interpret the book of Job as a Scholastic disputation in "A Passionate Dispute over Divine Providence: Albert the Great's Commentary on the Book of Job," in *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages*, 201–24.

43. *On Job* 38.1.491–92 (16).

44. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job" 3 (9).

45. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job" 1 (8).

46. "Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job" 3 (8).

ently.<sup>47</sup> This is a problem for Thomas no less than for Job and his counselors, who all presuppose the same retributive model of justice according to which good things, if they come to anyone, should come to those who do good, and correspondingly, if anyone has to suffer bad things, bad people should. “The work of justice,” Thomas asserts, “is to give each his due.”<sup>48</sup>

All the characters of Job agree that, somehow, God does maintain a just moral order in his creation in which people receive what they deserve for the conduct and moral character of their lives. What distinguishes Job’s position from that of his counselors, according to Thomas, is the view that human beings do not receive full and final retribution in this life. There are always things in store for people that they do not receive in the here and now. If this weren’t so, we would have to say that people can and do achieve the ultimate human end in this life—namely, perfect happiness. Now, for Thomas, it is clear that they cannot and do not.<sup>49</sup> This ultimate, beatific end—which Thomas understands to consist of intimate and immediate communion with God—is also the ultimate reward that one can receive, and to forego it is the greatest deprivation. Job’s counselors, because they deny life after death, are forced to deny that human fates in this life ever fall short of perfect justice and insist that any apparent inequity must be illusory. Consequently, Job’s suffering, for them, must be deserved and must indicate sin in his life.

By contrast, in Thomas’s interpretation, Job solves the problem of his apparently unjust earthly fate by positing a life to come in which God will finally resolve all injustices by rendering to each person the rewards and punishments that were merited but not fully discharged in this life. In Job’s lamentations, Thomas thus finds an argument for life after death that reasons *ad absurdum* from the structural injustice of human fate that he finds to be inextricable in the picture where death is absolute.

The life to come is, thus, the solution, for Thomas, both to the puzzle of Job’s particular fate and to the general problem of unjust human suffering and flourishing in this life—or at least, it is a large part of the story. It explains why we do not always see people getting all they deserve, whether in terms of rewards or punishments. It does less, however, to explain why they often seem to get positively *more* or *other* than what they deserve. Beyond the explanation of why Job did not get all the happiness that befit his virtue, the story of Job forces us to ask how it does not impugn God’s providence that Job was gravely

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47. “Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job” 2 (8).

48. *On Job* 4.3.87 (97).

49. *On Job* 7.1.122 (60).

afflicted by God instead—that, instead of happiness, he experienced excruciating affliction, deprivation, and pain.

In Thomas's understanding, the suffering of good people is, perhaps, finally inexplicable for us since "human wisdom is not sufficient to understand the truth of divine providence."<sup>50</sup> In this light, perhaps Job's mournful exclamations and exquisitely rhetorical expressions of *aporia* represent the most pious and human way of approaching the problem of suffering, oriented, as they seem to be, more to expressing lament and asking questions than answering them.

For Thomas's part, the fact that God allows the innocent to suffer is not simply inscrutable, however. On the contrary, he sees it as divinely ordained for pedagogical reasons. Suffering serves as a test that reveals the moral substance of the just, not to God, but to the just themselves: "God is said to test a person not so that he may learn what kind of person he is but so to inform others and so that the one tested might know himself."<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Thomas seems to view adversity as an inescapable feature of human life. Adversity is thematic in each of the metaphors he uses to describe it—for instance, in terms of a journey, a military campaign, and employment.<sup>52</sup>

In Thomas's interpretation of the book, Job shows himself to be an exemplar of wisdom and virtue. Indeed, although Thomas faults him for the hyperbole of his lamentation and the scandal it causes in the minds of his interlocutors,<sup>53</sup> he presents Job as otherwise a model of pious virtue, wisdom, and innocence. Indeed, although initially he speaks under the influence of his sadness, like a true sage, he rationally contains this sorrow and does not let himself be governed by it.<sup>54</sup> In the end, he succeeds not only in being mostly innocent in how he faces his horrific afflictions but also in being correct, as Thomas argues, in his understanding of divine providence and in deducing a human life after death. In the end, Job finds vindication in God's declaration to Job's critic Eliphaz: "You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:8 RSV).

#### *EXPOSITIO SUPER ISAIAM AD LITTERAM*

The dating of Thomas's commentary on Isaiah remains a matter of scholarly dispute. However, most scholars consider it—or at least much of it—to be an early work, produced before Thomas became a master of the sacred page.

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50. *On Job* 38.1.491 (16).

51. *On Job* 7.4.136 (65).

52. *On Job* 17.1.202, 7.1.122 (60).

53. See *On Job* 38.1.491 (16) and 39.1.524 (not included in this volume).

54. See *On Job* 1.4.32–33 (56).

The commentaries on chapters 12–66, as James Weisheipl observes, have “the form and style of a literal gloss with no theological developments or discussion.”<sup>55</sup> This cursory style is characteristic of a medieval bachelor and, thus, represents one compelling reason to ascribe an early date, possibly during the period from 1251 to 1252, while Thomas was a student at Cologne. This, indeed, is the date given by many leading Thomist scholars, including Jean-Pierre Torrell.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the quality of the lectures on Isaiah 1–11, which Weisheipl describes as having “the form and style of a university master,” suggests that the commentary, in some way, reflects a transition in Thomas’s development as a scholar.<sup>57</sup> It reflects such a transition at least insofar as it represents “Aquinas’s first substantial theological work,” as Joseph Wawrykow and others have noted.<sup>58</sup>

The commentary on Isaiah is undoubtedly richer than those on Jeremiah and Lamentations—Thomas’s two other early commentaries, which are written, unambiguously, in the cursory style of a bachelor. “By contrast” to these, Torrell remarks, “the exposition of Isaiah . . . possesses great riches on certain points.”<sup>59</sup> With a similar recognition of its unique status among Thomas’s early commentaries “on certain points,” this collection features the commentary’s prologue along with what are arguably its two most elaborate and emblematic lectures: the commentaries on the temple vision of Isaiah 6:1–7 and the Emmanuel sign in 7:10–25. These lectures arguably reflect a rigor and depth of thought on par with any of his magisterial biblical commentaries. Indeed, they are among the most rigorous of Thomas’s Old Testament commentaries in terms of their attention to historical detail and the Jewish interpretive tradition.

The nature of prophecy and revelation are leading topics of the book, the most profound discussion of which appears in Thomas’s commentary on the temple vision of Isaiah 6. There, Thomas argues that Isaiah’s epiphany, although truly a revelation of God, could not have been a direct vision of God. Following Pseudo-Dionysius, he establishes the law-like necessity of mediation for any divine revelation: “No mere human being—none among the fathers either of the New or Old Testament—received any revelation from God except by the mediation of angels.”<sup>60</sup> This thesis establishes the need for the Incarnation, which, Thomas says, represents “the primary subject matter”

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55. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 369.

56. See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:28.

57. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino*, 369.

58. Joseph Wawrykow, introduction to *St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on Isaiah* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), 3.

59. Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas*, 1:27.

60. *On Isaiah* 6.1.215 (86–87).

of Isaiah.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the virgin-birth prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is the pivotal passage of the book in its unambiguous and literal identification of Christ as the subject of the many messianic oracles that follow. Christ is Emmanuel—God with us. Thomas works to show that Christ is the undeniable referent of the prophecy by methodically examining and refuting alternate interpretations.

In the lecture on the Emmanuel sign, Thomas also outlines his high Christology and notably argues that Christ was developmentally and psychologically complete from the moment of his conception. Even in his infancy, “he has perfect knowledge of everything.”<sup>62</sup> His fullness of divinity, which thus elevates his human nature, also makes him the perfect medium of divine revelation. In him, we can see God because, in him, God is with us.

## CONCLUSION

The commentaries compiled in this volume were written at different times in Thomas’s teaching career—the commentaries on Isaiah in the early part, those on Job in the middle, and those on the Psalms at the end. They address a wide array of topics and questions and showcase the breadth of Thomas’s learning and intellectual curiosity. His commentary on the Psalms highlights the glory of God in all his works of creation, governance, restoration, and glorification. His exposition of Job probes the mysteries of divine providence and human existence. He meditates on the nature of prophecy, revelation, and Christ in his commentary on Isaiah. Despite their topical variety and the different historical periods they represent in Thomas’s career as a scholar, they cohere together in this collection in a way that demonstrates the continuity of Thomas’s approach to the Old Testament throughout his career.

We can see, for instance, his overriding concern for the literal meaning of Scripture. Nevertheless, as we have seen, his understanding of the literal meaning is uniquely expansive due to his robust sense of the divine agency in and behind the human authorship of Scripture. In Thomas’s interpretation, the literal sense of the Old Testament writings can thus be more overtly Christian than we are perhaps accustomed to assert today.

Again, Thomas’s approach to Scripture is unrelentingly theological and philosophical. Although he demonstrates a keen interest in the historical and literary dimensions of the Old Testament Scriptures, his primary concern centers on the theological revelations they contain and express. Moreover, the theology of the Old Testament is speculative in a way that is nevertheless

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61. “Prologue of Saint Thomas to Isaiah” 5 (12).

62. *On Isaiah* 7.2.254 (107).



profoundly pedagogical and practically vital. In the commentaries on Job and the Psalms, for instance, we see Thomas's concern to help his reader understand and orient his life to God within the order of creation and in the face of his eventual death. The theology of the Old Testament, for Thomas, is ordered to redemption, beatitude, and the eternal union of the human soul with God. This is to say that it is ordered to Christ, for Christ is the redeemer, the self-revelation of God, and the way to eternal life with him. Consequently, for Thomas, Christ is the essential truth revealed by God in the Old Testament.



# The Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Psalms

*In all his works, he gave thanks to the holy one and to the most High with words of glory.*

—SIRACH 47:9

These words refer in the literal sense to David and are selected fittingly to show the cause of this work. In them, its four causes are shown—namely, the matter, the mode or form, the goal, and the agent. The matter is universal since, while individual books of the canonical Scriptures contain particular matter, this book contains the general matter of the whole of theology. And this is what Dionysius says: *The Sacred Scripture of the divine songs—that is, of the Psalms, intends to sing about all of the holy and divine actions.*<sup>1</sup> So the phrase *in all his works* designates the matter since he writes about every work of God.

Now the work of God is fourfold—namely, creation: *on the seventh day, God rested from every work* (Gen. 2:2); governance: *My Father is working still* (John 5:17); restoration: *My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work* (John 4:34); and glorification: *The work of the Lord is full of his glory* (Sir. 42:16). And all these are treated completely in this teaching.

*First* is the work of creation: *I will behold thy heavens, the works of thy fingers* (Ps. 8:4). *Second* is the work of governance since all the histories in the Old Testament are treated in this book: *I will open my mouth in parables. . . . How great things have we heard and known, and our fathers have told us* (Ps. 77:2–3).

*Third* is the work of restoration, in regard to the head—namely, Christ—and in regard to all the effects of grace: *I have slept and taken my rest, and I have risen up* (Ps. 3:6). For all the things that pertain to faith in the Incarnation are related so plainly in this work that it seems to be a gospel rather than a prophecy.

*Fourth* is the work of glorification: *The saints shall rejoice in glory* (Ps. 149:5). And this is the reason why the Psalter is used so frequently in the Church since it contains the whole of Scripture. Or, according to the Gloss, it is to give us hope in divine mercy since, although David sinned, he was nevertheless restored through penance.<sup>2</sup>

Now, the matter is universal because it is *all his works*, and because it looks to Christ, *for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell* (Col. 1:19), and so the matter of this book is Christ and his members.

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1. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.3.4.

2. Cf. Peter Lombard, *Magna glossatura*.

The mode or form of Sacred Scripture is of many kinds. For example, narrative: *Hath not the Lord made the saints to declare all his wonderful works?* (Sir. 42:17 DRB). And this is found in the historical books. Another kind admonishes, exhorts, and commands: *Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority* (Titus 2:15); *remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord* (2 Tim. 2:14). This kind is found in the law, the prophets, and the books of Solomon. Another kind disputes, and this is in Job and in the Apostle: *I desire to argue my case with God* (Job 13:3). Then there is praying or praising, and this is also found in this book since everything said in the other books in the modes already mentioned is also here, in the mode of praise and prayer: *I will give praise to thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will relate all thy wonders* (Ps. 9:2). And so he says, *he gave praise*, because he spoke in the mode of giving praise.

And from this comes the reason for the book's title: *The Beginning of The Book of Hymns* or *The Soliloquies of the Prophet David About Christ*. A hymn is the praise of God with song. Now, a song is the exultation of a mind dwelling on things eternal breaking forth aloud. Therefore, he teaches us to praise God with exultation. A soliloquy is a person's conversation with God alone or with just himself since this is fitting for praising and praying.

The goal of this scripture is prayer, which is the lifting up of the mind to God. *Prayer is the ascent of the intellect to God.*<sup>3</sup> *The lifting up of my hands, as an evening sacrifice* (Ps. 140:2). The soul is lifted up toward God in four ways: *first*, to admire the height of his power, and this is the elevation of faith: *Lift your eyes on high and see who has created these things* (Isa. 40:26). *How great are thy works, O Lord* (Ps. 103:24). *Second*, the mind is lifted up to stretch toward the excellence of eternal beatitude, and this is the elevation of hope: *You will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear. You will forget your misery. . . . And your life will be brighter than the noonday* (Job 11:15–17). *Third*, the mind is lifted up to cling to the divine goodness and holiness: *Rouse yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem* (Isa. 51:17). And this is the elevation of charity. *Fourth*, the mind is lifted up to imitate the divine justice in action, and this is the elevation of justice: *Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven* (Lam. 3:41).

And these four ways are implied when he says, *to the holy one, and to the most High*, since the last two ways of being lifted up relate to *the holy one* and the first two to *the most High*. And the Psalms teach that this is the goal of this Scripture.

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3. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 3.24.

First, about *the most High*: *From the rising of the sun . . . the Lord is high above all nations* (Ps. 112:3–4). Second, about *the Holy One*: *Let them give praise to thy great name, for it is terrible and holy* (Ps. 98:3).

So, Gregory says that if it is carried out with the attention of the heart, the voice of psalm-singing prepares for Almighty God a way to the heart so that he may pour the mystery of prophecy or the grace of remorse into the attentive soul.<sup>4</sup> The goal is, therefore, that the soul may be joined to God as *the holy one* and *the most High*.

Now, the phrase *with words of glory* indicates the author of this work. For it should be noted that Sacred Scripture differs from other kinds of knowledge. For other kinds of knowledge arise through human reason, but Scripture through the impulse of divine inspiration: *No prophecy ever came by the impulse of men but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God* (2 Pet. 1:21).<sup>5</sup> So, in Sacred Scripture, the human tongue is like the tongue of a child saying the words another provides: *My tongue is the pen of a scrivener* (Ps. 44:2), and *The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue* (2 Sam. 23:2). And so, he says, *the words of the Lord*, or *of glory*, which are spoken through revelation. Thus 1 Kings 20:35 says, *In the word of the Lord: strike me* (DRB)—that is, in divine revelation.

And so, this Scripture<sup>6</sup> can be said to be the *words of glory* in four ways since it is related to glory in four ways. First, in regard to the cause from which it flows, since this teaching comes forth from the glorious Word of God, a voice coming down in this way from the excellent glory: *This is my beloved Son* (2 Pet. 1:17). Second, in regard to content, since this book contains the glory of the Lord that it announces: *Declare his glory among the gentiles* (Ps. 95:3). Third, in regard to the way it comes forth, since glory is equivalent to clarity, and the revelation of this prophecy was glorious because it was manifest.

For there are three modes of prophecy: first, through sensible things: *The fingers of a man's hand appeared . . . and the king saw the hand as it wrote* (Dan. 5:5). Second, through imaginary likenesses, as is made clear by the dream of Pharaoh and the interpretation made by Joseph (Gen. 41): *I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne* (Isa. 6:1). Third, through the manifestation of the truth itself.<sup>7</sup> And this latter mode befits the prophecy of Daniel, who put forth his prophecy solely by the impulse of the Holy Spirit without any exterior help. *For the other prophets*, as Augustine says, *prophesied deeds and words through certain images of things and verbal veiling (namely, through dreams and visions), but he was taught*

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4. See Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* 1.15.

5. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.1.3.

6. That is, the Psalms.

7. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2-2.173.2; *On Isaiah* 1.1.

directly by the truth.<sup>8</sup> So when David said that *the Spirit of the Lord speaks by me*, he immediately added, *He dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth upon a cloudless morning* (2 Sam. 23:2, 4). For the sun is the Holy Spirit, illuminating the hearts of the prophets, who sometimes appears under the clouds when he illumines through the two modes of prophecy already mentioned and who sometimes appears without clouds, as here. And to this can be added, *How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids* (2 Sam. 6:20).

The *fourth* way in which this Scripture relates to glory is that through it, God invites us to glory. Psalm 149:9, *This glory is to all his saints*, aptly relates to *how the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself* (2 Sam. 6:20).

Thus, we know the matter of this work: it concerns all the works of the Lord; its mode: praying and praising; its goal: so that, elevated, we may be joined to the *most High* and *holy one*; and its author: the Holy Spirit revealing it.

But, before we come to the text, we should consider three things generally about this book. *First*, the translation of this work. *Second*, the way of explaining it. *Third*, its division.

There are three translations.<sup>9</sup> One is from the earthly Church's beginning at the time of the apostles, and by Jerome's time, this had been corrupted by copyists. So, Jerome corrected it at the request of Pope Damasus, and this is read in Italy. But since this translation did not agree with the Greek, Jerome translated it again from Greek into Latin at the request of Paula, and Pope Damasus had this sung in France, and it agrees word for word with the Greek. Later, a certain Sophronius was disputing with the Jews, who said that something was not as he cited it from the second translation of the Psalter, so he asked Jerome to translate the Psalter into Latin from Hebrew. Jerome agreed to his request, producing a translation that entirely agrees with the Hebrew but that is not sung in any church, though many still have it.

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8. Cf. Augustine, *Letter 147*, 13.

9. Thomas actually mentions four translations here. The first, called the *Versio vetus Latina* (the Old Latin Version), comes from the Latin translation of the Septuagint that preceded Jerome's Vulgate. The second version, which he describes as "read in Italy," is the Roman Psalter, a corrected version of the Old Latin translation that more closely follows a common version of the Septuagint. The third version is the Gallican Psalter, which Jerome produced using the four Greek columns of his *Hexapla*—an immense text in which Jerome presented a line-by-line comparison of six different versions of the Bible. In the eighth century, Alcuin used the Gallican Psalter in the version of the Bible he created, and thus, by Thomas's time it was the most influential psalter, both for liturgical and scholarly use. Thomas relies on it as his default translation, and in the sixteenth century it was included in the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate. The fourth translation Thomas mentions is the *Iuxta Hebraeos*, the "Hebrew Psalter," the final translation of the Psalms that Jerome produced using pre-Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts instead of the Septuagint.

Second, regarding the way of explaining it, it should be known that in explaining the Psalter, as with other prophecies, we must avoid the error condemned in the Fifth Synod.<sup>10</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia said that Sacred Scripture and the prophecies do not speak explicitly about Christ, only about other things, but that people have applied them to Christ.<sup>11</sup> Thus, *They parted my garments amongst them* (Ps. 21:19) in the literal sense was not about Christ but David. This theory was condemned by that Council, and anyone who insists that Scripture must be explained this way is a heretic. Therefore, blessed Jerome, writing about Ezekiel, gave us a rule that we will follow in regard to the Psalms—namely, that events should be explained as prefiguring something relating to Christ or the Church.<sup>12</sup> For, as it is said, *all these things happened to them in figure* (1 Cor. 10:11 DRB).<sup>13</sup>

Now prophecies are sometimes about things that took place in their own time; however, they are not about these things principally but insofar as these things prefigure future ones. This is why the Holy Spirit ordained that when such things are said, certain elements exceeding that event itself are inserted to lift the soul up to what is prefigured.

Just as in the book of Daniel, many things are said about Antiochus as a figure of the Antichrist—hence, we read some things there that were not fulfilled in him but will be fulfilled in the Antichrist. Similarly, some things are written about the reign of David and Solomon that were not to be fulfilled in the reign of these men but were to be fulfilled in the rule of Christ, in whose figure they were spoken. Take Psalm 71:2, for example: *Give to the king thy judgment, O God*. According to its title, this psalm is about the reign of David and Solomon, but there is material in it that exceeds the capacity of these men—namely: *In his days shall justice spring up, and abundance of peace till the moon be taken away*, and further, *He shall rule from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth* (Ps. 71:7–8). Therefore, the psalm is about the reign of Solomon insofar as it prefigures that of Christ, in which all that has been said will be fulfilled.

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10. The Second Council of Constantinople, held in 553.

11. Numerous passages from the writings of Theodore are excerpted in the acts of Constantinople's fourth session, including one that argued, concerning Psalm 21: "It is beyond doubt that the psalm does not at all fit the Lord." Instead, Theodore argued, the passages "were manifestly applied to him by the apostles because what had first been said hyperbolically by David on account of ills inflicted on him happened in actuality to Christ." *Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553: With Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy* 4.28, trans. Richard Price, vol. 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

12. The rule to which Thomas refers here, in fact, appears in the prologue of Jerome's *Commentary on Hosea*.

13. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.1.10.

Its *first* division is that there are one hundred and fifty psalms, and this has a hidden meaning since one hundred and fifty is composed of seventy and eighty. Seven, from which seventy is named, signifies the length of this time, which is measured by seven days. Eight, from which eighty is named, signifies the state of future life; for eight, according to the Gloss, relates to those who are risen.<sup>14</sup> So one hundred and fifty signifies that this book treats those things that pertain to the course of this present life and to future glory. Seven also signifies the Old Testament, for the Old Testament fathers maintained a sevenfold structure of observance. They observed the seventh day; the seventh week; the seventh month; and the seventh year of the seventh decade, which is called the jubilee (cf. Lev. 25:8–10). Now, eight signifies the New Testament because we celebrate the eighth day, the Lord's day, because of the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection. And in this book of Psalms, the mysteries of the Old and New Testaments are contained.

The *second* division follows those who said that the Psalter is divided into five books by the five divisions of the psalms that say, *So be it, so be it*; and this is in Greek, where the Hebrew has, *Amen, amen*. And according to them, this phrase marks the end of each book, and it is found first in Psalm 40:2, which begins, *Blessed is he that understandeth*. Again, in Psalm 71:2: *Give to the king thy judgment, O God*. And in Psalm 88:2: *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever*. And in Psalm 105, whose first verse begins, *Give glory*. And so there are five books.<sup>15</sup>

But this division is not found among the Hebrews, who regard it as one book: for it is written in the book of Psalms, *May their camp be a desolation* (Ps. 68:26; Acts 1:20). For they say that *So be it, so be it* or *Amen, amen* does not refer to the end of a book, since it is used many times in the other books where it is not the end of a book.<sup>16</sup>

The *third* division is into three groups of fifty, and this division reflects the three states of the faithful people. *First*, the state of penitence, to which are directed the first fifty psalms, which end with the psalm beginning, *Have mercy on me, O God* (50:3), which is a penitential psalm. *Second*, the state of justice, which consists in judgment, and this group ends with Psalm 100, which begins, *Mercy and judgment*. The *third* concludes the praise of eternal glory, and so it ends in this way: *Let every spirit praise the Lord* (Ps. 150:5).

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14. *Glossa Ordinaria*.

15. A division related to this theory is favored by contemporary scholarship, although in many forms it is more complicated, involving several original collections being split and layered around a central set of psalms. For a reference to this fivefold division, see *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 626.

16. Cf. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* 150.2, and Judith 13:26 (DRB).



Now, about the order of the Psalms, it should be noted that although some psalms are about history, they are not in historical order. For the psalm that begins *I will love thee, O Lord* (17:2) pertains to the history of Saul, but the psalm that begins *Why, O Lord, are they multiplied* (3:2) pertains to the history of Absalom, which came later. So, they signify something other than merely history.

The first fifty pertain to the state of penitence, and so the tribulations and attacks against David and his deliverance are treated in them figuratively.<sup>17</sup> And in order that the division also be literal, King David prays against two kinds of attack or persecution.

*First*, against what was against the whole people of God, and this is in the fifth set of ten, beginning, *As the hart panteth after fountains of water, so my soul panteth after thee, O God* (Ps. 41:2). And *second*, the just person individually is afflicted in two ways: sometimes by those persecuting him in temporal affairs, and sometimes by those living unjustly: *they afflicted the soul of the just with unjust works* (2 Pet. 2:8); *fainting hath taken hold of me because of the wicked* (Ps. 118:53).

So, he puts first the psalms pertaining to the first kind of persecution against David, which signifies something against Christ and the Church, and next, the fourth set of ten, those pertaining to the second kind of tribulation: *Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven* (Ps. 31:1).

And David, while reigning, suffered two kinds of tribulation: by particular persons and by the whole people. Therefore, the psalms that are against an individual are first. Next are the psalms in which he prays against the second persecution, and this is in the third set of ten—namely: *O God my God, look upon me* (Ps. 21:2).

Now, he suffered persecution from two particular persons—namely, Absalom and Saul—and this signifies the persecution that the saints suffer either from those of their own household or from those outside. So, Christ was made to suffer by Judas and by the Jews.

Therefore, the psalms against the first are put first; those against the second are next, and these are in the second group of ten: *Save me, O Lord, for there is now no saint, truths are decayed from among the children of men* (Ps. 11:2).

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17. For further discussion of this division of the first fifty psalms, see Thomas's discussion in the opening of Psalm 31, included at page 112 below.

## The Prologue of Saint Thomas to Job

1 Just as things that are generated naturally reach perfection from imperfection by small degrees, so it is with human beings in their knowledge of the truth. In the beginning, they attained a very limited understanding of the truth, but later, they gradually came to know the truth in fuller measure. For this reason, many erred in the beginning due to an imperfect knowledge of the truth. Among these, there were some who excluded divine providence and attributed everything to luck and chance. Indeed, this opinion predominated among so many of these early philosophers that they held the world to have been made by chance and by what naturally arose from the positions of the ancient natural elements, which constituted only a material cause. Even certain later philosophers, such as Democritus and Empedocles, attributed most things to chance. However, by a more profound diligence in their contemplation of the truth, later philosophers showed by evident proofs and reasons that natural things are set in motion by providence. For such a sure course in the motion of the heavens and the stars and other effects of nature would not be found unless all these things were governed and ordered by some intellect transcending the things ordered.

2 Therefore, after the majority asserted the opinion that natural things did not happen by chance but by providence due to the order that clearly appears in them, a question emerged among them about human actions as to whether human affairs evolved by chance or were governed by some kind of providence or a higher ordering. This doubt was fed especially because there is no sure order apparent in human events. For good things do not always befall the good, nor evil things the wicked. On the other hand, evil things do not always befall the good nor good things the wicked, but good and evil befall both the good and the wicked indifferently. This fact, then, especially moved the human heart to the opinion that human affairs are not governed by divine providence. Some said that human affairs proceed by chance, except to the extent that they are ruled by human providence and counsel; others attributed their outcome to a fatalism ruled by the heavens.

3 This idea causes a great deal of harm to humanity, for if divine providence is denied, there will remain no reverence or true fear of God among people. The degree of indolence toward the virtues and inclination toward vices that would follow from this lack of reverence is sufficiently easy to assess, for nothing calls people back from evil things and induces them to good as much as the fear and love of God. For this reason, the first and foremost aim of those who had pursued wisdom inspired by the Spirit of God for the instruction of others was to remove this opinion from human hearts. So after the promulgation of

the Law and the Prophets, the book of Job occupies first place in the order of Holy Scripture, the books composed by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for the instruction of human beings. The whole intention of this book is directed to this: to show that human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.

4 The methodology used in this book is to demonstrate this proposition from the supposition that natural things are governed by divine providence. The affliction of the just is what seems especially to impugn divine providence in human affairs. For although it seems irrational and contrary to providence at first glance that good things sometimes happen to evil people, nevertheless, this can be excused in one way or another by divine compassion. But that the just are afflicted without cause seems to undermine totally the foundation of providence. Thus, the varied and grave afflictions of a particular just man called Job, perfect in every virtue, are proposed as a kind of theme for the question intended for discussion.

5 Nevertheless, there were some who had the impression that Job could not have been anything in reality but that it must have been a parable made up to serve as a particular case for a debate about providence, as people frequently invent cases to serve as a model for debate. Although it does not matter much for the intention of the book whether or not such is the case, it makes a difference for the truth itself. This aforementioned opinion seems to contradict the authority of Scripture. In Ezekiel, the Lord is represented as saying, *If these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness* (14:14). Clearly Noah and Daniel were men who really existed, and so there should be no doubt about Job, who is the third man numbered with them. Also, James says, *Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord* (5:11). Therefore, we must believe that Job was a real man.

6 However, as to the epoch in which he lived, who his parents were, or even who the author of the book was—that is, whether Job wrote about himself as if speaking about another person or whether someone else reported these things about him—is not the present intention of this discussion. With trust in God's aid, I intend to explain this book entitled the book of Job briefly, as far as I am able, according to the literal sense. The mystical sense has been explained for us both accurately and eloquently by the blessed Pope Gregory so that nothing further need be added to this sort of commentary.<sup>18</sup>

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18. See Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*.

## The Prologue of Saint Thomas to Isaiah

*Write the vision and make it plain upon tables that he that readeth it may run over it. For as yet the vision is far off, and it shall appear at the end.*

—HABAKKUK 2:2–3

1 From these words, we can understand three things about the book of the prophet Isaiah, which we have at hand: the author, the manner, and the subject matter. Regarding the *first*, three things are set out: the author, the author's minister, and the minister's office or gift.

The speaker's authority reveals the author; hence it says, *The Lord answered me, and said, write the vision*. For the author of Holy Scripture is the Holy Spirit, as it says below: *Now the Lord God has sent me and his Spirit* (Isa. 48:16); *because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God* (2 Pet. 1:21); for it is the Spirit who *speaks mysteries* (1 Cor. 14:2).

The minister is shown in the act of writing, for he says, *Write*. The tongue of the prophet was an organ of the Holy Spirit, as is said in Psalm 44:2: *My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe*; and: *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed* (1 Cor. 3:5).

The office of the minister is shown in the privilege of the vision, for it says, *the vision*, as it says in 1 Samuel 9:9: *For he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer*; and in Numbers 12:6: *If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream*. Thus, therefore, the author is clear.

2 The manner is shown in *make it plain*, for this prophet's manner of writing is plain and open. Hence, as is said in Jerome's preface, he seems *to be not prophesying about the future but composing an account of past events*.<sup>19</sup> Regarding the manner of writing, three things are set out: the explanation of the vision, the reason for the explanation, and the benefit that follows.

The *first* is shown where it is said, *make it plain*. He makes plain what he has seen, or the vision, in three ways: *first*, through the use of similitudes; *second*, through the expression of thought; *third*, through the beauty of his words. And in these three ways, this prophet surpasses the other prophets.

He sets out beautiful and courtly similitudes, which indeed are necessary for us due to the connaturality of sense to reason. It is, thus, natural for our reason to receive from sensible objects; hence, it more clearly grasps things whose

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19. "Preface of St. Jerome," in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Isaiah* 2, trans. Louis St. Hilaire, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, vol. 30 (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2021).

likenesses it sees by the senses. Likewise, Dionysius shows this in his second Letter to Titus—namely, that sensible figures are necessary in the Scriptures: *All those who hear plain things weave in themselves a certain figure, which conducts them to an understanding of theology.*<sup>20</sup> Again, in Hosea: *Through the prophets [I] gave parables* (12:10).

Isaiah also excels in the expression of thought, *so that he seems to compose not a prophecy but a gospel*, as is said in the Helmeted Prologue.<sup>21</sup> Thus it is said to him below: *Lift up thy voice . . . fear not. Say to the cities of Judah* (Isa. 40:9). He also excels in beauty of words as *a man of noble and urbane eloquence*, as Jerome says in the Prologue; *the tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge* (Prov. 15:2).

3 After this, the reason for this explanation is touched on when it says, *upon tables*. For there are the tables of the law, there are tables of a stony heart, and there are tables of a soft and fleshly heart: *You yourselves are our letter . . . written . . . not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts* (2 Cor. 3:2–3).

The *first* tables of the law were written by God's finger, as is said in Exodus 31:18, and therefore Scripture is profound and obscure and filled with many mysteries. Thus, to explain them, it was necessary for plain prophecy to be written upon these tables by a human finger, as it says below: *Take thee a great book and write in it with a man's pen* (Isa. 8:1). But it was necessary to write plainly on the *second* tables, the stony hearts, in order to confound them: *Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me"* (Matt. 15:7–8). But it was necessary to write on the *third* tables, the fleshly hearts, to instruct them: *They read from the book, from the law of God, clearly*, and it continues, *the people understood the reading* (Neh. 8:8).

4 The benefit of the explanation, however, is shown in what follows: *that he may run over it*. For to run over is to come to the end quickly by running. The end, moreover, is threefold: the end of the law, the end of the commandment, and the end of life.

*For Christ is the end of the law that everyone who has faith may be justified* (Rom. 10:4); *the end of the commandment is charity* (1 Tim. 1:5 DRB); the end of life is death: *He who endures to the end will be saved* (Matt. 24:13). Therefore, it says, *that he that readeth it may run over it*, as if to say: that he who reads

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20. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Letter 9*, 1.

21. The "Prologus Galeatus": Jerome's preface to Samuel and Kings. However, these words appear in Jerome's *Letter 53*, 8; cf. also, the "Preface of St. Jerome" to Isaiah (cited in 10n19 above), where he says, "Isaiah should be called not so much a prophet as an evangelist, for he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the Church so clearly that you think that he is not prophesying about the future but composing an account of past events."

it without the impediment of doubt may run over, believing in Christ, and believing may love, and in love may persevere.

5 The subject matter is touched upon in what follows: *For as yet the vision is far off*; and the primary subject matter of this book is the appearance of the Son of God. Hence, in the Church, it is read during the season of Advent. Now, there are three appearances of the Son of God. The *first* is that in which he, having been made man, appeared in the flesh: *The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared* (Titus 3:4). The *second* is that in which he appeared by faith, believed by the world: *The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men* (Titus 2:11). The *third* is that in which he will appear by sight in glorification: *We know that when he appears we shall be like him* (1 John 3:2). And these appearances are the subject matter of this book. Thus, in the Prologue it is said that *all his concern is for the coming of Christ and the calling of the gentiles*.<sup>22</sup>

6 But certainly, the one who afterward was thus seen was still far off in Isaiah's own time. Indeed, he was far off because he was exalted in equality of majesty: *Man beholds it from afar. Behold, God is great, and we know him not* (Job 36:25–26). He was also far off because he was hidden in the Father's preordination: *What is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God* (Eph. 3:9). He was also far off because he was delayed in the expectation of the fathers: *These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar* (Heb. 11:13).

7 But certainly what was then far off has come near because what was exalted has been made the lowest. For the Word *became flesh* (John 1:14). What was hidden has been made public because *the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known* (John 1:18). What was delayed has begun even now to be possessed by the saints in glory: *Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Matt. 25:34).

8 Thus, therefore, he was able to say, *as yet the vision is far off, and it shall appear at the end*. For the *first* appearance was at the end of the law, *but when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law* (Gal. 4:4). The *second* appearance, however, was at the end of idolatry, as it says below: *Behold, the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud and will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence* (Isa. 19:1). The *third* will be at the end of all misery, for *he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away* (Rev. 21:4).

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22. "Preface of St. Jerome," in Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Isaiah* 5.

And these are the last things about which it is said of Isaiah: *By the spirit of might he saw the last things and comforted those who mourned in Zion. He revealed what was to occur to the end* (Sir. 48:24–25).





## Chapter 1

# DIVINE WISDOM, CREATION, AND THE COSMOS

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### Job 38:1–12

#### Divine Wisdom

*On Job 38.1 (491–499)*

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- 38:1 *Then the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind and said:*
- 38:2 *Who is this that wrappeth up sentences in unskillful words?*
- 38:3 *Gird up thy loins like a man. I will ask thee and answer thou me.*
- 38:4 *Where wast thou when I laid up the foundations of the earth? Tell me if thou hast understanding.*
- 38:5 *Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?*
- 38:6 *Upon what are its bases grounded? or who laid the corner stone thereof,*
- 38:7 *When the morning stars praised me together and all the sons of God made a joyful melody?*
- 38:8 *Who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth as issuing out of the womb:*
- 38:9 *When I made a cloud the garment thereof and wrapped it in a mist as in swaddling bands?*
- 38:10 *I set my bounds around it, and made it bars and doors:*
- 38:11 *And I said, hitherto thou shalt come and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves.*

38:12 *Didst thou since thy birth command the morning and show the dawning of the day its place?*

491 *Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:* After the discussions of Job and his friends about divine providence, Eliud had assumed to himself the office of determining the answer, contradicting Job in one thing and his friends in others. But because human wisdom is not sufficient to understand the truth of divine providence, it was necessary that the dispute should be determined by divine authority. Job thought correctly about divine providence, but in his manner of speaking he had gone to excess because he had caused scandal in the hearts of others when they thought that he did not show due reverence to God. Therefore, the Lord, as the determiner of the question, contradicts the friends of Job because they did not think correctly, Job himself for expressing himself in an inordinate way, and Eliud for an inadequate determination of the question.

So, the text continues, *the Lord answered Job*, because this answer is more on his account, although he had not spoken immediately before in the chapter. The text shows the manner of response, saying, *out of a whirlwind*, which can certainly be understood according to the literal sense to mean that the voice of God was formed miraculously in the air by some disturbance of the air, as happened on Mt. Sinai in Exodus, or like the voice that spoke to Christ, of which some said *that it thundered* (John 12:29 DRB). Or, this can be understood metaphorically, so that this answer of the Lord is an interior inspiration divinely given to Job himself, and so the Lord is said to have answered him *out of a whirlwind* both because of the disturbance that he still suffered and also because of the darkness that accompanies a whirlwind, since we cannot perceive divine inspiration clearly in this life but with the darkness of sensible likenesses, as Dionysius says in chapter 1 of *The Celestial Hierarchy*. The Lord indicated this, even if he had made his voice sensibly heard from a corporeal whirlwind.

492 Once a dispute is determined by the opinion of the judge, nothing else remains to be said except to reject the statement of the determination. So the Lord first rejects the determination of the question that Eliud had made. He rejects it because Eliud had enveloped the true opinions that he had proposed with many false and frivolous words, and so the text continues, *he said: Who is this that wrappeth up sentences in unskillful words?* In his arguments, Eliud had accused Job of saying he wanted to dispute with God and said that his claim to be just was tantamount to detracting from the justice of the divine judgment. But he enveloped these opinions with many presumptuous and even false statements, as should be clear already, which are called here unskillful words because every lack of order proceeds from a defect of reason.

493 So, after the Lord rejects the determination of Eliud, he himself begins to determine the question. First, he gets Job's attention when he says, *Gird up thy loins like a man*, which here is used as a metaphor. For men usually gird up their loins in preparation for a journey or work. The Lord, therefore, wanted Job to be ready to consider what he said to him by removing every impediment. So, he clearly tells him to gird up his loins because 'loins' metaphorically mean carnal desires, which block listening with the mind in a special way; as Isaiah says, *Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast* (28:9).

494 First, he begins in his determination to accuse Job for having spoken presumptuously when he provoked God to discussion. Since Job had given God two options when he said, *Call me, and I will answer thee*, and *I will speak, and do thou answer me* (13:22), and as Job had already said enough, the Lord, as though choosing the second alternative, says, *I will ask thee and answer thou me*. God certainly does not question to learn but to convince a human being of his ignorance. He questions him about his effects, which are easily accessible to the experience of the human senses. When a person is shown to be ignorant of these, he is much convinced that he does not have knowledge of the highest realities. Among other sensible effects, he begins to ask about the principal parts of the earth. Of these, earth is more known to us because it is more immediate to our experience. He begins to ask him about this and says, *Where wast thou when I laid up the foundations of the earth?* He rightly compares the earth to a foundation because, as a foundation is the lowest part of a building, so also the earth is the lowest of bodies, and it lies under everything. Since the earth is the principal matter of the human body, matter precedes in time that which is made from it, and even more, the plan of the artisan who created the matter precedes it. So, he clearly says, *Where wast thou when I laid up the foundations of the earth*, as if to say, 'You cannot know the plan of the foundation of the earth, because when the earth was laid on its foundation you did not yet exist as a really existing thing.'

495 Consider that some of the ancients did not attribute the position of the earth and of the other elements to some ordering plan but to material necessity, according to which the heavier elements sank under the lighter ones. So, to disprove this opinion, the Lord consequently compares the foundation of the earth to the foundation of a building, which is constructed according to the plans of the architect. In the same way, the foundation of the land was made according to divine providence, which human intelligence is not capable of understanding fully. He makes this clear when he says, *Tell me, if thou hast understanding*—as if to say, 'Therefore, you cannot give the answer for these

things because your intelligence is not capable of grasping them.’ Consider that an architect puts four things in order in the foundation of a building.

*First*, he orders the size of the foundation. In the same way, divine reason has disposed how great a quantity the earth should have, and not more or less. He expresses this, saying, *Who hath laid the measures thereof*, in all its dimensions. He clearly says, *laid the measures*, for earth, by its nature, does not require a certain quantity by necessity, but this quantity was only imposed on the earth from divine reason, which a human being cannot know. So, he says, *if thou knowest*, since a human cannot know or tell this.

*Second*, an architect puts in order in his plans the determination of the site of the foundation, which he encompasses by the extension of the measuring line, and so he says, *who hath stretched the line upon it?* This means the plan of divine government, which clearly determined the place of the earth in the composition of the universe.

*Third*, after the architect has determined the size of the foundation and where it must be located, he determines how to make the foundation solid. As to this he says, *Upon what are its bases*, of the land, *grounded*, because it was founded on the center of the world.

*Fourth*, after these three things, the architect now begins to lay the stones in the foundation. First, he lays the corner stone, on which all the different walls are aligned. As to this he says, *or who laid*, put down, *the corner stone*, on which the very center of the earth is clearly determined, according to which the different parts of the land are aligned.

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A person usually lays the foundation of a building because he needs a place to live. But to show that God does not lay the foundation of the earth from need, he adds, *When the morning stars praised me*, which is as if he should say, ‘Although heaven is my dwelling and the stars praise me, yet I founded the earth, not because I need the servants who live there, but only from my will.’ He does not say this as though heaven was made before the earth, especially as we read in Genesis, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (1:1). For the text says that the stars that he mentions here were created on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14). But Genesis says this to show that in the order of nature, heaven and the stars are prior to the earth as incorruptible to corruptible and moving to moved. He says the *morning stars*—that is, ones newly created, because we call morning stars the ones that usually appear at the beginning of the day. The fact that the morning stars praise God can be understood, in one way, materially inasmuch as they are the material of divine praise in their brightness and nobility. Even if they were not so fair to humankind, which did not yet exist, they were so for the angels who already existed.

In another way, according to those who call the heavenly bodies animated, the stars in the beginning of their institution praised God, not with vocal, but with mental praise. This can even be referred to the angels whose ministry is to move the heavenly bodies, as the text continues, *and all the sons of God made a joyful melody*, which refers to the angels of the highest hierarchies, whom Dionysius says are located in the entrance court of God. Therefore, as he clearly attributes praise to the lower angels, so he attributes shouting for joy to the higher angels because this connotes greater excellence in praise.

497 After the foundation of the earth, he continues then speaking about the waters that are immediately placed over the land. The natural order of the elements requires that water covers the earth at every point like air covers earth and water at every point. Nevertheless, by the divine plan for the generation of human beings, animals, and plants, a part of the land remains uncovered by the waters, as God closes the waters of the sea within their certain limits by his power, and so he says, *Who shut up the sea with doors*, with determined limits. There were some who thought the action of the sun dried a determined part of the earth, but the Lord shows that it was from the beginning, by divine disposition, that the sea does not everywhere cover the land. He describes the production of the sea using the comparison of the birth of a living thing, a child, because water is especially apt to be changed into living things. This is why the seeds of all things are moist.

The child *first* comes forth from the womb of its mother, and he means this when he says, *when it broke forth as issuing out of the womb*. He uses the verb *broke forth* in the production of the sea because it is a property of water to move almost continually. He says water proceeds *out of the womb* not because it has its origin from some corporeal matter but because it proceeds from the hidden origin of divine providence as from the womb.

*Second*, a newborn child is dressed, and expressing this he says, *I made a cloud the garment thereof*. For since the clouds are born from water vapor, clouds are much more numerous in maritime climates.

*Third*, a child who is born is wrapped in swaddling clothes, and expressing this, he says, *I wrapped it in a mist as in swaddling bands*. The fog does not mean those high water vapors confined in the clouds, but the vapors that darken the air on the face of the sea, and perhaps he alludes to this when Genesis says, *Darkness was upon the face of the deep* (1:2).

498 Having described what pertains to the original production of the sea, he explains his conclusion as if by saying that when the sea was newly made, *I set my bounds around it*. He puts three things here that pertain to the boundary of the sea. One of these is shown when he says, *my bounds*—that is, those

placed by me. The second is when he says, *I made it bars*, and the third when he says, *and doors*.

These three things pertain to the rule of divine power, and so he explains them in this way: *I said, hitherto thou shalt come*, which pertains to the concept of a boundary, for a boundary is a measure by which the forward motion of something is impeded: *here thou shalt break thy swelling waves*. This pertains to the gates that are placed for the purpose of not allowing entrance or exit, except according to a determined measure. Thus, even the sea does not change its shore at will, but according to the determined measure of the ebb and flow of the waves.

499

After the land and the water, he proceeds on to the air, which, according to appearances, is continuous in heaven. The first common disposition to the whole body that stretches over the waters and the land is the variation of night and day, which happens from the motion of the day, which is first of movements. Therefore, he says as a consequence, *Didst thou since thy birth command the morning?* as if to say, ‘Do day and night succeed each other on this earth by your command?’ For dawn is a kind of boundary between day and night. He clearly says, *since thy birth*, as when he spoke about the earth before he had said, *Where wast thou?* (Job 38:4). For just as earth is the first material principle of human beings, so also the highest heaven, which varies its motion day and night, is the first principle of the human body among corporeal causes.

Consider that the clarity of the break of day or the dawn is diversified according to the diverse places of the intensity of signs that accompany the sun, because when there is the sign of a quick rising, in which the sun rises immediately, the dawn lasts only a little while. When the sun shows signs of a delayed rising, it endures longer. The measure of place is determined from where the brightness of the sun begins to appear when the sun is there, and expressing this, he then says, *and show the dawning of the day its place?* as if to say, ‘Have you ordered the places in heaven from which the dawn will give its light?’ He implies the answer: ‘No.’ From all these things, you can understand that your reason cannot comprehend divine things, and so it is clear that you are not suited to dispute with God.