

# THOMAS AQUINAS

*Selected Commentaries on the New Testament*





# THOMAS AQUINAS

*Selected Commentaries on the New Testament*



EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

JASON C. PAONE

Published by Word on Fire Academic, an imprint of  
Word on Fire, Park Ridge, IL 60068  
© 2022 by Word on Fire Catholic Ministries  
Printed in the United States of America  
All rights reserved.

Design and layout by Cassie Pease, Rozann Lee, Ikuborije Opeyemi, and Anna Manhart.

Translations of all biblical commentaries by Thomas Aquinas are from the Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, reproduced by permission of the Aquinas Institute, corrected and edited by Jason C. Paone.

Except in the second inaugural sermon, all biblical quotations in bold, italic font are from the Douay-Rheims translation. Except where otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations in non-bold, italic font are from the RSV-CE.

The featured translation of *The Inaugural Sermons* is by Ralph McInerny and adapted by Jason C. Paone from its original published form in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*.  
Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books.

All hymns and prayers of Thomas Aquinas are from *The Aquinas Prayer Book: The Prayers and Hymns of Thomas Aquinas*, reproduced by permission of Sophia Institute Press. To purchase this book, visit <https://www.sophiainstitute.com>.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews. For more information, contact Word on Fire, PO Box 170, Des Plaines, IL 60016 or email [contact@wordonfire.org](mailto:contact@wordonfire.org).

First published August 2022  
Reprinted August 2024

ISBN: 978-1-68578-014-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021922728

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ix
Introduction .....	xi
<i>Jason C. Paone</i>	
Before Study: A Prayer of Thomas Aquinas .....	1
<i>The Inaugural Sermons</i>	
I. The Division of Sacred Scripture.....	3
II. Commendation of Sacred Scripture .....	10
The Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Gospel of John.....	15

## PART I

### FROM THE FATHER: *The Being and Incarnation of the Word*

The Word from Heaven Now Proceeding	
A Hymn of Thomas Aquinas.....	22
<b>Chapter 1: The Divine and Human Generations of Christ</b>	
John 1:1–2: The Being of the Word.....	23
Matthew 1:1: The Human Nature of Christ .....	42
<b>Chapter 2: Christ and the Creation of the World</b>	
John 1:3–4: The Word as the Creative Wisdom of the Father.....	47
Hebrews 1:10–12: The Son, Founder of the Heavens and Earth .....	58
<b>Chapter 3: Christ: The Incarnation of the Word</b>	
John 1:14a: The Word’s Assumption of Human Nature.....	65
John 1:14b: Christ’s Glory, Grace, and Truth .....	72

## PART II

### BY HIM: *The Redemptive Passion and Death of Christ*

At the Elevation of the Body of Christ	
A Prayer of Thomas Aquinas .....	80
<b>Chapter 4: The Sacrificial End of the Incarnation</b>	
John 3:16–21: The Gift of the Only Begotten Son.....	81
Philippians 2:5–8: Christ’s Obedient Self-Emptying.....	88
Hebrews 2:9–13: Christ Condescended to Suffer for All .....	93

## **Chapter 5: The Sacrificial Death of Christ**

Matthew 27:27–66: The Passion of Christ.....	101
Hebrews 2:14–18: Christ’s Triumph in Death .....	122
Hebrews 9:23–28: Christ the High Priest and Sacrifice.....	129
John 13:31–32: The Cross: Christ’s Glory.....	135

## **Chapter 6: Christ’s Victory over Death**

John 20:1–9: Racing to the Tomb: Models of Devotion to Christ .....	141
John 20:10–13: Magdalene’s Tears: Hope Born of Inconsolable Love.....	148
John 20:14–18: “Whom Do You Seek?”: Recognizing the Glorified Lord ..	153
1 Corinthians 15:20–28: Christ as Firstfruits of the Resurrection .....	159
1 Thessalonians 4:12–18: Christ’s Resurrection Raises the World.....	167

## **PART III**

### **IN HIM: *Participation in Christ’s Life***

Praise, O Zion, Your Redeemer

A Hymn of Thomas Aquinas.....	174
-------------------------------	-----

## **Chapter 7: Christ’s Revelation of the Father**

John 1:9–10: The World’s Ignorance of the Word.....	177
Hebrews 1:1–2: Christ, the Ultimate Revelation.....	185

## **Chapter 8: Christ’s Grace**

John 1:16–17: Christ’s Fullness: The Source of All Grace.....	195
Titus 2:11–15: Christ’s Grace for the Sanctification of All .....	199
Ephesians 2:8–10: Our Salutary Virtues Are Christ’s Gifts .....	203

## **Chapter 9: Application of Christ’s Gifts in the Sacraments**

Hebrews 6:1–6: The Spiritual Pedagogy of Christ .....	207
Romans 6:1–5: Baptism: Dying and Rising with Christ.....	215
John 3:1–6: Spiritual Rebirth and the Necessity of Baptism.....	219
1 Corinthians 11:23–24: Christ’s Institution of the Eucharist .....	229
Matthew 26:27–29: Christ’s Consecration of the Chalice .....	237

## **PART IV**

### **THROUGH HIM: *Participation in the Triune Life through Christ***

For God’s Blessing

A Prayer of Thomas Aquinas .....	244
----------------------------------	-----

## **Chapter 10: Christ's Gift of His Spirit**

John 14:15–17: Receiving the Spirit of Love and Truth.....	247
John 14:22–26: The Son's Spirit of Love .....	253
Galatians 4:6–7: Christ's Spirit of Adoption .....	261

## **Chapter 11: Christ's Gift of Divine Sonship**

Romans 8:14–17: Adoptive Sonship in Christ.....	265
John 15:9–13: "That They Would Be Gods": Participation in Divine Love...	270
John 16:23–24: Prayer to the Father in Christ's Name .....	275
John 16:25–28: Christ's Promise of Intimacy with the Father .....	280

## **Chapter 12: The Vision of God**

1 Timothy 6:15–16: The Incomprehensible Infinity of God .....	287
1 Corinthians 13:12–13: The Beatific Vision .....	291
2 Corinthians 12:1–2: The Rapture of Saint Paul .....	295
John 17:24–26: Christ's Prayer for the Glory of the Faithful .....	304

## **PART V**

### **WITH HIM: *Christian Discipleship and the Mystical Body of Christ***

For the Attainment of Heaven

A Prayer of Thomas Aquinas .....	312
----------------------------------	-----

## **Chapter 13: The Being and Mission of Christ's Church**

Matthew 16:13–19: "Upon This Rock": Christ Found His Church .....	315
Colossians 1:18–23: Christ's Headship over His Mystical Body .....	324
Romans 12:4–13: The Members of Christ's Mystical Body .....	329
John 21:1–6: The Church's Toil in the Twilight of the Resurrection .....	336
John 21:15–17: "Feed My Lambs": Christ's Mandate to Church Leaders...	342
John 17:20–23: Christ's Prayer for the Unity of the Church.....	348

## **Chapter 14: Christ's Moral Teaching and the Fruit of His Spirit**

Matthew 5:3–10: The Beatitudes .....	355
Galatians 5:22–23: The Fruits of the Spirit.....	370

## **Chapter 15: The Theological Virtues**

Hebrews 11:1: Faith: The Beginning of Eternal Life .....	375
Romans 5:1–5: Hope: The Glory of the Sons of God.....	381
1 Corinthians 13:4–7: Charity: The Greatest Virtue .....	385

**Conclusion**

John 21:24–25: The Epilogue of John’s Gospel ..... 389

Devoutly I Adore You, Hidden Deity: A Prayer of Thomas Aquinas ..... 392

Bibliographies ..... 393

General Index ..... 403

Index of Ancient Sources

1. Old Testament..... 416

2. New Testament ..... 427

3. Patristic and Medieval Works..... 439



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Books are always the work of a community. Certainly this one is. From the Angelic Doctor, who lectured and wrote the earliest forms of its material nearly 1000 years ago, countless hands and eyes have diligently labored over these texts—scribes and copyists, translators, editors, and scholars—far more than I could thank. But I am especially grateful to Brandon Vogt and Matthew Becklo of Word on Fire Publishing for giving me the opportunity to create this collection. I owe many thanks, also, to John Mortensen of the Aquinas Institute for providing many of the manuscripts that were used to create this collection. My teacher, Reinhard Hütter, too deserves credit both for having taught me most of what I know about Thomas Aquinas and for his help reviewing a draft of the book.

I am indebted, also, to Matthew Levering who gave me superb feedback on an early draft of the introduction and invaluable input on the project all along the way. Richard DeClue and Bobby Mixa of the Word on Fire Institute gave me crucial advice as well. James O’Neil copyedited the book and wrote the general index with his usual skill, and Dan Seseske helped me to polish up the introduction and wrote the ancient sources index. Edyta McNichol secured permissions for much of the book’s previously published content. Rozann Lee and Cassie Pease of Word on Fire’s design team transformed a bland Word document into a beautiful and functional book.

Lastly, I thank my beloved wife, Clara, who carried a double load on the many evenings and weekends that I spent working on this project—to say nothing of her many years of support during graduate school.



## INTRODUCTION

As arguably the best-known and most-researched medieval thinker, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) needs little in the way of a biographical introduction here. In any case, there is a wealth of fine literature on the topic for any interested reader.<sup>1</sup> Many will have already encountered his well-known works of theology and philosophy, the *Summa theologiae* and *Summa contra Gentiles*. In fact, the need for a biblical commentary collection such as this is in some measure a consequence of the very prominence of these masterworks, which have tended to eclipse St. Thomas' corpus of biblical commentary, which in turn, has resulted in a somewhat skewed reception of this medieval master of the sacred page.

Ask an undergraduate what he or she knows about Thomas Aquinas, and you will likely hear about the “five ways”—his arguments for the existence of God. A student of theology might mention his systematic treatment of the Trinity, his discussion of the relation between philosophy and theology, or some other of his contributions to fundamental, systematic, or moral theology. By contrast, you will not likely hear, for instance, about his understanding of the spiritual senses of Scripture, the theme of Christ's supremacy in the *Commentary on Hebrews*, or of his comparison of contemplative and active discipleship in the *Commentary on John*. Thus, although the rediscovery of St. Thomas' biblical commentaries has been underway for some time within certain sectors of the Thomistic scholarly community, the movement has not yet become mainstream enough to register in college curricula or in the perception that students have of the kind of thinker and teacher Thomas Aquinas was.<sup>2</sup>

The perception that the biblical commentaries are inessential for new students and readers of Thomas Aquinas is again reflected in their exclusion from the many introductory Aquinas anthologies on offer. This collection, designed to serve readers at any level of exposure to his works, is the first and only anthology dedicated wholly to the biblical commentaries.

---

1. See the biographies section in the bibliography at the end of this volume.

2. For discussion of the movement of “biblical Thomism” in the twentieth century, see Christopher T. Baglow's introduction to “Modus et Forma”: *A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the Lectura super Epistolam ad Ephesios* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2002), 1–16. For more recent work in this research program, see the two essay collections edited by Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen: *Towards A Biblical Thomism: Thomas Aquinas and the Renewal of Biblical Theology* (Pamplona, ES: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2018) and *Reading the Church Fathers with St. Thomas Aquinas: Historical and Systematical Perspectives* (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2021).

In a more general sense, this selective anthology of Thomas' New Testament commentaries is dedicated to raising this forgotten corpus to its proper place within the canon of works customarily held to be most representative of Thomas Aquinas. And with the great Aquinas scholar Jean-Pierre Torrell, our guiding conviction is that a well-rounded perception of Thomas Aquinas, of the theologian and his method, demands a rigorous engagement with his biblical commentaries—his premier work as a thirteenth-century theologian.<sup>3</sup>

The biblical commentaries—comprising roughly a third of his overall corpus—deserve a place among the works standardly included in introductory courses and anthologies on Thomas Aquinas. And they especially ought to be included in Catholic theological curricula given the special pedagogical status that St. Thomas enjoys as *Doctor Universalis* by the commendation of the Church's Magisterium.<sup>4</sup> If “the study of the sacred page is . . . the soul of sacred theology,” as the Second Vatican Council teaches, then Thomas Aquinas is a model theologian, in the first place, as a *biblical* theologian, and it is from his biblical commentaries that we may gather the resources for a distinctively Catholic model of biblical theology—no less instructive in the twenty-first century than in the thirteenth.<sup>5</sup>

That Aquinas is sometimes imagined to be paradigmatic of a kind of preconciliar theological methodology that Vatican II is supposed to have put to rest, again, likely owes something to the marginalization of his biblical commentaries, in which we see a model of theology that could hardly be more opposite from the insular rationalism that postconciliar theologians railed against. The council's vision of *ressourcement*, the return to the sources of the Christian faith, is very much embodied in the commentaries, in which a typical page presents a flurry of Old and New Testament cross-references and engagements with the Fathers of the West and East, including Augustine, John Chrysostom, Origen, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Ambrose, and Athanasius, to name only a few.

To promote further reader engagement with these patristic sources, hundreds of new footnote citations have been added—by painstaking original research—to the lectures featured in this collection, connecting every one of

---

3. “If we wish . . . to get a slightly less one-sided idea of the whole theologian and his method, it is imperative to read and use in a much deeper fashion these biblical commentaries in parallel with the great systematic works” (*Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996], 55).

4. For a brief survey of the magisterial commendations that Thomas Aquinas has received, see Chrysostom Baer's introduction to his translation of the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (South Bend, IN: Saint Augustine's, 2006), xi–xiv.

5. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* 6.24.

Thomas' patristic citations to a precise location within a source.<sup>6</sup> Each abbreviated source citation in the notes corresponds, in turn, to a full bibliographic reference in the "ancient works cited" section of the bibliography, where the reader can find the best and most recent translation of the respective work.

Also included in the bibliographies are recent biographies, introductions, and studies that illuminate the place and importance of Sacred Scripture in Thomas' thought and career.<sup>7</sup> Many of these studies link the modern neglect of his biblical commentaries with an inadequate understanding of what Thomas was by training and aspiration. It was for precisely this work of expositing Scripture that Thomas spent some fifteen years in preparation—two of which were devoted to reading the Bible from cover to cover. Only upon the completion of this lengthy, Bible-centered program of study was a theologian granted the title *magister sacrae paginae* (master of the sacred page) and authorized to give the kind of commentaries on the Bible that are collected in this volume. Scriptural commentary was the primary task for which Thomas was trained, and when he completed his training, it was his official job description. The Bible was his textbook, and for the whole period of his tenure as a master (1256–1273), he taught no other text *ex professo*.<sup>8</sup> Hence, although he is perhaps best-known today as a Christian exponent of Aristotelian philosophy, as Scott Hahn observes, "Thomas, in fact, never taught a class on Aristotle."<sup>9</sup> Nor, as John Boyle points out, did he ever teach a course on his *Summa theologiae* or *Summa contra Gentiles*.<sup>10</sup>

To interpret the sacred page was, for Aquinas and his contemporaries, the most important work of the theologian, and thus as Boyle suggests, Thomas Aquinas himself most likely regarded his scriptural commentaries as his most important works.<sup>11</sup> This is in no way meant to minimize the importance that Thomas obviously gave to the *Summa theologiae* and his other systematic *magna*

---

6. For the source citations in the lectures from the *Commentary on John*, I am grateful to The Catholic University of America Press's published edition, which includes source citations for nearly all of Thomas' patristic citations (many of these were borrowed, in turn, from the French edition of the *Commentary*) along with cross references to the *Summa theologiae*.

7. See especially Matthew Levering's *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014). By tracing Pauline themes and references in the *Summa*, Levering shows concretely how Thomas' engagement with Scripture shaped his systematic theology.

8. See Heinrich Denifle, "Quel livre servait de base à l'enseignement des maîtres en théologie dans l'Université de Paris?," *Revue Thomiste* 2 (1894): 129–161.

9. Scott Hahn, foreword to *Thomas Aquinas: Biblical Theologian*, ed. Roger Nutt and Michael Dauphinais (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), x.

10. John F. Boyle, "St. Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture," *Pro Ecclesia* 4, no. 1 (1995): 92–104, at 94.

11. Boyle, 92. See also Boyle's collection of essays on Thomas' approach to Scripture in *The Order and Division of Divine Truth* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021).

*opera*, to which he devoted so many of his prime years and so much of his intellectual energy. The point is rather that we cannot fully appreciate these great systematic works apart from their context. They are the fruit of a biblical theologian's lifelong study of Sacred Scripture.<sup>12</sup> But to see the full profile of Thomas Aquinas, the biblical theologian—to appreciate the extent to which his profound engagement with Scripture shaped his thought—we must turn to his biblical commentaries and recognize their importance in his scholarly career. With the *Summa*, we must regard these commentaries as the fruit and end of Thomas' career as a medieval theologian.

In this light, it is no surprise that in the commentaries we find some of St. Thomas' richest and most sophisticated theological work. Torrell has ventured to identify the *Commentary on John* in particular as "the theological work par excellence by Saint Thomas."<sup>13</sup> Blending systematic and positive theological methods with the riches of medieval hermeneutics, at their best, the lectures on John achieve the quality of a rich tapestry in which strands of Scripture, New and Old, are braided together with shimmering threads of patristic commentary, and woven into a vast fabric of speculative theology—the robust warp and weft of the commentaries—that subtly glows with a contemplative and mystical radiance.

Some readers will perhaps find the florid aesthetics of this image incongruous with Thomas' own famously austere writing. It is certainly the case that the Angelic Doctor favored precision and clarity over rhetorical flourish. And yet the reader accustomed to the restrained style of the *Summa theologiae* will notice a distinctive tone and personality in many of these commentaries and a stylistic element that, though modest in comparison with Augustine or other of the fathers, is remarkable in its own right as reflecting a side of Aquinas that is seldom seen in the *Summa*.

It is quite possible, however, to overstate the literary achievement of the commentaries. As far as medieval biblical commentaries go, Thomas' are certainly not among the most pleasurable reads on offer, and at some point, the explanation of their neglect in the past few decades must gesture at their often dry and tedious scholastic form. At the opening of each lecture, for example, Thomas offers a point-by-point summary of the text under commentary, which he organizes into often lengthy hierarchies of numbered points and sub-points

---

12. For more on the dialectical interrelationship between Thomas' biblical exegesis and speculative theology, see Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, eds., *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

13. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:200.

(and sub-sub-points!).<sup>14</sup> Energetic readers may be inclined to draw diagrams in order to follow these *divisiones textus*, and in certain lectures there may be value in this approach, as often these summaries contain a key insight or something essential to the subsequent commentary.<sup>15</sup> In many others, however, the divisions and organization of these summaries are apparently determined as much by the exigencies of lecturing as by the inherent features of the biblical passage under analysis. Hence, it is often a valuable reading strategy to skim through them so as to discern whether further analysis is worthwhile.

Earlier editions of the translations used in this collection dedicated a separate paragraph to each point and sub-point in order to maximize the navigability of these summaries. But this approach tended to yield a rather disorienting sprawl of paragraph fragments across the initial page or two of most lectures. Given that these summaries are not always essential, in this collection, their points and subpoints are consolidated into larger paragraphs and their ordinal number terms (*first*, *second*, *third*, etc.) are highlighted with italic typeface. Likewise, and in the same interest of improving the visual presentation and readability of the lectures, the Marietti paragraph numbers, though usually featured in the body text of English translations, have been moved to the margins.

Where possible, the Douay-Rheims translation has been replaced with the RSV-CE version for biblical quotations in non-bold, italic font. For the primary biblical texts of the commentaries in this collection, the Douay-Rheims translation has been retained for most lectures as the version that most closely follows the version of the Vulgate that St. Thomas himself used and referenced in these commentaries.

Above I gestured at the significance of the fact that these commentaries were originally oral lectures. This is an important detail in understanding their form. The first textual antecedents of this collection were handwritten records produced by students or scribes who attended Thomas' lectures. These hand-recorded *reportationes*, as they were called, were sometimes published with little or no revision on the part of the lecturer. Apart from the commentaries on Romans and 1 Corinthians 1–10, all of the commentaries on the Pauline epistles (including some twenty of the lectures included in this collection) are

---

14. For more on Thomas' use of the *divisio textus*, see John F. Boyle, *The Order and Division of Divine Truth: St. Thomas Aquinas as Scholastic Master of the Sacred Page* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021) and Randall B. Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris: Preaching, Prologues, and Biblical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

15. John F. Boyle goes so far as to say that "the genius of the commentaries is often in the division of the text. It is this division that sets every passage in a context, or perhaps better, in a set of nested contexts" ("St. Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture," 100–101).

thought to constitute more-or-less unredacted *reportationes*.<sup>16</sup> The commentaries on Matthew, of which five lectures are included in this collection, are also *reportationes*. The commentaries on Romans and 1 Corinthians 1–7:9, by contrast, are classified as *ordinationes* (or *expositiones*) as composed by Thomas' own hand.

It is perhaps natural to expect a *reportatio* to be overall inferior both in quality and fidelity to a master's thought than an *ordinatio*. The inferior textual status of many biblical commentaries—compounded by the fact that there are as yet no critical editions available for any of St. Thomas' scriptural commentaries—represents yet another explanation for the reluctance of the Thomistic scholarly mainstream to give much attention to these commentaries until recently.

Nevertheless, such concerns surrounding the textual status of the biblical commentaries amount to far less than valid reasons to neglect them, as will be clear to anyone who reads them. Moreover, the *Commentary on John*—a *reportatio* transcribed by Thomas' companion, Reginald of Piperno—stands as a counterexample to the presumption that a *reportatio* as such must be of inferior quality. Of Reginald's *reportatio* of the *Commentary on John*, the medieval Church historian Thomas Prügl observes: "The quality of these notes was so remarkable that they were accepted by the University of Paris as an exemplar, that is, an official copy serving as an authentic text for further copying."<sup>17</sup>

The *Commentary on John*, likely produced during his second tenure at the University of Paris between 1269–1272, is an undeniable masterpiece of Thomas' theology, as Torrell has argued. I suggest, furthermore, that it represents a centerpiece of Thomas' whole theological enterprise, which revolves around the being and agency of the divine Word—the one who was sent to convey a new divine life to a world that had first received its life from him. In Thomas' view, moreover, this divine Word is the primary topic and insight of the Gospel of John. In the prologue to his commentary, Thomas explains that among the Evangelists, it is John who "sees the light of the incarnate Word more excellently," and on this account, "John's gospel contains the ultimate in revelation."<sup>18</sup>

16. See Torrell, 1:250–57; and James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1983), 117.

17. Thomas Prügl, "Thomas Aquinas as Interpreter of Scripture," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 386–415, at 390.

18. Thomas Aquinas, *On John*, prologue 11 (pp. 18–19 below). The latter phrase in quotation marks is Torrell's quote of M.-D. Philippe's French translation of the *Commentary on John* in Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 1:200.



In the first of the two *Inaugural Sermons* (included below), which Thomas delivered in 1256 when he received the title *magister*, Thomas offers a *divisio textus* of the whole Bible in which he summarizes the New Testament in terms of a three-phase economy of grace. Accordingly, the Gospels give account of the *origin* of grace, the Pauline epistles its *power*, and the remaining books, especially Acts and Revelation, address the outworking of this grace in the world, especially in terms of the Church and its sacraments.<sup>19</sup> But to understand any phase in Thomas' economy of grace, we must first understand its origin in Christ, from whose divine fullness we have all received "grace upon grace" (John 1:16). But Christ's superlative fullness of grace, as Thomas insists, is a strict consequence of his divine nature as the Word—the consubstantial Son of God—made flesh. Thus, although John features last in the canonical order of the Gospels, Thomas gives it the place of privilege as the Gospel *par excellence*, because it peers deepest of all into the mystery of Christ's divinity. Thomas expresses this with unusual rhetorical flair in a discussion of the Gospels' four symbols:

The other three evangelists, concerned with those things which Christ did in his flesh, are symbolized by animals which walk on the earth, namely, by a man, a bull calf, and a lion. But John flies like an eagle above the cloud of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart. And gazing on the very deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he is equal to the Father, he has striven in this Gospel to confide this above all.<sup>20</sup>

Following Thomas' prioritization, this collection gives precedence to the *Commentary on John* both in terms of the number of lectures drawn from it—more than that of any other commentary—and in terms of the thematic organization of the collection, which generally follows the narrative flow of the Gospel of John. Hence, following the introductory *Inaugural Sermons* and Thomas' prologue to the *Commentary on John*, discussion proceeds in the order of John's Gospel and thus begins in chapter 1, not with the Nativity or genealogy of Christ, but at the absolute beginning—the Word, the consubstantial wisdom and creativity of God as elaborated in Thomas' eighteen-page commentary on the first two verses of John. Next, in his commentary on the genealogy of Matthew, Thomas sheds further light on the eternal generation of the Word by distinguishing a "twofold generation in Christ," divine and human, of which Matthew addresses the latter.

---

19. Thomas Aquinas, *The Division of Sacred Scripture* (p. 3 below).

20. Thomas Aquinas, *On John*, prologue 11 (pp. 18–19 below).

Chapter 2 turns to a discussion of the power of the Word by exploring his role in the creation of the heavens and earth in lectures on John 1:3–4 and Hebrews 1:10–12, and chapter 3 treats the Incarnation in Thomas' two lectures on John 1:14.

In his commentary on Hebrews 2:9–13, Thomas explains that Christ is the grace of God both in the sense that he is the source of all grace and as the gratuitous, sacrificial gift of God in his Passion and death. Following this distinction, part 2 features Thomas' lectures on Christ's gift of himself in his sacrificial Passion and death, and parts 3 and 4, his lectures on Christ's grace and the human participation in the divine life that follows from it.

Chapter 4 links the Incarnation to the cross with commentaries on John 3:16–21, Philippians 2:5–8, and Hebrews 2:9–13 that consider the Incarnation as a *kenosis*, or a self-emptying, in which the Word assumed a nature in which he was able to suffer and die for the salvation of the world. And chapters 5 and 6, introducing a welcome element of narrative, feature commentaries on the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ in Matthew and John. These are complemented by lectures on Hebrews, exploring the sacrificial character of Christ's death and on 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:12–18 on the hopeful implications of Christ's Resurrection.

From Christ's death and Resurrection, chapters 7–9 turn to explore aspects of Christ's supernatural life in which believers participate. In chapter 7, commentaries on John 1:9–10 and Hebrews 1:1–2 explore the grace of enlightenment that Christ gives to the world as the revelation of God in human flesh. Chapter 8 features the thematic discussion of Christ's fullness of grace in John 1:16–17, followed by complementary lectures on Titus 2:11–15 and Ephesians 2:8–10. Finally, chapter 9 features commentaries that elaborate on the sacraments as the media by which Christ's soul-perfecting graces are conveyed to the world. The opening lecture on Hebrews 6:1–6 discusses the sacraments all together, and the subsequent lectures from Romans, John, 1 Corinthians, and Matthew explore the specific sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist in a more focused way.

Part 4 considers the supernatural life in which we become participants through Christ's grace. Our union with Christ brings us into new relationships also with the Father and Spirit, and thus chapter 10 features commentaries on John 14 and Galatians 4, exploring Christ's gift of the Spirit who comes to dwell in us. From Christ, we also receive the gift of adoption wherein we come to participate in Christ's sonship, ceasing to relate to the Father as mere creatures and servants.

Chapter 11 takes up the theme of adoption in Thomas' commentaries on Romans 8 and John 15–16. Following the trajectory of our now inchoate

participation in the triune life of God through Christ, chapter 12 is devoted to the beatific vision of God—the topic of the lectures on 1 Timothy 6:15–16, 1 Corinthians 13:12–13, 2 Corinthians 12:1–2, and John 17:20–23.

Having considered the glorious ultimate end to which Christ's grace orders us, we return to consider its more immediate effects now in the life of the Church and in Christian discipleship. Chapter 13 features the narrative commentaries on Peter's confession in Matthew and Jesus' threefold mandate to him ("feed my sheep") in John 21, followed by commentaries on the Pauline identification of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ in Colossians 1 and Romans 12.

Chapter 14 explores the moral teachings of Christ and Paul in the commentaries on the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 and Galatians 5:22–23 on the fruits of the spirit. Chapter 15 studies the special theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, with commentaries on Hebrews 11:1, Romans 5:1–5, and 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, respectively. The conclusion, featuring Thomas' commentary on the epilogue of John's Gospel, qualifies the Gospel's achievement in view of the inexhaustible depth of meaning in Christ's every word and deed. "If one tried to write and tell of the nature of every one," Thomas insists, "he could not do so; indeed, the entire world could not do this. This is because even an infinite number of human words cannot equal one word of God."<sup>21</sup>

This remark about the depth of meaning in Christ's words brings us to a handful of final remarks that must be made about Thomas' expository approach. It bears repeating that Thomas is a medieval exegete whose approach to Scripture is bound to seem foreign in some measure to readers who are removed from his milieu, as we are, by almost a thousand years. To become acquainted with so foreign an author, it will help to observe some of the peculiar features of his work and take stock, at the same time, of our own peculiarities as readers with sensibilities no less shaped by a particular time and cultural circumstance.

One distinctive feature of Thomas' approach is his typically medieval understanding of the fourfold sense of Scripture. Accordingly, a given passage can mean several different things concurrently. Thomas distinguishes, first, between the literal and spiritual (or "mystical") senses of Scripture.<sup>22</sup> The literal, Thomas explains, consists in the primary meaning intended in the use of a word or sentence. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to imagine that this "primary meaning" is reached without any kind of interpretation. Thomas is conscious of the plurality of possible meanings even at the literal level and suggests that the divine author of the Scriptures may intend a given passage to have multi-

21. Thomas Aquinas, *On John*, epilogue 2660 (p. 391 below).

22. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions* 7.6.2 (available at <https://Aquinas.cc>).

ple literal meanings.<sup>23</sup> Further complicating this picture, Thomas holds that the literal meaning can sometimes be a metaphor, as where a metaphor is the meaning primarily intended. This is the case, for example, where Jesus is said to sit at the right hand of God. No nonmetaphorical literal sense could be the intended meaning of this passage, as Thomas explains, because there is no literal sense in which God the Father has a right hand.<sup>24</sup>

To explain the spiritual sense, in turn, Thomas distinguishes between the signification of words and of things. ‘Rock’ literally signifies a dense mineral object (the signification of the word), but this object in turn can itself signify Peter or Christ (the signification of the thing). Accordingly, the spiritual meaning is that conveyed by the *things* to which the words of Scripture literally refer.<sup>25</sup>

For Thomas, the spiritual senses are ordered to instruct the reader either regarding right action or right belief. The spiritual sense instructive of right action is called the moral (or tropological) sense. And of the two spiritual senses that instruct right belief, the allegorical sense concerns the truths of the New Testament, especially those regarding Christ and the Church. And last, the anagogical sense is eschatological, signifying especially the glorified life of the saints in heaven. Thus, the three spiritual meanings are the moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings, one or more of which are sometimes implicated in the literal meaning of Scripture.

In the commentaries below, Thomas tends to use the term “mystical sense” indiscriminately of all three spiritual senses. We will see, moreover, that his exposition of the mystical sense is a fairly standard feature of his commentaries. Nevertheless, it should also be said that Thomas’ spiritual interpretations are both rarer and more bound to the literal meaning of the text than was typical among many of his contemporary exegetes. He seems to have been more concerned with the literal meaning, but as we have seen, the literal sense, for Thomas, is often more expansive in its semantic possibility than we might

---

23. See Thomas Aquinas, *The Power of God* (*De potentia Dei*) 4.1 and *Summa theologiae* 1.1.10. For further discussion of Thomas’ understanding of the literal sense and its possible plurality, see Mark F. Johnson, “Another Look at the Plurality of the Literal Sense,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 115–141.

24. See Thomas Aquinas, *On Galatians* 4.7.254 and *Literal Commentary on Job* 1.6.

25. The ancient Christian practice of spiritual interpretation, largely rejected by modern scholars, has been reappraised by some scholars in light of the work of Richard Hays and others who, among other notable contributions, have drawn new attention to the pervasive metaphor, typology, and allegory inherent in both testaments and the deployment of a kind of spiritual interpretation of Old Testament on the part of New Testament authors. See Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

expect. There are passages in the Old Testament, for instance, whose literal meaning Thomas understands to refer to Christ.<sup>26</sup>

It goes without saying that Thomas' interest in the literal and historical was quite different from that of modern historical scholars. For Thomas, the purpose of Sacred Scripture is not to relay historical and scientific information *per se* but to manifest those truths that are essential to human salvation.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, in his approach to a passage, Thomas is interested in its historical and scientific import only insofar as these are in some way bound up with the salvific meaning of Scripture. Furthermore, we can see that Thomas is in no way committed to affirming the veracity of every historical or scientific detail in the Bible—even though he does insist that “nothing false can ever underlie the literal sense of scripture”—if we bear in mind that in the narratives and cosmological descriptions it presents, what Scripture is intended to *assert* need not be any historical or astronomical information.<sup>28</sup> And where it does seem to assert what is evidently false along these lines, Thomas takes this as a cue to look for a different meaning so as to avoid the absurdity of ascribing falsehood or factual error to an all-knowing author who by nature cannot lie.

Thomas' expository approach, again, differs rather strikingly from modern biblical commentaries in the manner of his engagement with his scriptural texts. His commentaries are less strictly exegetical and far more speculative and theological than is typical of biblical commentaries today. Many of the lectures included in this collection constitute full-blown theological treatises in their own right. Some are certainly no less systematic, no less theologically and philosophically dense than their corresponding discussions in the *Summa theologiae*. Evidently, Thomas sees the content of the passage under study as a starting point rather than a limit of his exploration of the fuller theological meaning revealed in the book to which it belongs and in the Scriptures as a whole. He explores and expands upon the meaning of both the part and whole in light of the authoritative teaching and theological tradition of the Church.

Of course, historical facts are normative of Thomas' interpretation too. In the commentary on the Passion narrative of Matthew 27, for instance, we see Thomas grappling with the problem presented by the shortage of extra-biblical

---

26. See, for instance, Thomas' literal commentary on the servant songs of Isaiah, especially chapter 53. For a helpful study of the place of Christ in Aquinas' commentary on Isaiah, see Matthew Levering, “Mystagogy and Aquinas' *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. H.J.M. Schoot et al. (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2019), 17–40.

27. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions* 7.6.1.

28. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.1.10 ad 3. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The Power of God* 4.1.

attestation to the eclipse described in the Gospel narrative.<sup>29</sup> Although Thomas worked before the advent of the historical data and research methods that are available to biblical scholars today, it would be unfair to dismiss him as simply “uncritical.” At the same time, Thomas’ approach to Scripture, as a dogmatic theologian of the thirteenth century, certainly differs from that of a modern historical-critical scholar in ways that are not reducible to methodology. Naturally, Thomas is innocent of many questions that we have been asking about the Bible since the Enlightenment; more significantly, though, he is innocent of our sense of the importance of certain distinctly modern kinds of questions. This is not a suggestion that Thomas was in any sense “anti-modern”; only that he was *not* modern.

Thomas’ sensibilities are “naïve” in the sense that, for better or worse, they are free of the hermeneutic suspicions that are encoded in our cultural DNA. Thus he evinces no doubt, for instance, about the genuine Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews (nor that of any of the fourteen Pauline epistles). If this constitutes something of a deficiency in his approach, it should be said that Thomas’ purposes—which, as we have said, are more theological than strictly expository—do not demand that he give the same level of interest to such questions as we do today.

Furthermore, the importance of the question of human authorship is relativized in some measure by the robust sense in which Thomas holds God to be “the principal author of Sacred Scripture.”<sup>30</sup> In the first *Inaugural Sermon* featured at page 3 below, Thomas makes clear that a book’s status as authoritative Scripture may in some cases have entirely nothing to do with the identity of its human author. Discussing the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, “whose teachings are not doubted but whose authors are,” he explains, “they do not have force from the authority of the authors but rather from their reception by the Church.”<sup>31</sup>

This is not to say that the question of the human authorship of a given book was insignificant for Thomas. In the *Commentary on John*, for instance, we can see how prominent John the Apostle figures as the presumed author of the Gospel. Thomas betrays a special devotion to John, whom he esteems as a model theologian, contemplative, and disciple of Christ. The unique authority that he ascribes to John’s Gospel is certainly bound up with his view of its authorship by this “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2), and in some measure these

---

29. Thomas Aquinas, *On Matthew* 27.2 (p. 101 below).

30. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions* 7.6.1 ad 5 (available at <https://Aquinas.cc>).

31. Thomas Aquinas, *The Division of Sacred Scripture* (p. 3 below).

points can surely be made of the Pauline epistles too, which, apart from the Gospels, Thomas cherished above all other writings.<sup>32</sup>

Lastly, this comment about Thomas' affection for the Scriptures brings us to a final point that, perhaps more than anything that has been said so far, is essential for any adequate appreciation of Thomas' project in the commentaries. Thomas was a devout Christian who vigorously practiced his faith. His biographer, Bernard Gui, describes his many devotions and the daily Mass that only sickness could prevent him from celebrating.<sup>33</sup> But by contrast to the milieu in which biblical scholars today operate, there were no academic norms in thirteenth-century Europe that demanded any pretense of secular neutrality or air of religious indifference. And thus, there is never anything calculated or cautious in the way that Thomas exhibits his faith in his writing; he has no notion that his faith is in any way incompatible with scholarly rigor or that a scientific study of the Bible could not at the same time constitute a Christian mystagogy and practice of discipleship.

To the contrary, for Thomas, a truly scientific theology is necessarily a spiritual practice of prayer and contemplation. And thus for Thomas, the apostolic model of a theologian is not his namesake, Thomas, who approached the reports of Christ's Resurrection with a cool, critical scrutiny and demanded tangible evidence; the model is John, the beloved disciple, whose noteworthy trait was not any intellectual gift or discipline but the intimate love that he shared with Jesus. It is this love, Thomas explains, that granted him the most profound theological insights of all.

Likewise, although we might be inclined to point to Aquinas' extraordinary intelligence as the explanatory factor for his towering theological and philosophical achievements, he is reported to have personally confessed to Reginald of Piperno that "prayer . . . was of greater service . . . in the search for truth than his natural intelligence and habit of study." "When perplexed by a difficulty," Bernard Gui explains, "he would kneel and pray and then, on returning to his writing or dictation, he was accustomed to find that his thought had become so clear that it seemed to show him inwardly, as in a book, the words he needed."<sup>34</sup>

---

32. William of Tocco, one of Thomas' contemporary biographers, makes this point in *Vita S. Thomae Aquinatis* 17, p. 88; translation in Kenelm Foster, trans. and ed., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents* (London: Longmans, 1959), 70.

33. Bernard Gui, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas* 15, in *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 25–81, at 37.

34. Gui, p. 37.

The practice of theology was inseparable, for St. Thomas, from the practice of prayer.<sup>35</sup> In this collection, we have sought to reflect this spiritual context of Thomas' biblical theology by including many of his own prayers and hymns at the beginning and end of each major section. To fully enter into Thomas' engagement with Scripture, we must also enter into his habit of prayer—his striving for intimacy with God. The end of Sacred Scripture, after all, is to lead us to this beatific intimacy or, as he says specifically of the Gospel of John, to make us “the temple of God.”<sup>36</sup>

---

35. For more on this point, see Paul Murray, *Aquinas at Prayer: The Bible, Mysticism and Poetry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

36. Thomas Aquinas, “The Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Gospel of John” 8 (p. 17–18 below).



## Before Study

A PRAYER OF THOMAS AQUINAS

Ineffable Creator,  
    who, from the treasures of your wisdom,  
        have established three hierarchies of angels,  
        have arrayed them in marvelous order  
            above the fiery heavens,  
        and have marshaled the regions  
            of the universe with such artful skill,

You are proclaimed  
    the true font of light and wisdom,  
    and the primal origin  
        raised high beyond all things.

Pour forth a ray of your brightness  
    into the darkened places of my mind;  
    disperse from my soul  
        the twofold darkness  
            into which I was born:  
            sin and ignorance.

You make eloquent the tongues of infants;  
    refine my speech  
    and pour forth upon my lips  
        the goodness of your blessing.

Grant to me  
    keenness of mind,  
    capacity to remember,  
    skill in learning,  
    subtlety to interpret,  
    and eloquence in speech.

May you  
    guide the beginning of my work,  
    direct its progress,  
    and bring it to completion.

You who are true God and true man,  
    who live and reign, world without end.

Amen



# THE INAUGURAL SERMONS

## I. The Division of Sacred Scripture

*This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that is forever.  
All that keep it shall come to life: but they that have forsaken it, to death.*

—BARUCH 4:1

According to Augustine, one skilled in speech should so speak as to teach, to delight, and to change;<sup>1</sup> that is, to teach the ignorant, to delight the bored, and to change the lazy. The speech of Sacred Scripture does these three things in the fullest manner. For it firmly teaches with its eternal truth: *Forever, O Lord, thy word is firmly fixed in the heavens* (Ps. 119:89). And it sweetly delights with its pleasantness: *How sweet are thy words to my taste!* (Ps. 119:103). And it efficaciously changes with its authority: *Is not my word like fire, says the Lord?* (Jer. 23:29).

Therefore in the text above Sacred Scripture is commended for three things. *First*, for the authority with which it changes: *This is the book of the commandments of God*. *Second*, for the eternal truth with which it instructs, when it says, *and the law that is forever*. *Third*, for the usefulness with which it entices, when it says, *All that keep it shall come to life*. The authority of this Scripture is shown in three things. *First*, its origin, because God is its origin. Hence it says, *the commandments of God*. Baruch 3:36: *He found the whole way to knowledge*. Hebrews 2:3: *It was declared at first by the Lord*. Such an author is infallibly to be believed, both on account of the condition of his nature, because he is truth: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life* (John 14:6). And on account of his fullness of knowledge: *O, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!* (Rom. 11:33). And also on account of the power of the words: *The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword* (Heb. 4:12).

*Second*, it is shown to be efficacious by the necessity with which it is imposed: *He who does not believe will be condemned* (Mark 16:16). The truth of Sacred Scripture is proposed in the manner of a precept; hence the text says, *the commandments of God*. These commandments direct the intellect through faith: *Believe in God, believe also in me* (John 14:1); inform the affections with love: *This is my commandment, that you love one another* (John 15:12); and induce to action: *Do this and you will live* (Luke 10:28).

*Third*, it is shown to be efficacious by the uniformity of its sayings, because all who teach the sacred doctrine teach the same thing. *Whether then it was I*

---

1. Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* 4.12.

or they, so we preach, and so you believed (1 Cor. 15:11). And this is necessary because they all had one teacher: *You have one teacher* (Matt. 23:8). And they had one spirit: *Did we not act in the same spirit?* (2 Cor. 12:18) and one love from above: *Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul* (Acts 4:32). Therefore, as a sign of the uniformity of doctrine, it says significantly, *this is the book*.

The truth of this teaching of Scripture is immutable and eternal, hence the words, *and the law that is forever*. Luke 21:33: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*. This law will endure forever because of three things: *First*, because of the power of the lawgiver: *The Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?* (Isa. 14:27). *Second*, on account of his immutability: *I the Lord do not change* (Mal. 3:6); *God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent* (Num. 23:19). *Third*, because of the truth of the law: *All thy statutes are truth* (Ps. 118:86 DRB). *Truthful lips endure forever* (Prov. 12:19). *Truth remains and gathers strength eternally* (3 Ezra 4:38).<sup>2</sup>

The usefulness of this Scripture is the greatest: *I am the Lord thy God that teach thee profitable things* (Is. 48:17 DRB). Hence our text continues: *All that keep it shall come to life*. Which indeed is threefold: *First* it is the life of grace, to which Sacred Scripture disposes. *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life* (John 6:63). For through this life the spirit lives in God. *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Gal. 2:20). *Second* is the life of justice consisting in works, to which Sacred Scripture directs. *I will never forget thy precepts; for by them thou hast given me life* (Ps. 119:93). *Third* is the life of glory which Sacred Scripture promises and to which it leads. *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (John 6:69). *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name* (John 20:31).

Sacred Scripture leads to this life in two ways, by commanding and by helping. Commanding through the mandates which it proposes, which belong to the Old Testament: *The covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded* (Sir. 24:23). Helping, through the gift of grace which the lawgiver dispenses, which pertains to the New Testament. Both of these are touched on in John 1:17: *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*.

Hence the whole of Sacred Scripture is divided into two principal parts, the Old and New Testaments, which are mentioned in Matthew 13:52: *every Scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and old*. And Song of Solomon 7:13: *over*

---

2. 3 Ezra is a deuterocanonical book featured in the Septuagint and in again in the Vulgate translation that Thomas used.

*our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.*

The Old Testament is divided according to the teaching of the commandments, for the commandment is of two kinds, the binding and the warning. The binding is the command of a king who can punish transgressors: *The dread wrath of a king is like the growling of a lion* (Prov. 20:2). But a warning is the precept of a father who must teach: *Do you have children? Discipline them* (Sir. 7:23). The precept of a king is of two kinds, one which establishes the laws, another which induces to observance of the law, which is customarily done through his heralds and ambassadors. Thus it is that three kinds of command are distinguished, that of the king, that of the herald, and that of the father. On this basis the Old Testament is subdivided into three parts, according to Jerome in his prologue to the book of Kings.<sup>3</sup>

The *first* part is contained in the law which is proposed by the king himself. *For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King* (Isa. 33:22 DRB).

The *second* is contained in the prophets who were, as it were, ambassadors and heralds of God, speaking to the people in the person of God, and urging them to observance of the law: *Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message* (Hag. 1:13).

The *third* is contained in the works of hagiographers, writers who were inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoke as for themselves and not for God. Hence they are called saintly writers because they were writers of the sacred, *agios* meaning 'sacred,' and *graphia* meaning 'scripture.' Thus the precepts found in them are paternal. As is evident in Proverbs 6:20: *My son, keep your father's commandment.*

Jerome mentions a *fourth* kind of book, namely the apocryphal, so called from *apo*, that is, 'especially,' and *cryphon*, that is, 'obscure,' because there is doubt about their contents and authors.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic Church includes among the books of Sacred Scripture some whose teachings are not doubted but whose authors are. Not that the authors are unknown but because these men were not of known authority. Hence they do not have force from the authority of the authors but rather from their reception by the Church. Because there is the same manner of speaking in them and in the hagiographical works, they are for now counted among them.

The *first* part, which contains the law, is divided into two parts, insofar as there are two kinds of law, public and private. A private law is imposed for the observance of one person or one family. Such law is contained in Genesis, as

---

3. Jerome, "The Books of Samuel and Kings."

4. Jerome, "The Books of Samuel and Kings."

is evident from the first precept given to man, *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat* (2:17), and to Noah, *you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood* (9:4), and to Abraham, *As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations* (17:9).

The public law is that which is given to the people. For the divine law was given to the Jewish people through a mediator because it was not fitting that the people should receive it immediately from God: *I was the mediator and stood between the Lord and you and at that time to show you his words* (Deut. 5:5 DRB). *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions . . . and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary* (Gal. 3:19). Thus a twofold level is found in legislation. *First*, when the law comes from the Lord to the mediator, and this pertains to three books, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Hence we frequently read in them, *God spoke to Moses*. *Second*, when the law is given to the people by the mediator, and this pertains to Deuteronomy, as is evident from its very beginning: *These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel* (1:1).

These three books are distinguished by the three things in which a people should be ordered. *First*, precepts bearing on equity of judgement, and this is found in Exodus. *Second*, in sacraments with respect to the establishment of worship, and this in Leviticus. And *third*, in offices, with respect to the administration of the community, and this in Numbers.

The *second* part, which is the prophets, is subdivided insofar as a herald ought to do two things. He should manifest the beneficence of the king, so that men will be inclined to obey, and he should declare the edict of the law.

There is a threefold divine beneficence that the prophets expose to the people. *First*, the effect of heredity, and this in Joshua, of which Sirach says, *Joshua the son of Nun was mighty in war* (46:1). *Second*, the destruction of armies, and this in the book of Judges, of whose destruction Psalm 83:9 says, *Do to them as to Madian, as to Sisara*. *Third*, the exultation of the people, which is twofold, namely the private exaltation of one person, and this in Ruth, and a public which is of the whole people, and this in Kings, which benefice God grants to them: *You were decked with gold and silver* (Ezek. 16:13). For these books, according to Jerome, are placed in the rank of prophets.<sup>5</sup>

In other books which are commonly said to be of the prophets, the prophets posed divine edicts for the observance of the law. And this is said, *first*, in general, in the major prophets who were sent to the whole people and called for the observance of the whole law; *second*, in particular, and this in the minor prophets, different ones of whom were sent for different reasons to special tribes, as Hosea to the ten tribes of Joel, Jonah to the Ninevites, and so with the rest.

---

5. Jerome, "The Books of Samuel and Kings."

The major prophets differ according to the different ways the prophets sought to lead the people to observance of the law, namely, cajoling by the promise of benefits, frightening with the threat of punishment, arguing by condemnation of sins. Although each of these is found in every prophet, Isaiah chiefly cajoles, as is said in Sirach 48:24: *By the spirit of might he saw the last things and comforted those who mourned in Zion*. Jeremiah chiefly warns: *He is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city by speaking such words to them* (38:4). But Ezekiel argues and scolds: *Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite* (Ezek. 16:3).

They can be distinguished in another way, insofar as Isaiah chiefly foretells the mystery of the incarnation, which is why he is read during the time of Advent by the Church, and Jeremiah the mystery of the Passion, hence he is read in Passiontide, and Ezekiel the mystery of the Resurrection, hence his book finishes with the raising of the bones and the repair of the temple. Daniel, however, is included among the prophets insofar as he predicted future events in a prophetic spirit; although he did not speak to the people in the person of the Lord, he dealt with the divinity of Christ. Thus the four prophets answer to the four Evangelists, and also to the call to judgement.

The third part, which contains the hagiographic and the apocryphal books, is subdivided according to the two ways fathers instruct their sons in virtue, namely, by word and deed, since in morals examples are no less important than words. Some teach by deed alone, some by word alone, some by word and deed.

By deed, however, in two ways. One, instructing about the future by warning, and this in Joshua, whom Jerome places among the hagiographs.<sup>6</sup> For although one is a prophet because of the gift of prophecy, this is not his office, because he was not sent by God to prophesy to the people. Hence what is said in Wisdom 8:8 can be applied to the prophet: *She has foreknowledge of signs and wonders*. In another way, speaking of past events as examples of virtue. There are four principal virtues, namely justice, which serves the common good, an example of which is given in Chronicles, in which the condition of a whole people who were governed with justice is described. The *second* is temperance, an example of which is given in Judith, which is why Jerome says, *Take Judith as an example of the chaste widow*.<sup>7</sup> Judith 15:10: *thy heart has been strengthened because thou hast loved chastity*. *Third* is fortitude, which has two attributes. To attack, and an example of this is found in the book of Maccabees; and to endure, and an example of this is found in Tobit 2:12: *Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience*. The *fourth* is prudence, by which dangers are avoided, and an

---

6. Jerome, "The Books of Samuel and Kings."

7. Jerome, "Prologue to Judith."

example of this is given in Ezra. For in that book we are shown how Ezra and Nehemiah and other princes prudently guarded against the plots of enemies wishing to impede the building of the temple and the city. It also pertains to prudence wisely to repel the violent, and an example of this is given in Esther, where it is shown how Mordecai and Esther handled the deceptions of the most powerful Haman.

The hagiographical and apocryphal books which instruct by word, are divided insofar as words work in a twofold way to instruct, in one way, by asking for the gift of wisdom. *I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me* (Wis. 7:7). This is how the psalter instructs, speaking to God in prayer. In another way, by teaching wisdom, and this in two ways according to the twofold work of wisdom, one of which is to expose the liar, and Job who drove out errors by way of disputation exhibits this: *I would speak to the Almighty and I desire to argue my case with God. As for you, you whitewash with lies* (Job 13:3–4). The other work is not to lie about what it knows, and thus we are instructed in a twofold way, because either wisdom is commended to us, and this in the book of Wisdom, or the precepts of wisdom are proposed, and this in the three books of Solomon, which indeed differ according to the three grades of virtue that Plotinus distinguishes since the precepts of wisdom ought to concern only the acts of virtue.<sup>8</sup> In the *first* grade, according to him, are political virtues, whereby a man moderately uses the things of this world and lives among men, and this in the Proverbs. In the *second* grade are the purgative virtues, whereby a man regards the world with contempt, and this in Ecclesiastes, which aims at contempt of the world, as is clear from Jerome's prologue.<sup>9</sup> In the *third* grade are the virtues of the purged soul, whereby a man, wholly cleansed of worldly cares, delights in the contemplation of wisdom alone, and this is found in the Song of Solomon. In the *fourth* grade are the exemplar virtues existing in God, concerning which precepts of wisdom are not given but are rather derived from them. In word and in deed Sirach instructs. Hence the precepts of wisdom in praise of fathers close his book, as is clear in chapter 44 and after.

The New Testament, which is ordered to eternal life not only through precepts but also through the gifts of grace, is divided into three parts. In the *first* the origin of grace is treated, in the Gospels. In the *second*, the power of grace, and this in the epistles of Paul, hence he begins in the power of the Gospel, in Romans 1:16 saying, *I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes*. In the *third*, the execution of the afore-said virtues is treated, and this in the rest of the books of the New Testament.

---

8. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.2.2–7.

9. Jerome, "Preface to the Commentary on Ecclesiastes."



Christ is the origin of grace. *From his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:16–17). In Christ a twofold nature is to be considered, a divine, and the Gospel of John is chiefly concerned with this, hence he begins, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. And a human, and the other Gospels treat chiefly of this, and they are distinguished according to the threefold dignity that belongs to the man Christ. With respect to his royal honor, Matthew speaks. Hence in the beginning of his Gospel he shows that Christ descended from kings and was adored by the Magi kings. With respect to his prophetic honor, Mark speaks, hence he begins with the preaching of the Gospel. With respect to his priestly dignity, Luke speaks, and he begins with the temple and the priesthood and ends his Gospel in the temple, and frequently returns to the temple, as the *Gloss* says about Luke 2:46: *They found him sitting in the temple in the midst of the teachers*.<sup>10</sup>

In another way, Matthew might be said to speak of Christ chiefly with respect to the mystery of the incarnation, and thus he is depicted in the figure of a man. Luke, with respect to the mystery of the Passion, and therefore he is depicted as a bull, which is an animal to be immolated. Mark, with respect to the victory of the Resurrection, and thus he is depicted as a lion. But John, who soars to the heights of his divinity, is depicted as an eagle.

[The part dealing with the power of grace as exemplified in the epistles of Paul is missing from the text.]

The execution of the power of grace is shown in the progress of the Church, in which there are three things to consider. *First*, the beginning of the Church, and this is treated in the Acts of the Apostles, hence Jerome says, in his preface to the Pentateuch, that *the Acts of the Apostles seem to give the bare history of the birth and to clothe the infant Church*.<sup>11</sup> *Second*, the progress of the Church, and to this is ordered the apostolic instruction of the canonical epistles. *Third*, the end of the Church, with which the whole content of Scripture concludes in Revelation, with the spouse in the abode of Jesus Christ sharing the life of glory, to which Jesus Christ himself conducts, and may he be blessed forever and ever. Amen.

---

10. The *Gloss* mentioned here is a compilation of scriptural comments and well-known sayings mostly attributed to the Fathers. Early on, individual glosses were included sporadically in the margins or between the lines of Vulgate manuscripts, but over time, certain authoritative comments appeared with more regularity. By the twelfth century, more standardized gloss collections such as the *Glossa Ordinaria* were widely used. Thomas Aquinas produced his own gloss collection for the four Gospels called the *Glossa Continua super Evangelia* or the *Catena Aurea*. The two glosses most frequently cited by St. Thomas are the *Glossa Ordinaria* and Peter Lombard's *Magna Glossatura*. Versions of these glosses can be found in Latin in the Patrologia Latina series, volumes 113–114 and 192, respectively.

11. The quote is actually located in Jerome, "To Paulinus" 9.

## II. Commendation of Sacred Scripture

*From thy lofty abode thou waterest the mountains:  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work.*

-PSALMS 104:13

### PREFACE

The King and Lord of the heavens set down this law from all eternity that the gifts of his Providence should come to the lower through intermediaries. Hence Dionysius says, *It is the most sacred law of the divinity that things in the middle should be led to his most divine light by first things.*<sup>1</sup>

This is found to be a law not only in spiritual things but also in corporeal. Hence Augustine says: *As the more crass and least are ruled in a given order by more subtle bodies, so all bodies are ruled by the rational spirit of life.*<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in the psalm the Lord proposed this law observed in the communication of spiritual wisdom in a metaphor of bodily things: *waterest the mountains*. It is plain to the senses that from the highest clouds rain flows forth by which the mountains and rivers are refreshed and send themselves forth so that the satiated earth can bear fruit. Similarly, from the heights of divine wisdom the minds of the learned, represented by the mountains, are watered, by whose ministry the light of divine wisdom reached to the minds of those who listen.

There are then four things to be considered in the chosen text: the *height* of spiritual doctrine; the *dignity* of those who teach it; the *condition* of the listeners; and the *order* of communicating.

#### 1.

Its height is expressed by the words, *from thy lofty abode*. The *Gloss* has, *from thy treasure houses on high*. The height of sacred doctrine comes from three things.

*First*, its origin: for this is the wisdom that is described as being from on high. *The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom* (Sir. 1:5 DRB).

*Second*, because of the subtlety of its matter: *I dwell in the high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud* (Sir. 24:4). There are some heights of divine wisdom to which all come, though imperfectly, because, as Damascene says: *Knowledge of the existing God is naturally inserted in all.*<sup>3</sup> In this respect, it is said in Job 36:25, *All men see him: everyone beholds afar off* (DRB). Other things are higher and only the wit of the wise achieves them. *What can be known about God is plain to them* (Rom. 1:19). Some are so high that they completely

---

1. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy* 5.

2. Augustine, *The Trinity* 3.1.4.

3. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.1.

transcend human reason, of which it is said in Job 28:21, *It is hid from the eyes of all living*, and Psalm 18:11: *He made darkness his covering*. But this has been made known by the Holy Spirit: *Now we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is from God* (1 Cor. 2:12), instructing holy teachers who passed it on in the text of Sacred Scripture; and these are the highest, in which this wisdom is said to dwell.

*Third*, from the sublimity of the end, for it has the highest end, namely, life eternal: *These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name* (John 20:31). *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on the things that are on earth* (Col. 3:1–2).

## 2.

Because of the height of this doctrine, there is required dignity in those who teach it, which is why they are symbolized by mountains when it is said, *thou waterest the mountains*, and this for three reasons.

*First*, because of the height of mountains. For they are elevated above the earth and neighbors of the sky. Thus the holy teachers by despising earthly things cleave to heavenly things alone: *Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Phil. 3:20). Hence of the teacher of teachers, Christ, it is said in Isaiah: *It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains . . . and all the nations shall flow to it* (2:2).

*Second*, because of its splendor. For the mountains are illumined by beams. Similarly the sacred teachers of minds first receive the splendor. Like mountains the teachers are illumined by the first beams of divine wisdom. *Glorious are you, more majestic than the everlasting mountains. All the foolish of heart were troubled* (Ps. 76:4–5), that is, by the teachers who participate in eternity. *You shine as lights in the world* (Phil. 2:15).

*Third*, because of the protection of the mountains, for the land is defended from the enemy by mountains. So too the doctors of the Church must in defense of the faith stand against errors. The sons of Israel do not put their trust in lance or bow, but the mountains defend them. *You have not gone up into the breaches, or built a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand to stand in battle in the day of the Lord* (Ezek. 13:5).

Therefore all the teachers of Sacred Scripture should give high thanks to their eminence of life, that they might be worthy to preach efficaciously, because as Gregory says: *The preaching of those whose life is despised will also*

be despised.<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:11: *The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings which are given by one Shepherd.* For the heart cannot be stimulated or stirred to fear of God unless it is fixed in highness of life.

They should be enlightened, that they might fittingly teach by reading: *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things* (Eph. 3:8–9). Armed, that they might refute errors in disputation: *I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict* (Luke 21:15). Of these three offices, namely, to preach, to lecture, and to dispute, it is said in Titus 1:9: *He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.*

### 3.

*Third*, the condition of those who hear, which are presented in the symbol of earth: ***the earth is satisfied***. This is because the earth is lowest: *As the heavens for height, the earth for depth* (Prov. 25:3). Again, it is stable and firm: *A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever* (Eccles. 1:4). Again, it is fruitful: *Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed* (Gen. 1:11).

Similarly, they should be low as the earth in humility: *With the humble is wisdom* (Prov. 11:2).<sup>5</sup> Again, firm with the sense of rectitude *that we may be now no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Eph. 4:14). And fruitful, as the precepts of wisdom bear fruit in them: *Hearing the word, [they] hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bring forth fruit with patience* (Luke 8:15).

Therefore humility is required of them with respect to the learning that comes from listening: *If you love to listen, you will gain knowledge; and if you incline your ear, you will become wise* (Sir. 6:33). Rectitude of the senses with respect to the judgement of what is heard: *Does not the ear try words?* (Job 12:11). But fruitfulness in discovery, by which from a few things heard, the good listener pronounces many things: *Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser* (Prov. 9:9).

---

4. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 12.

5. It is worth noting here that the Latin word for humble (*humilis*) is derived from the word for earth (*humus*). Hence, in Latin, ‘humble’ has the force of ‘of the earth.’

4.

The order of its coming about is touched on here with respect to three things, namely, the order of communicating, the amount, and the quality of the gift received.

*First* with respect to the order of communicating, because not everything that is contained in divine wisdom can be grasped by the minds of the teachers. Hence he does not say ‘from the highest mountains,’ but from the upper: *Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways* (Job 26:14). Similarly, not everything that the teachers grasp is passed on to the hearers: *He heard things that cannot be told* (2 Cor. 12:4). Hence he does not say, ‘passing on to earth the fruits of the mountains,’ but *the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work*. Job 26:8 says, *He binds up the waters in his thick clouds, so that they break not out and fall down together*. In explaining this, Gregory says that *the teacher should not preach to the simple as much as he knows, because he himself is unable to know how many divine mysteries there are*.<sup>6</sup>

*Second*, the order with respect to the mode of having is touched upon, because God has wisdom naturally. Hence his *lofty abode* is what is natural to him: *With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding* (Job 12:13). But teachers share in wisdom abundantly. Hence they are said to be watered from on high: *I will water my orchard and drench my garden plot* (Sir. 24:31). But listeners sufficiently participate in it, and the satiety of the earth signifies this: *I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form* (Ps. 17:15).

*Third*, with respect to the power of communicating, because God communicates wisdom by his own power. Hence by himself he is said to water the mountains. But the teachers do not communicate wisdom except as ministers. Hence the fruits of the mountains are not attributed to them but to the divine works, *with the fruit of thy work*. 1 Corinthians 3:4–5: *What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed*.

But *who is sufficient for these things?* (2 Cor. 2:16). For God requires innocent ministers: *He who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me* (Ps. 101:6); understanding: *A servant who deals wisely has the king’s favor* (Prov. 14:35); fervor: *You . . . make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers* (Ps. 104:4); again, obedience: *Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will!* (Ps. 103:21).

But although no one by himself, of himself, is sufficient for such a ministry, he can hope to have this sufficiency from God: *Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God*

---

6. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 17.37.

(2 Cor. 3:5). He must ask it of God: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him* (James 1:5).

## The Prologue of Saint Thomas to the Gospel of John

*I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the whole house was full of his majesty, and the things that were under him filled the temple.*

—ISAIAH 6:1

- 1 These are the words of a contemplative, and if we regard them as spoken by John the Evangelist, they apply quite well to showing the nature of this Gospel. For as Augustine says: *The other evangelists instruct us in their Gospels on the active life; but John in his Gospel instructs us also on the contemplative life.*<sup>7</sup>

The contemplation of John is described above in three ways, in keeping with the threefold manner in which he contemplated the Lord Jesus. It is described as high, full, and perfect. It is high: *I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne*; it is full: *and the whole house was full of his majesty*; and it was perfect: *and the things that were under him filled the temple*.

- 2 As to the *first*, we must understand that the height and sublimity of contemplation consists most of all in the contemplation and knowledge of God. *Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these* (Isa. 40:26). A man lifts up his eyes on high when he sees and contemplates the Creator of all things. Now since John rose above whatever had been created—mountains, heavens, angels—and reached the Creator of all, as Augustine says, it is clear that his contemplation was most high.<sup>8</sup> Thus, *I saw the Lord*. And because, as John himself says below: *Isaiah said this because he saw his glory*, namely, of Christ, *and spoke of him* (John 12:41), therefore the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne is Christ.

Now a fourfold height is indicated in this contemplation of John. A height of authority; hence he says, *I saw the Lord*. A height of eternity; when he says, *seated*. One of dignity, or nobility of nature; so he says, *on a high throne*. And a height of incomprehensible truth; when he says, *lofty*. It is in these four ways that the early philosophers arrived at the knowledge of God.

- 3 Some attained to a knowledge of God through his authority, and this is the most efficacious way. For we see the things in nature acting for an end and attaining to ends which are both useful and certain. And since they lack intelligence, they are unable to direct themselves, but must be directed and moved by one directing them, and who possesses an intellect. Thus it is that the movement of the things of nature toward a certain end indicates the existence of something higher by which the things of nature are directed to an end and governed. And so, since the whole course of nature advances to an end in an orderly way and is directed, we have to posit something higher which directs

---

7. Augustine, *Agreement among the Evangelists* 1.5.

8. Augustine, 1.4.

and governs them as lord; and this is God. This authority in governing is shown to be in the Word of God when he says, *Lord*. Thus a Psalm says: *You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them* (89:9), as though saying: ‘you are the Lord and govern all things.’ John shows that he knows this about the Word when he says below, *he came unto his own* (1:11), i.e., to the world, since the whole universe is his own.

- 4 Others came to a knowledge of God from his eternity. They saw that whatever was in things was changeable, and that the more noble something is in the grades of being, so much the less it has of mutability. For example, the lower bodies are mutable both as to their substance and to place, while the heavenly bodies, which are more noble, are immutable in substance and change only with respect to place. We can clearly conclude from this that the first principle of all things, which is supreme and more noble, is changeless and eternal.

The prophet suggests this eternity of the Word when he says, *seated*, i.e., presiding without any change and eternally. *Your divine throne endures forever and ever* (Ps. 45:6); *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Heb. 13:8). John points to this eternity when he says below, *in the beginning was the Word* (1:1).

- 5 Still others came to a knowledge of God from the dignity of God; and these were the Platonists. They noted that everything which is something by participation is reduced to what is the same thing by essence, as to the first and highest. Thus, all things which are fiery by participation are reduced to fire, which is such by its essence. And so since all things which exist participate in being and are beings by participation, there must necessarily be at the summit of all things something which is its existence through its own essence, i.e., whose essence is its existence. And this is God, who is the most sufficient, the most eminent, and the most perfect cause of the whole of existence, from whom all things that are participate in existence. This dignity is shown in the words, *on a high throne*, which, according to Dionysius, refer to the divine nature.<sup>9</sup> *The Lord is high above all nations* (Ps. 113:4). John shows us this dignity when he says below, *the Word was God* (1:1), with *Word* as subject and *God* as the predicate.

- 6 Yet others arrived at a knowledge of God from the incomprehensibility of truth. All the truth which our intellect is able to grasp is finite, since according to Augustine, *Everything that is known is bounded by the comprehension of the one knowing*;<sup>10</sup> and if it is bounded, it is determined and particularized. Therefore, the first and supreme truth, which surpasses every intellect, must necessarily be incomprehensible and infinite; and this is God. Hence a psalm says, *Your greatness is above the heavens* (8:1), i.e., above every created intellect, angelic

---

9. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy* 13.4.

10. Augustine, *The City of God* 12.18.



and human. The Apostle says this in the words, *He dwells in unapproachable light* (1 Tim. 6:16).

This incomprehensibility of truth is shown to us in the word *lofty*, that is, above all the knowledge of the created intellect. John implies this incomprehensibility to us when he says below, *No one has ever seen God* (1:18).

Thus, the contemplation of John was high as regards authority, eternity, dignity, and the incomprehensibility of the Word. And John has passed on this contemplation to us in his Gospel.

- 7 John's contemplation was also full. Now contemplation is full when someone is able to consider all the effects of a cause in the cause itself, that is, when he knows not only the essence of the cause, but also its power, according as it can extend out to many things. Of this flowing outward we read, *it fills men with wisdom, like the Pishon, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits* (Sir. 24:25); *the river of God is full with water*, since the divine wisdom has depth in relation to its knowledge of all things. *With thee is wisdom, who knows your works* (Wis. 9:9).

Since John the Evangelist was raised up to the contemplation of the nature of the divine Word and of his essence when he said, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God* (1:1), he immediately tells us of the power of the Word as it extends to all things, saying, *All things were made through him* (1:3). Thus his contemplation was full. And so after the Prophet had said, *I saw the Lord seated*, he added something about his power, *and the whole house was full of his majesty*, that is, the whole fullness of things and of the universe is from the majesty and power of God, through whom all things were made, and by whose light all the men coming into this world are enlightened. *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* (Ps. 24:1).

- 8 The contemplation of John was also perfect. For contemplation is perfect when the one contemplating is led and raised to the height of the thing contemplated. Should he remain at a lower level, then no matter how high the things which he might contemplate, the contemplation would not be perfect. So in order that it be perfect it is necessary that it rise and attain the end of the thing contemplated, adhering and assenting by affection and understanding to the truth contemplated. Job says, *Do you know the balancings of the clouds*, that is, the contemplation of those preaching, *the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge* (37:16), inasmuch as they adhere firmly by affection and understanding to contemplating the highest truth.

Since John not only taught how Christ Jesus, the Word of God, is God, raised above all things, and how all things were made through him, but also that we are sanctified by him and adhere to him by the grace which he pours into us, he says below, *Of his fullness we all have received—indeed, grace*

*upon grace* (1:16). It is therefore apparent that his contemplation is perfect. This perfection is shown in the addition, *and the things that were under him filled the temple*. For *the head of Christ is God* (1 Cor. 11:3). The things that are under Christ are the sacraments of his humanity, through which the faithful are filled with the fullness of grace. In this way, then, *the things that were under him filled the temple*, i.e., the faithful, who are the holy temple of God (1 Cor. 3:17) insofar as through the sacraments of his humanity all the faithful of Christ receive from the fullness of his grace.

9       The contemplation of John was thus full, high, and perfect. We should note, however, that these three characteristics of contemplation belong to the different sciences in different ways. The perfection of contemplation is found in moral science, which is concerned with the ultimate end. The fullness of contemplation is possessed by natural science, which considers things as proceeding from God. Among the physical sciences, the height of contemplation is found in metaphysics. But the Gospel of John contains all together what the above sciences have in a divided way, and so it is most perfect.

10       In this way then, from what has been said, we can understand the matter of this Gospel. For while the other evangelists treat principally of the mysteries of the humanity of Christ, John, especially and above all, makes known the divinity of Christ in his Gospel, as we saw above. Still, he does not ignore the mysteries of his humanity. He did this because, after the other evangelists had written their Gospels, heresies had arisen concerning the divinity of Christ, to the effect that Christ was purely and simply a man, as Ebion and Cerinthus falsely thought. And so John the Evangelist, who had drawn the truth about the divinity of the Word from the very fountainhead of the divine breast, wrote this Gospel at the request of the faithful. And in it he gives us the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and refutes all heresies.

The order of this Gospel is clear from the above. For John *first* shows us *the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne*, when he says below, *In the beginning was the Word* (1:1). He shows *second* how *the house was full of his majesty*, when he says, *All things were made through him* (John 1:3). *Third*, he shows how *the things that were under him filled the temple*, when he says, *The Word became flesh* (John 1:14).

The end of this Gospel is also clear, and it is that the faithful become the temple of God and become filled with the majesty of God; and so John says below, *These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God* (John 20:31).

11       The matter of this Gospel, the knowledge of the divinity of the Word, is clear, as well as its order and end. Then follows the condition of the author, who is described above in four ways: as to his name, his virtue, his symbol, and his

privilege. He is described as to name as John, the author of this Gospel. 'John' is interpreted as 'one in whom grace is present,' since the secrets of the divinity cannot be seen except by those who have the grace of God within themselves. *No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God* (1 Cor. 2:11).

As concerns his virtue, John saw the Lord seated, because he was a virgin; for it is fitting that such persons see the Lord: *Blessed are the pure in heart* (Matt. 5:8). He is described as to his symbol, for John is symbolized by an eagle. The other three evangelists, concerned with those things which Christ did in his flesh, are symbolized by animals which walk on the earth, namely, by a man, a bull calf, and a lion. But John flies like an eagle above the cloud of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart. And gazing on the very deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he is equal to the Father, he has striven in this Gospel to confide this above all, to the extent that he believed was sufficient for all. Concerning this flight of John it is said: *Will the eagle, that is, John, fly up at your command?* (Job 39:27 DRB) And further on it says, *his eyes look far away*, because the Word of God is seen in the bosom of the Father by the eye of the mind.

John is described as to privilege since, among the other disciples of the Lord, John was more loved by Christ. Without mentioning his own name John refers to himself below as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (21:20). And because secrets are revealed to friends, *I have called you friends because everything I have heard from my father I have made known to you* (John 15:15), Jesus confided his secrets in a special way to that disciple who was specially loved. Thus it says in Job: *From the savage, that is, the proud, he hides his light*, that is, Christ hides the truth of his divinity, *and shows his friend*, that is, John, *that it is his possession* (Job 36:32 DRB), since it is John who sees the light of the incarnate Word more excellently and expresses it to us, saying that he was *the true light* (1:9).

Now the matter, order, end, and author of this Gospel of the blessed John are clear.



PART I

# FROM THE FATHER

*The Being and Incarnation  
of the Word*

# The Word from Heaven Now Proceeding

---

A HYMN OF THOMAS AQUINAS

The Word from heaven now proceeding,  
his Father's right hand never leaving,  
advancing to his proper work,  
approached his life's final evening.

By his disciples unto death  
and to his enemies betrayed,  
he first as life's true sustenance  
himself to his apostles gave.

To them beneath a twofold guise  
he flesh and blood distributed;  
thus in corporeal substances  
the entire man he justly fed.

Being born, he became our friend;  
at supper, he became our food.  
Dying, he was our ransom's price  
and, reigning, is our eternal good.

O sacrifice for our salvation,  
heavenly gates you open wide.  
Our enemies press hard around us.  
Give us strength; our help provide.

To the one and triune God,  
be glory and eternal praise.  
May he grant us life forever  
and to our home our souls upraise.

Amen

# Chapter 1

## THE DIVINE AND HUMAN GENERATIONS OF CHRIST

---

### John 1:1–2

#### The Being of the Word

*On John 1.1 (23–67)*

---

*1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*1:2 He was in the beginning with God.*

23 John the Evangelist, as already indicated, makes it his principal object to show the divinity of the incarnate Word. Accordingly, his Gospel is divided into two parts. In the *first* he asserts the divinity of Christ; in the *second* he shows it by the things Christ did in the flesh, at *and on the third day* (2:1).

In regard to the *first*, he does two things. *First*, he shows the divinity of Christ; *second*, he sets forth the manner in which Christ's divinity is made known to us, at *We have beheld his glory, the glory as of the only Son* (John 1:14). Concerning the *first* he does two things. *First*, he treats of the divinity of Christ; *second* of the incarnation of the Word of God, at *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John* (1:6).

Because there are two items to be considered in each thing, namely, its existence and its operation or power, *first* he treats the existence of the Word as to his divine nature; *second* of his power or operation, at *All things were made through him* (1:3). In regard to the *first* [the existence of the Word] he does four things. *First*, he shows when the Word was: *In the beginning was the Word*; *second*, where he was: *The Word was with God*; *third*, what he was: *The Word was God*; *fourth*, in what way he was: *He was in the beginning with God*. The first two pertain to the inquiry of whether something exists; the second two pertain to the inquiry of what something is.

24 With respect to the *first* of these four [when] we must examine the meaning of the statement *In the beginning was the Word*. And here three things present themselves for careful study according to the three parts of this statement. *First* it is necessary to investigate the name *Word*; *second* the phrase *in the beginning*; *third* the meaning of *The Word was in the beginning*.

25 To understand the name *Word* we should note that, according to the Philosopher, vocal sounds are signs of the affections that exist in our soul.<sup>1</sup> It is customary in Scripture for the things signified to be themselves called by the names of their signs, as in the statement, *the rock was Christ* (1 Cor. 10:4). It is fitting that what is within our soul, and what is signified by our external word, be called a word. But whether the name ‘word’ belongs first to the exterior vocal sound or to the conception in our mind, is not our concern at present. However, it is obvious that what is signified by the vocal sound, as existing interiorly in the soul, exists prior to the vocal expression inasmuch as it is its actual cause.

Therefore if we wish to grasp the meaning of the interior word, we must first look at the meaning of that which is exteriorly expressed in words. Now there are three things in our intellect: the intellectual power itself, the species of the thing understood, which is its form, and this form being to the intellect what the species of a color is to the eye; and third, the very activity of the intellect, which is to understand. But none of these is what is signified by the exterior vocal word.

For, the name ‘stone’ does not signify the substance of the intellect because this is not what the one naming intends; nor does it signify the species, which is that by which the intellect understands, since this also is not the intention of the one naming; nor does it signify the act itself of understanding since to understand is not an action proceeding to the exterior from the one understanding, but an action remaining within. Therefore, that is properly called an interior word which the one understanding forms when understanding.

Now the intellect forms two things, according to its two operations. According to its operation which is called the understanding of indivisibles, it forms a definition; while according to its operation by which it unites and separates, it forms an enunciation or something of that sort. Hence, what is thus formed and expressed by the operation of the intellect, whether by defining or enunciating, is what the exterior vocal sound signifies. So the Philosopher says that the notion [*ratio*] that a name signifies is a definition.<sup>2</sup> Hence, what is thus expressed, i.e., formed in the soul, is called an interior word. Consequently it is compared to the intellect, not as that by which the intellect understands, but as that in which it understands, because it is in what is thus expressed and formed that it sees the nature of the thing understood. Thus we have the meaning of the name ‘word.’

*Second*, from what has been said we are able to understand that a word is always something that proceeds from an intellect existing in act; and furthermore, that a word is always a notion and likeness of the thing understood. So

---

1. Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 1 (16a3–4).

2. Aristotle, 2 (16a20–16b5).



if the one understanding and the thing understood are the same, then the word is a notion and likeness of the intellect from which it proceeds. On the other hand, if the one understanding is other than the thing understood, then the word is not a likeness and notion of the one understanding but of the thing understood, as the conception which one has of a stone is a likeness of only the stone. But when the intellect understands itself, its word is a likeness and notion of the intellect. And so Augustine sees a likeness of the Trinity in the soul insofar as the mind understands itself, but not insofar as it understands other things.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear then that it is necessary to have a word in any intellectual nature, for it is of the very nature of understanding that the intellect in understanding should form something. Now what is formed is called a word, and so it follows that in every being which understands there must be a word.

However, intellectual natures are of three kinds: human, angelic, and divine; and so there are three kinds of words. The human word, about which it is said: *The fool said in his heart, "there is no God"* (Ps. 14:1). The angelic word, about which it is said in Zechariah, and in many places in Sacred Scripture, *The angel . . . said to me, "I will show you what they are"* (Zech. 1:9). The third is the divine word, of which it is said: *God said, "let there be light"* (Gen. 1:3).

So when the Evangelist says, *in the beginning was the Word*, we cannot understand this as a human or angelic word, because both these words have been made since man and angel have a cause and principle of their existence and operation, and the word of a man or an angel cannot exist before they do. The word the Evangelist had in mind he shows by saying that this word was not made, since all things were made by it. Therefore, the word about which John speaks here is the Word of God.

26 We should note that this Word differs from our own word in three ways. The *first* difference, according to Augustine, is that our word is formable before being formed, for when I wish to conceive the notion of a stone, I must arrive at it by reasoning.<sup>4</sup> And so it is in all other things that are understood by us, with the sole possible exception of the first principles, which, since they are known in a simple manner, are known at once without any discourse of reason.

So as long as the intellect, in so reasoning, casts about this way and that, the formation is not yet complete. It is only when it has conceived the notion of the thing perfectly that for the first time it has the notion of the complete thing and a word. Thus in our mind there is both a cogitation, meaning the discourse involved in an investigation, and a word, which is formed according to a perfect contemplation of the truth. So our word is first in potency before

---

3. Augustine, *The Trinity* 9.5.8.

4. Augustine, 15.4.25.

it is in act. But the Word of God is always in act. In consequence, the term cogitation does not properly speaking apply to the Word of God. For Augustine says: *The Word of God is spoken of in such a way that cogitation is not included, lest anything changeable be supposed in God.*<sup>5</sup> Anselm was speaking improperly when he said: *For the supreme Spirit to speak is for him to look at something while cogitating.*<sup>6</sup>

27 The *second* difference is that our word is imperfect, but the divine Word is most perfect. For since we cannot express all our conceptions in one word, we must form many imperfect words through which we separately express all that is in our knowledge. But it is not that way with God. For since he understands both himself and everything else through his essence, by one act, the single divine Word is expressive of all that is in God, not only of the persons but also of creatures; otherwise it would be imperfect. So Augustine says: *If there were less in the Word than is contained in the knowledge of the one speaking it, the Word would be imperfect; but it is obvious that it is most perfect; therefore, it is only one.*<sup>7</sup> Job 33:14: *God speaks once* (DRB).

28 The *third* difference is that our word is not of the same nature as we; but the divine Word is of the same nature as God. And therefore it is something that subsists in the divine nature. For the understood notion which the intellect is seen to form about something has only an intelligible existence in our soul. Now in our soul, to understand is not the same as the nature of the soul, because our soul is not its own operation. Consequently, the word which our intellect forms is not of the essence of our soul but is an accident of it. But in God, to understand and to be are the same; and so the Word of the divine intellect is not an accident but belongs to its nature. Thus it must be subsistent, because whatever is in the nature of God is God. Thus Damascene says that God is a substantial word, and a hypostasis, but our words are concepts in our mind.<sup>8</sup>

29 From the above it is clear that the Word, properly speaking, is always understood as a person in the divinity, since it implies only something expressed, by the one understanding; also, that in the divinity the Word is the likeness of that from which it issues; and that it is co-eternal with that from which it issues, since it was not first formable before being formed, but was always in act; and that it is equal to the Father, since it is perfect and expressive of the whole being of the Father; and that it is co-essential and consubstantial with the Father, since it is his substance.

---

5. Augustine, 15.4.25.

6. Anselm, *Monologion* 63.

7. Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.14.23.

8. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.13.

It is also clear that since in every nature that which issues forth and has a likeness to the nature from which it issues is called a son, and since this Word issues forth in a likeness and identity to the nature from which it issues, it is suitably and appropriately called a son, and its production is called a generation.

30 So now the first point is clear, the meaning of the term *Word*. There are four questions on this point, two of them from Chrysostom. The *first* is: why did John the Evangelist omit the Father and begin at once with the Son, saying, *in the beginning was the Word*?<sup>9</sup>

There are two answers to this. One is that the Father was known to everyone in the Old Testament, although not under the aspect of Father, but as God; but the Son was not known. And so in the New Testament, which is concerned with our knowledge of the Word, he begins with the Word or Son.

The other answer is that we are brought to know the Father through the Son: *I have manifested your name to the men whom you have given to me* (John 17:6). And so wishing to lead the faithful to a knowledge of the Father, the Evangelist fittingly began with the Son, at once adding something about the Father when he says, *and the Word was with God*.

31 The *second* question is also from Chrysostom: Why did he say *Word* and not *Son*, since, as we have said, the Word proceeds as Son?<sup>10</sup>

There are also two answers to this. *First*, because ‘Son’ means something begotten, and when we hear of the generation of the Son, someone might suppose that this generation is the kind he can comprehend, that is, a material and changeable generation. Thus he did not say ‘Son,’ but *Word*, which signifies an intelligible proceeding, so that it would not be understood as a material and changeable generation. And so in showing that the Son is born of the Father in an unchangeable way, he eliminates a faulty conjecture by using the name *Word*.

The *second* answer is this. The Evangelist was about to consider the Word as having come to manifest the Father. But since the idea of manifesting is implied better in the name *Word* than in the name ‘Son,’ he preferred to use the name *Word*.

32 The *third* question is raised by Augustine, and it is this.<sup>11</sup> In Greek, where we have *Word*, they have *Logos*; now since *Logos* signifies in Latin both notion and word, why did the translators render it as *Word* and not ‘notion,’ since a notion is something interior just as a word is? I answer that ‘notion,’ properly speaking, names a conception of the mind precisely as in the mind, even if through it nothing exterior comes to be; but word signifies a reference to some-

---

9. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 2.4.

10. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 2.4.

11. Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 63.

thing exterior. And so because the Evangelist, when he said *Logos*, intended to signify not only a reference to the Son's existence in the Father, but also the operative power of the Son, by which, *all things were made through him: and without him was made nothing*, our predecessors preferred to translate it *Word*, which implies a reference to something exterior, rather than 'notion' which implies merely a concept of the mind.

- 33 The *fourth* question is from Origen and is this.<sup>12</sup> In many passages, Scripture, when speaking of the Word of God, does not simply call him the *Word*, but adds *of God*, saying, *the Word of God*, or *of the Lord: The Word of God on high is the foundation of wisdom* (Sir. 1:5 DRB); *he is called . . . the Word of God* (Rev. 19:13). Why then did the Evangelist, when speaking here of the Word of God, not say, 'in the beginning was the Word of God,' but said *in the beginning was the Word*?

I answer that although there are many participated truths, there is just one absolute truth, which is truth by its very essence, that is, the divine act of being; and by this truth all words are words. Similarly, there is one absolute wisdom elevated above all things, that is, the divine wisdom, by participating in which all wise persons are wise. Further, there is one absolute Word, by participating in which all persons having a word are called speakers. Now this is the divine Word which of itself is the Word elevated above all words.

So in order that the Evangelist might signify this supereminence of the divine Word, he pointed out this Word to us absolutely without any addition. And because the Greeks, when they wished to signify something separate and elevated above everything else, did this by affixing the article to the name, as did the Platonists, wishing to signify the separated substances, such as the separated good or the separated man, called them the good *per se*, or man *per se*, so the Evangelist, wishing to signify the separation and elevation of that Word above all things, affixed an article to the name *Logos*, so that if it were stated in Latin we would say *Verbum* (the Word).

- 34 *Second*, we must consider the meaning of the phrase, *in the beginning*. We must note that according to Origen, the word *principium* [beginning] has many meanings.<sup>13</sup> Since the word *principium* implies a certain order of one thing to another, one can find a *principium* in all those things which have an order.

*First* of all, order is found in quantified things; and so there is a principle of number and lengths, as for example, a line. *Second*, order is found in time; and so we speak of a beginning of time, or of duration.

*Third*, order is found in learning; and this in two ways: as to nature, and as to ourselves, and in both cases we can speak of a beginning. *By this time you*

12. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.37–41.

13. Origen, 1.90.

*ought to be teachers* (Heb. 5:12). As to nature, in Christian doctrine the beginning and principle of our wisdom is Christ, inasmuch as he is the wisdom and Word of God, i.e., in his divinity. But as to ourselves, the beginning is Christ himself inasmuch as *the Word became flesh* (John 1:14), i.e., by his incarnation.

*Fourth*, order is found in the production of a thing. In this perspective there can be a *principium* on the part of the thing generated, that is, the first part of the thing generated or made; as we say that the foundation is the beginning of a house. Another is on the part of the generator, and in this perspective there are three principles: of intention, which is the purpose, which motivates the agent; of reason, which is the idea in the mind of the maker; and of execution, which is the operative faculty.

35 Considering these various ways of using the term, we now ask how *beginning* is used here when it says, *In the beginning was the Word*. We should note that this word can be taken in three ways. In one way so that *principium* is understood as the person of the Son, who is the principle of creatures by reason of his active power acting with wisdom, which is the conception of the things that are brought into existence. Hence, we read: *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor. 1:24). And so the Lord said about himself: *The beginning, who also speak to you* (John 8:25).

Taking *principium* in this way, we should understand the statement *in the beginning was the Word* as though he were saying ‘the Word was in the Son,’ so that the sense would be: the Word himself is the principle, in the sense in which life is said to be in God, when this life is not something other than God. And this is the explanation of Origen.<sup>14</sup>

And so the Evangelist says *in the beginning* here in order, as Chrysostom says, to show at the very outset the divinity of the Word by asserting that he is a principle because, as determining all, a principle is most honored.<sup>15</sup>

36 In a *second* way *principium* can be understood as the person of the Father, who is the principle not only of creatures, but of every divine process. It is taken this way in, *With you is the principality in the day of your strength* (Ps. 109:3 DRB). In this second way one reads *in the beginning was the Word* as though it means, ‘the Son was in the Father.’ This is Augustine’s understanding of it, as well as Origen’s.<sup>16</sup>

The Son, however, is said to be in the Father because both have the same essence. Since the Son is his own essence, then the Son is in whomsoever the Son’s essence is. Since, therefore, the essence of the Son is in the Father by

---

14. Origen, 1.116–117.

15. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 2.3.

16. Augustine, *The Trinity* 6.2.3. Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.102.

consubstantiality, it is fitting that the Son be in the Father. Hence it is said: *I am in the Father, and the Father in me* (John 14:10).

- 37 In a *third* way, *principium* can be taken for the beginning of duration, so that the sense of *in the beginning was the Word* is that the Word was before all things, as Augustine explains it.<sup>17</sup> According to Basil and Hilary, this phrase shows the eternity of the Word.<sup>18</sup>

The phrase *in the beginning was the Word* shows that no matter which beginning of duration is taken, whether of temporal things, which is time, or of aeviternal things, which is the aeon, or of the whole world or any imagined span of time reaching back for many ages, at that beginning the Word already was. Hence Hilary says, *Go back season by season, skip over the centuries, take away ages. Set down whatever you want as the beginning in your opinion: the Word already was*.<sup>19</sup> And this is what Proverbs says: *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything* (8:22 DRB). But what is prior to the beginning of duration is eternal.

- 38 And thus the *first* explanation asserts the causality of the Word; the *second* explanation affirms the consubstantiality of the Word with the Father, who utters the Word; and the *third* explanation affirms the co-eternity of the Word.

- 39 Now we should consider that it says that *the Word was*, which is stated in the past imperfect tense [*erat*]. This tense is most appropriate for designating eternal things if we consider the nature of time and of the things that exist in time. For what is future is not yet in act; but what is at present is in act, and by the fact that it is in act what is present is not described as having been. Now the past perfect tense indicates that something has existed, has already come to an end, and has now ceased to be. The past imperfect tense, on the other hand, indicates that something has been, has not yet come to an end, nor has ceased to be, but still endures. Thus, whenever John mentions eternal things he expressly says *was* [*erat*, imperfect], but when he refers to anything temporal he says *has been* [*fuit*, perfect], as will be clear later.<sup>20</sup>

But so far as concerns the notion of the present, the best way to designate eternity is the present tense, which indicates that something is in act, and this is always the characteristic of eternal things. And so it is said: *I am who am* (Exod. 3:14 DRB). And Augustine says: *He alone truly is whose being does not know a past and a future*.<sup>21</sup>

---

17. Augustine, *The Trinity* 6.2.3.

18. Basil the Great, *Homily on the Beginning of the Gospel of John* 1. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.13.

19. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.13.

20. See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.4 (not included in this collection).

21. Augustine, *The Trinity* 5.2.3.

40 We should also note that this verb *was*, according to the *Gloss*, is not understood here as indicating temporal changes, as other verbs do, but as signifying the existence of a thing. Thus it is also called a substantive verb.

41 Someone may ask how the Word can be co-eternal with the Father since he is begotten by the Father: for a human son, born from a human father, is subsequent to his father.

I answer that there are three reasons why an originative principle is prior in duration to that which derives from that principle. *First* of all, if the originative principle of anything precedes in time the action by which it produces the thing of which it is the principle; thus a man does not begin to write as soon as he exists, and so he precedes his writing in time. *Second*, if an action is successive; consequently, even if the action should happen to begin at the same time as the agent, the termination of the action is nevertheless subsequent to the agent. Thus, as soon as fire has been generated in a lower region, it begins to ascend; but the fire exists before it has ascended, because the motion by which it tends upward requires some time. *Third*, by the fact that sometimes the beginning of a thing depends on the will of its principle, just as the beginning of a creature's coming-to-be depends on the will of God, such that God existed before any creature.

Yet none of these three is found in the generation of the divine Word. God did not first exist and then begin to generate the Word: for since the generation of the Word is nothing other than an intelligible conception, it would follow that God would be understanding in potency before understanding in act, which is impossible. Again, it is impossible that the generation of the Word involve succession: for then the divine Word would be unformed before it was formed, as happens in us who form words by cogitating, which is false, as was said. Again, we cannot say that the Father pre-established a beginning of duration for his Son by his own will, because God the Father does not generate the Son by his will, as the Arians held, but naturally: for God the Father, understanding himself, conceives the Word; and so God the Father did not exist prior to the Son.<sup>22</sup>

An example of this, to a limited degree, appears in fire and in the brightness issuing from it: for this brightness issues naturally and without succession from the fire. Again, if the fire were eternal, its brightness would be coeternal with it. This is why the Son is called the brightness of the Father: *the brightness of his glory* (Heb. 1:3 DRB). But this example lacks an illustration of the identity

---

22. The Arians were a loose group of clergy and theologians who followed the view of Arius (AD 256–336), an influential presbyter from Alexandria, Egypt, who argued that the Son, because he is begotten of the Father, can be neither co-eternal nor equal in divinity with him. Arius and his views were condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.



of nature. And so we call him Son, although in human sonship we do not find coeternity: for we must attain our knowledge of divine things from many likenesses in material things, for one likeness is not enough. The Council of Ephesus says that the Son always coexists with the Father: for *brightness* indicates his unchangeability, *birth* points to the Word himself, but the name *Son* suggests his consubstantiality.<sup>23</sup>

42 And so we give the Son various names to express his perfection, which cannot be expressed by one name. We call him *Son* to show that he is of the same nature as the Father; we call him *image* to show that he is not unlike the Father in any way; we call him *brightness* to show that he is coeternal; and he is called the *Word* to show that he is begotten in an immaterial manner.

43 Then the Evangelist says, *and the Word was with God*. This is the second clause which the Evangelist posits in his narration. The first thing to consider is the meaning of the two words which did not appear in the first clause, that is, *God*, and *with*; for what is signified by *Verbum* and *principium* has already been related. Therefore, let us diligently continue investigating that which is new in the second clause, namely *God* and *with*. And to better understand the explanation of this second clause, we must say something about the meaning of each so far as it is relevant to our purpose.

44 At the outset, we should note that the name *God* signifies the divinity concretely and as inherent in a subject, while the name 'deity' signifies the divinity in the abstract and absolutely. Thus it cannot naturally and by its mode of signifying stand for a divine person, but only for the divine nature. But the name *God* can, by its natural mode of signifying, stand for any one of the divine persons, just as the name 'man' stands for any individual possessing humanity. Therefore, whenever the truth of a statement or its predicate requires that the name 'God' stand for the person, then it stands for the person, as when we say, 'God begets God.' Thus, when it says here that *the Word was with God*, it is necessary that God stand for the person of the Father, because the preposition *with* signifies the distinction of the Word, which is said to be *with God*. And although this preposition signifies a distinction in person, it does not signify a distinction in nature, since the nature of the Father and of the Son is the same. Consequently, the Evangelist wished to signify the person of the Father when he said *God*.

45 Here we should note that the preposition 'with' signifies a certain union of the thing signified by its grammatical antecedent to the thing signified by its grammatical object, just as the preposition 'in' does. However, there is a difference, because the preposition 'in' signifies a certain intrinsic union, whereas the preposition 'with' implies in a certain way an extrinsic union.

---

23. The Council of Ephesus (431), "Canonical Epistle of St. Cyril, *Cum Salvatore Noster*."



And we state both in divine matters, namely, that the Son is in the Father and with the Father. Here the intrinsic union pertains to consubstantiality, but the extrinsic union (if we may use such an expression, since extrinsic is improperly employed in divine matters) refers only to a personal distinction, because the Son is distinguished from the Father by origin alone. And so these two words designate both a consubstantiality in nature and distinction in person: consubstantiality inasmuch as a certain union is implied; but distinction, inasmuch as a certain otherness is signified as was said above.

The preposition ‘in,’ as was said, principally signifies consubstantiality, as implying an intrinsic union and, by way of consequence, a distinction of persons, inasmuch as every preposition is transitive. The preposition ‘with’ principally signifies a personal distinction, but also a consubstantiality inasmuch as it signifies a certain extrinsic, so to speak, union. For these reasons the Evangelist specifically used here the preposition ‘with’ in order to express the distinction of the person of the Son from the Father, saying, *and the Word was with God*, that is, the Son was with the Father as one person with another.

46 We should note further that this preposition ‘with’ has four meanings, through which four contrary objections are eliminated. *First*, the preposition ‘with’ signifies the subsistence of its antecedent, because things that do not subsist of themselves are not properly said to be with another; thus we do not say that a color is with a body, and the same applies to other things that do not subsist of themselves. But things that do subsist of themselves are properly said to be with another; thus we say that a man is with a man, and a stone with a stone. *Second*, it signifies authority in its grammatical object. For we do not, properly speaking, say that a king is with a soldier, but that the soldier is with the king. *Third*, it asserts a distinction. For it is not proper to say that a person is with himself but rather that one man is with another. *Fourth*, it signifies a certain union and fellowship. For when some person is said to be with another, it suggests to us that there is some social union between them. Considering these four conditions implied in the meaning of this preposition *with*, the Evangelist quite appropriately joins to the first clause, *in the beginning was the Word*, this second clause, *and the Word was with God*.

For if we omit one of the three explanations of *in the beginning was the Word*, namely, the one in which *principium* was understood as the Son, certain heretics make a twofold objection against each of the other explanations, namely, the one in which *principium* means the same as ‘before all things,’ and the one in which it is understood as the Father. Thus there are four objections, and we can answer these by the four conditions indicated by this preposition ‘with.’

47 The *first* of these objections is this. You say that the Word was in the beginning, i.e., before all things. But before all things there was nothing. So if before

all things there was nothing, where then was the Word? This objection arises due to the imaginings of those who think that whatever exists is somewhere and in some place. But this is rejected by John when he says, *with God*, which indicates the union mentioned in the last four conditions. So, according to Basil, the meaning is this: where was the Word? The answer is: *with God*; not in some place, since he cannot be surrounded, but he is with the Father, who is not enclosed by any place.<sup>24</sup>

48 The *second* objection against the same explanation is this. You say that the Word was in the beginning, i.e., before all things. But whatever exists before all things appears to proceed from no one, since that from which something proceeds seems to be prior to that which proceeds from it. Therefore, the Word does not proceed from another. This objection is rejected when he says, *the Word was with God*, taking *with* according to its second condition, as implying authority in what is causing. So the meaning, according to Hilary, is this: from whom is the Word if he exists before all things? The Evangelist answers: *the Word was with God*, i.e., although the Word has no beginning of duration, still he does not lack a beginning or author, for he was with God as his author.<sup>25</sup>

49 The *third* objection, directed to the explanation in which *principium* is understood as the Father, is this. You say that *in the beginning was the Word*, i.e., the Son was in the Father. But that which is in something does not seem to be subsistent, as a hypostasis; just as the whiteness in a body does not subsist. This objection is solved by the statement *the Word was with God*, taking *with* in its first condition, as implying the subsistence of its grammatical antecedent. So according to Chrysostom, the meaning is this: *in the beginning was the Word*, not as an accident, but he *was with God*, as subsisting, and a divine hypostasis.<sup>26</sup>

50 The *fourth* objection, against the same explanation, is this. You say that the Word was in the beginning, i.e., in the Father. But whatever is in something is not distinct from it. So the Son is not distinct from the Father.

This objection is answered by the statement *and the Word was with God*, taking *with* in its third condition, as indicating distinction. Thus the meaning, according to Alcuin and Bede, is this: *the Word was with God*, and he was with the Father by a consubstantiality of nature, while still being with him through a distinction in person.

51 And so, *and the Word was with God* indicates: the union of the Word with the Father in nature, according to Basil; their distinction in person, accord-

---

24. Basil the Great, *Homily on the Beginning of the Gospel of John* 4.

25. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.14.

26. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 4.1.

ing to Alcuin and Bede;<sup>27</sup> the subsistence of the Word in the divine nature, according to Chrysostom; and the authorship of the Father in relation to the Word, according to Hilary.

52 We should also note, according to Origen, that *the Word was with God* shows that the Son has always been with the Father.<sup>28</sup> For in the Old Testament it says that the Word of the Lord *came* to Jeremiah or someone else, as is plain in many passages of Sacred Scripture. But it does not say that the Word of the Lord was with Jeremiah or anyone else, because the Word comes to those who begin to have the Word after not having it. Thus the Evangelist did not say that the Word came to the Father, but *was with* the Father, because, given the Father, the Word was with him.

53 Then he says, *and the Word was God*. This is the third clause in John's account, and it follows most appropriately considering the order of teaching. For since John had said both when and where the Word was, it remained to inquire what the Word was, that is, *the Word was God*, taking *Word* as the  
54 subject, and *God* as the predicate. But since one should first inquire what a thing is before investigating where and when it is, it seems that John violated this order by discussing these latter first.

Origen answers this by saying that the Word of God is with man and with God in different ways.<sup>29</sup> The Word is with man as perfecting him, because it is through him that man becomes wise and good: [*He*] *passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets* (Wis. 7:27). But the Word is not with God as though the Father were perfected and enlightened by him. Rather, the Word is with God as receiving natural divinity from him, who utters the Word, and from whom he has it that he is the same God with him. And so, since the Word was with God by origin, it was necessary to show first that the Word was in the Father and with the Father before showing that the Word was God.

55 It is to be noted however, that this clause, *the Word was God*, also enables us to answer two objections which arise from the foregoing.

The *first* is based on the name *Word* and is this. You say that *in the beginning was the Word*, and that *the Word was with God*. Now it is obvious that 'word' is generally understood to signify a vocal sound and the statement of something necessary, a manifesting of thoughts. But these words pass away and do not subsist. Accordingly, someone could think that the Evangelist was speaking of a word like these.

---

27. Alcuin, *Commentaria in sancti Joannis Evangelium* 1. Bede, *Expositio in Evangelium Sancti Joannis* 1.

28. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.8.

29. Origen, 2.8–10.

According to Hilary and Augustine, this question is sufficiently answered by the above account.<sup>30</sup> Augustine says that it is obvious that in this passage *Word* cannot be understood as a statement because, since a statement is in motion and passes away, it could not be said that *in the beginning was the Word*, if this Word were something passing away and in motion.<sup>31</sup> The same thing is clear from *and the Word was with God*: for to be in another is not the same as to be with another. Our word, since it does not subsist, is not with us, but in us; but the Word of God is subsistent, and therefore with God. And so the Evangelist expressly says, *and the Word was with God*. To entirely remove the ground of the objection, he adds the nature and being of the Word, saying, *and the Word was God*.

56 The other question comes from his saying, *with God*. For since *with* indicates a distinction, it could be thought that *the Word was with God*, i.e., the Father, as distinct from him in nature. So to exclude this he adds at once the consubstantiality of the Word with the Father, saying, *and the Word was God*. As if to say: 'the Word is not separated from the Father by a diversity of nature, because the Word itself is God.'

57 Note also the special way of signifying, since he says, *the Word was God*, using *God* absolutely to show that he is not God in the same way in which the name of the deity is given to a creature in Sacred Scripture. For a creature sometimes shares this name with some added qualification, as when it says, *I make you as God to Pharaoh* (Exod. 7:1), in order to indicate that he was not God absolutely or by nature, because he was appointed the god of someone in a qualified sense. Again, it says in a psalm: *I say, "you are gods"* (82:6) as if to say: 'in my opinion, but not in reality.' Thus the Word is called God absolutely because he is God by his own essence, and not by participation, as men and angels are.

58 We should note that Origen disgracefully misunderstood this clause, led astray by the Greek manner of speaking and this was the occasion of his error.

It is the custom among the Greeks to put the article before every name in order to indicate a distinction. In the Greek version of John's Gospel the name *Word* in the statement *in the beginning was the Word*, and also the name *God* in the statement *and the Word was with God*, are prefixed by the article, so as to read *the Word* and *the God*, in order to indicate the eminence and distinction of the Word from other words, and the principality of the Father in the divinity. But in the statement, *the Word was God*, the article is not prefixed to the noun *God*, which stands for the person of the Son. Because of this Origen blasphemed that the Word, although he was Word by essence, was not God

30. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.15.

31. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1.8.

by essence, but is called God by participation; while the Father alone is God by essence.<sup>32</sup> And so he held that the Son is inferior to the Father.

59 Chrysostom proves that this is not true, because if the article used with the name *God* implied the superiority of the Father in respect to the Son, it would never be used with the name *God* when it is used as a predicate of another, but only when it is predicated of the Father.<sup>33</sup> Further, whenever it would be said of the Father, it would be accompanied by the article.

However, we find the opposite to be the case in two statements of the Apostle, who calls Christ *God*, using the article. For he says, *The appearing of the glory of the great God and our savior Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:13), where *God* stands for the Son, and in the Greek the article is used. Therefore, Christ is the great God. Again he says: *Christ, who is God over all things . . . blessed forever* (Rom. 9:5), and again the article is used with *God* in the Greek. Further, it is said of Jesus Christ that *he is the true God and eternal life* (1 John 5:20). Thus, Christ is not God by participation, but truly God. And so the theory of Origen is clearly false.

Chrysostom gives us the reason why the Evangelist did not use the article with the name *God*, namely, because he had already mentioned God twice using the article, and so it was not necessary to repeat it a third time, but it was implied.<sup>34</sup>

Or it could be said, and this is a better reason, that *God* is used here as the predicate and is taken formally. And it is not the custom for the article to accompany names used as predicates, since the article indicates a distinction. But if God were used here as the subject, it could stand for any of the persons, as the Son or the Holy Spirit; then, no doubt, the article would be used in the Greek.

60 Then he says, *he was in the beginning with God*. This is the fourth clause and is introduced because of the preceding clause. For from the Evangelist's statement that *the Word was God*, two false interpretations could be held by those who misunderstand. One of these is by the pagans, who acknowledge many and different gods, and say that their wills are in opposition. For example, those who put out the fable of Jupiter fighting with Saturn; or as the Manicheans, who have two contrary principles of nature.<sup>35</sup> The Lord said against this error: *Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord* (Deut. 6:4).

---

32. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.12–18.

33. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 4.3.

34. John Chrysostom, 4.3.

35. The Manicheans were an eclectic, Mesopotamian religious movement that emerged in the third century AD. The Manicheans held a dualistic cosmology in which good and evil were represented by two more-or-less equal deities whose rivalry constituted the fundamental dynamism of history.

Since the Evangelist had said, *the Word was with God, and the Word was God*, they could adduce this in support of their error by understanding the God with whom the Word is to be one God, and the Word to be another, having another, or contrary, will to the former; and this is against the law of the Gospel.

And so to exclude this he says, *he was in the beginning with God*, as if to say, according to Hilary: 'I say that the Word is God, not as if he has a distinct divinity, but he is with God, that is, in the one same nature in which he is.'<sup>36</sup> Further, lest his statement, *and the Word was God*, be taken to mean that the Word has an opposed will, he added that *the Word was in the beginning with God*, namely, the Father, not as divided from him or opposed, but having an identity of nature with him and a harmony of will. This union comes about by the sharing of the divine nature in the three persons, and by the bond of the natural love of the Father and the Son.

- 61 The Arians were able to draw out another error from the above. They think that the Son is less than the Father because it says: *The Father is greater than I* (John 14:28). And they say the Father is greater than the Son both as to eternity and as to divinity of nature. And so to exclude this the Evangelist added: *He was in the beginning with God*.

For Arius admits the first clause, *in the beginning was the Word*, but he will not admit that *principium* should be taken for the Father, but rather for the beginning of creatures. So he says that the Word was in the beginning of creatures, and consequently is in no sense coeternal with the Father. But this is excluded, according to Chrysostom, by this clause, *he was in the beginning*, not of creatures, but *in the beginning with God*, i.e., whenever God existed.<sup>37</sup> For the Father was never alone without the Son or Word, but *he*, that is, the Word, was always *with God*.

- 62 Again, Arius admits that the Word was God, but nevertheless inferior to the Father. This is excluded by what follows. For there are two attributes proper to the great God which Arius attributed solely to God the Father, that is, eternity and omnipotence. So in whomever these two attributes are found, he is the great God, than whom none is greater. But the Evangelist attributes these two to the Word. Therefore, the Word is the great God and not inferior. He says the Word is eternal when he states, *He was in the beginning with God*, i.e., the Word was with God from eternity, and not only in the beginning of creatures, as Arius held; but he was with God, receiving being and divinity from him. Further, he attributes omnipotence to the Word when he adds, *All things were made through him* (John 1:3).

36. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity* 2.16.

37. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 4.1.

63 Origen gives a rather beautiful explanation of this clause, *He was in the beginning with God*, when he says that it is not separate from the first three but is in a certain sense their epilogue.<sup>38</sup> For the Evangelist, after he had indicated that truth was the Son's and was about to describe his power, in a way gathers together in a summary form, in this fourth clause, what he had said in the first three. For in saying *he*, he understands the third clause; by adding *was in the beginning*, he recalls the first clause; and by adding *was with God*, he recalls the second, so that we do not think that the Word which was in the beginning is different than the Word which was God; but this Word which was God *was in the beginning with God*.

64 If one considers these four propositions well, he will find that they clearly destroy all the errors of the heretics and of the philosophers. For some heretics, as Ebion and Cerinthus, said that Christ did not exist before the Blessed Virgin, but took from her the beginning of his being and duration; for they held that he was a mere man, who had merited divinity by his good works.<sup>39</sup> Photinus and Paul of Samosata, following them, said the same thing.<sup>40</sup> But the Evangelist excludes their errors saying, *In the beginning was the Word*, i.e., before all things, and in the Father from eternity. Thus he did not derive his beginning from the Virgin.

Sabellius, on the other hand, although he admitted that the God who took flesh did not receive his beginning from the Virgin, but existed from eternity, still said that the person of the Father, who existed from eternity, was not distinct from the person of the Son, who took flesh from the Virgin.<sup>41</sup> He maintained that the Father and Son were the same person, confusing the trinity of persons in the divine. The Evangelist says against this error, *The Word was with God*, i.e., the Son was with the Father, as one person with another.

---

38. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.64–69.

39. Cerinthus was a first-century gnostic figure associated with the *Gospel of Cerinthus* and the view that Jesus was the natural-born son of Joseph and Mary who received the spirit of Christ during his baptism. Ebion, whom Tertullian identifies as the successor of Cerinthus, held a similar “adoptionist” view of Jesus that essentially denies the Incarnation.

40. Photinus, a bishop from the region of modern-day Serbia, was deposed in 336 for denying the Incarnation and, more generally, the divinity of Jesus Christ. Following Socrates Scholasticus, theologians have typically associated him with Paul of Samosata and Marcellus (see Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.6).

Paul of Samosata was an especially wealthy bishop of Antioch in 260–268 who was deposed in 272 for his “adoptionist” view that Christ was initially merely human and was subsequently “adopted” and indwelt by the *Logos* (see Eusebius, *Church History* 7.27–30).

41. Sabellius, a third-century priest, advanced a position that is sometimes called “modalism,” according to which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three distinct persons but three *modes* or manifestations of one divine Person.



Eunomius declared that the Son is entirely unlike the Father.<sup>42</sup> The Evangelist rejects this when he says, *The Word was God*. Finally, Arius said that the Son was less than the Father. The Evangelist excludes this by saying, *He was in the beginning with God*, as was explained above.

65 These words also exclude the errors of the philosophers. Some of the ancient philosophers, namely, the natural philosophers, maintained that the world did not come from any intellect or through some purpose, but by chance. Consequently, they did not place at the beginning as the cause of things a reason or intellect, but only matter in flux; for example, atoms, as Democritus thought, or other material principles of this kind as different philosophers maintained. Against these the Evangelist says, *In the beginning was the Word*, from whom, and not from chance, things derive their beginning.

Plato, however, thought that the ideas of all the things that were made were subsistent, i.e., existing separately in their own natures; and material things exist by participating in these. For example, he thought men existed through the separated idea of man, which he called man *per se*. So lest you suppose, as did Plato, that this idea through which all things were made be ideas separated from God, the Evangelist adds, *The Word was with God*.

Other Platonists, as Chrysostom relates, maintained that God the Father was most eminent and first, but under him they placed a certain mind in which there were the likenesses and ideas of all things.<sup>43</sup> So lest you think that the Word was with the Father in such a way as to be under him and less than he, the Evangelist adds, *The Word was God*.

Aristotle, however, thought that the ideas of all things are in God, and that in God, the intellect, the one understanding, and what is understood, are the same.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, he thought that the world is coeternal with him. Against this the Evangelist says, *he*, the *Word* alone, *was in the beginning with God*, in such a way that he does not exclude another person, but only another coeternal nature.

66 Note the difference in what has been said between John and the other Evangelists: how he began his Gospel on a loftier plane than they. They announced Christ the Son of God born in time, *when Jesus was born in Bethlehem* (Matt. 2:1); but John presents him existing from eternity: *In the beginning was the Word*. They show him suddenly appearing among men:

---

42. Eunomius, a fourth-century bishop of Cyzicus (in the northwestern coast of modern-day Turkey) and intellectual heir of Arius, argued that the unbegottenness and begottenness of the Father and Son respectively must constitute an essential difference between them such that they cannot even be said to be similar to one another in essence.

43. Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John* 2.4.

44. See Aristotle, *Physics* 8; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on The Metaphysics of Aristotle* 2536–2551, 2600–2663.



*Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen thy salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel* (Luke 2:29); but John says that he always existed with the Father: ***The Word was with God.*** The others show him as a man: *They glorified God who had given such authority to men* (Matt. 9:8); but John only says that he is God: ***The Word was God.*** The others say he lives with men: *When they abode together in Galilee, Jesus said to them* (Matt. 17:21); but John says that he has always been with the Father: ***He was in the beginning with God.***

- 67      Note also how the Evangelist designedly uses the word *was* [*erat*] to show that the Word of God transcends all times: present, past, and future. It is as though he were saying that he was beyond time: present, past, and future, as the *Gloss* says.