

“Reading Augustine through Dionysius: Aquinas’ correction of one Platonism by another”

Aquinas the Augustinian, edited by Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), Chapter 10, 243-257.

Nothing presents more problems for those who would enter the mentality of the medieval philosophical theologian than the task which has been set for this conference. Trying to judge the influence on his doctrine of one of his authoritative ancient sources requires us to surrender, at least provisionally, what we think we know about the authority in question. As heirs of Renaissance and modern philology, and of the modern constructions of the history of philosophy, we will almost certainly have a different, perhaps even opposed, view of the source than a medieval theologian would have had. Ironically, our problem increases with the greater sophistication of the scholastics of the later Middle Ages, because their sources became more rich, and the mediations of what they understand about their authorities became more complex.

In the twentieth-century we have become aware of how much in form and content moderns impose when they construct their “histories” of philosophy — though mentioning Aristotle, Theophrastus, Augustine, Proclus, Simplicius, Averroes, and Aquinas’ *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas* reminds us that the activity itself is part of philosophy and theology in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Our oppositions, for example, between Plato, Platonism, and Neoplatonism will not be made by as well informed an historian as Aquinas. In this he is following one of his most authoritative sources for the history of Platonism, Augustine. Both of them knew a good deal about Platonism but, with the exception of the *Timaeus* for Augustine, neither seems to have known the dialogues.¹ More importantly, in contrast to the tendency in modern histories, Aquinas follows the ancients who seek to make philosophical differences complementary and to see the historical movement as providentially guided. Without reducing them to one another, Aquinas will tend to incorporate the more kataphatic and intellectualist Augustine for whom we know by turning to

¹ On Augustine, see Stephen Gersh, “The Medieval Legacy from Ancient Platonism,” *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, ed. Stephen Gersh and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen, with the assistance of Pieter Th. van Wingerden (Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 3–30 at 24–30 and F. Van Fleteren, ‘Plato, Platonism,’ *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 631–654; on Aquinas, see R.J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), xxi and my “Aquinas and the Platonists,” *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages*, 279–324.

the ideas in the divine Word within the systematic structures developed by theurgic and apophatic Neoplatonism, where the human soul is turned decisively toward the sensible and material. Thus, Proclus, mediated most authoritatively by the pseudo-Dionysius, helps construct the frame within which Augustine will make his crucially important contributions.² Perhaps, most importantly, although Aquinas is careful about the degrees of authority of different kinds of texts, he has little—which is not to say no—sense of the differences between genres, so texts of very different kinds are treated as if they were equally sources for conceptual propositions which figure as positions within the scholastic dialectic. We may indicate something of these problems and complexities by brief examples in respect to the three most important intellectual authorities for Thomas, all of whom are crucial to this paper: Aristotle, Augustine, and the Pseudo-Dionysius.³

Until 1268 and his reading of Moerbeke's translation of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, Thomas' Aristotle was the author of the *Liber de causis*, a compilation of propositions from the *Elements*, substantially modified by Plotinian retrievals and Islamic monotheism. His advanced education, which began in the syncretistic intellectual atmosphere in Naples, introduced Aquinas to Aristotle from within the long tradition which reconciled the Peripatetic and the Neoplatonic. This is no doubt why he initially judged that the Pseudo-Dionysius followed Aristotle philosophically, and why although, later, when he had learned more about what we call Neoplatonism, he both recognised the Platonic character of the Dionysian corpus and, in contrast, judged that Dionysius and Aristotle were together more consonant with the Christian faith than were the *Platonici*. For him, Dionysius was not a sixth-century transmitter of

² See R.D. Crouse, "Augustinian Platonism in Early Medieval Theology," *Augustine, from Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. J. McWilliams (Waterloo: Wilfred University Press, 1992), 109–20; Giulio D'Onofrio, "The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Disagreement of Patristic Sources in John the Scot's *Periphyseon*," *Eriugena: East and West. Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, 18–20 October 1991*, ed. B. McGinn and W. Otten, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies V (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1994), 115–140 is a useful survey. On their fundamental differences and the assimilation of Augustinian conceptions to a Dionysian logic, see W.J. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation," *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21–24 septembre 1994*, édités Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 405–438 at 428–38.

³ For support for my statements about how Aquinas treats the history of philosophy and how he understood Aristotle and Dionysius, see my "Thomas' Neoplatonic Histories: His following of Simplicius," *Dionysius*, 20 (2002): 153–178.

the Neoplatonism of the late Athenian Academy developed in the Iamblichan tradition which he modified by Plotinian retrievals and Christian monotheism, but the first-century convert of St Paul and the chosen conduit of his mystical wisdom.

Augustine was, with Aristotle, among the first sources of Thomas' knowledge of Platonism. From the beginning of his own writing, Thomas is clear that the Bishop of Hippo was *imbutus* with the doctrine of the *Plato*, whom he "follows as far as the Catholic faith permits."⁴ In consequence of this limit, he judges that Augustine may recite doctrines he does not assert.⁵ Helpfully, unlike the Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine is explicit both about what he finds acceptable, superior to other philosophies, and even necessary for Christian faith within Platonism, and also about what he judges to be erroneous in it.

We need to ask what Aquinas knew about Augustine and how he knew it. Aquinas does not give us as much help in answering these questions as we would have if we were asking about his other greatest authorities. In contradistinction to the *Liber de causis*, the *Divine Names* of Dionysius, and much of Aristotle, Thomas commented on none of Augustine's works. Did he read any of them? One of the most important of his sources for Augustine was the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, whose character increases the problems involved in answering our questions.

The Lombard's textbook, which "did more than any other text to shape the discipline of medieval scholastic theology,"⁶ was so deeply formed structurally, doctrinally, and through quotation by Augustine that Josef Pieper called it "a systematically organized Augustinian breviary."⁷ Until the late Middle Ages, it was a principal source for the scholastic knowledge of Augustine; however, it is of the greatest importance to remind yourselves that Lombard had no direct knowledge of more than four of Augustine's books: *De doctrina Christiana*, the

⁴ Aquinas, *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, ed. J. Cos, Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 24, 2 (Rome / Paris, 2000) 10 ad 8, p. 113, lines 515-16: *Augustinus autem, Platonem secutus quantum fides catholica patiebatur.*

⁵ Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae De Veritate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 22, part 3 (Rome, 1973), quest. 21, art. 4, ad 3, p. 603; idem, *Summa Theologiae* (Ottawa: Piana, 1953), pars 1, quest. 84, art. 5, resp.; *ibid.*, quest. 77, art 5, ad 3; Mark Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, The Etienne Gilson Series 15 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), 40 compares Augustine's judgment of philosophy in *De Civitate Dei* with Aristotle as a source for Thomas' relation to Platonism.

⁶ Marcia Colish, "Peter Lombard," *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 168–183 at 182.

⁷ J. Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. R. & C. Winston (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 98.

Enchiridion, the *De diversis quaestionibus* 83, and the *Retractationes*.⁸ He depended largely on Augustinian *florilegia*, which were excerpts relative to the interests and needs of their authors and readers from the mountainous corpus of Augustine's writings. The first of these, the *Liber Sententiarum*, 392 passages drawn from twenty-four of them, was produced by Prosper of Aquitaine perhaps even before the great Bishop of Hippo was dead.⁹ Many were compiled as collections of proof-texts, and by Thomas' time, eight hundred years and many controversies later, the *florilegia* of various kinds circulating among scholars, countless of them containing passages claiming the authority of Augustine, were so numerous that scholars have lost track of them. If these two Augustinian mountains were not enough to survey in an attempt to locate Thomas' sources, there was a third huge mountain of Augustinian texts which confronted Aquinas: the bastard treatises fathered onto the Latin Christian because his authority far exceeded any other.¹⁰ These false works were often more popular than were the genuine ones. Lombard's *Sentences* contained quotations from these.

I wish to explore how Aquinas deals with a text on the Eucharist falsely attributed to Augustine in Lombard's *Sentences*, a text which expressed doctrines very different from Augustine's and which was drawn from a pseudonymous *florilegium*, the so-called *Sentences of Prosper*. How Thomas treats the

⁸ Jacques-Guy Bougerol, "The Church Fathers and the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard," *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West from the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Bachus, 2 volumes (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 1, 113–164 at 115. For the later shift, see Eric L. Saak, "The Reception of Augustine in the Later Middle Ages," *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West from the Carolingians to the Maurists*, vol. 1, 367–404.

⁹ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Liber Sententiarum*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina LXVIII A, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972), and see P.-I. Fransen, "D'Eugippius à Bède le Vénérable. A propos de leurs florilèges augustiniens," *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987): 187–194 and E. Dekkers, "Quelques notes sur les florilèges augustiniens anciens et médiévaux," *Augustiniana*, 40 (1990): 27–44, Dekkers is summarised by J.T. Leinhard, "Florilegia," *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, 370–71.

¹⁰ See B. Blumenkranz, "La survie médiévale de saint Augustin à travers ses apocryphes," *Augustinus Magister. Congrès international augustinien, Paris, 21–24 Septembre, 1954*, 3 vols., ii (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1954), 1003–1018, M. de Kroon, "Pseudo-Augustin im Mittelalter. Entwurf eines Forschungsberichts," *Augustiniana*, 22 (1972): 511–530, E. Dekkers, "Le succès étonnant des écrits pseudo-augustiniens au Moyen Age" and J. Machielsen, "Contribution à l'étude de la pseudépigraphie médiévale en matière patristique. Problèmes d'attribution et de remaniement des textes homilétiques," both in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 16.–19. September 1986*, 5 vols., v: *Fingierte Briefe Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschungen*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Schriften 33.5 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1988), 361–368 and 345–359, J. Machielsen, *Clavis Patristica Pseudepigraphorum Medii Aevi*, vol. IA, vol. IIA, vol. IIB, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990–1994) and K.B. Steinhauser, "Manuscripts," *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, 525–533 at 530.

pseudonymous text is of particular interest because he comes to a correct understanding of Augustine's doctrine, but, paradoxically, by way of an Aristotelian and Proclean epistemology which has the authority of Dionysius. There is an element of irony here, but it is as nothing compared to other moments in the history of this text: for example, John Wyclif supposed that he was quoting Augustine when he employed it in his invective against Lanfranc, but in fact he is quoting none other than Lanfranc himself!¹¹

I. The pseudonymous text

As I just indicated, the pseudonymous text is from Lanfranc, specifically from his *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* (PL 150,421-425). Lanfranc is responding to Berengar of Tours and in particular to Berengar's citation and interpretation of a portion of Augustine's *Letter to Boniface*. In consequence, the *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* generally, as well as the pseudonymous passage we are considering, contain genuine quotations from Augustine.¹² M. Lepin has traced the process by which Lanfranc's work was chopped up, rearranged, abridged, and entered eucharistic controversy for 500 years primarily, but not exclusively, as Augustine's *Sentences of Prosper*.¹³ Along with many others, Gratian's *Concordantia Discordantium Canonum*, or *Decretum*, in chapter 48, entitled *Sacramentum, et res sacramenti sacrificium ecclesiae conficitur*, of his treatise *De consecratione*, reproduced a text from Lanfranc which Gratian, and almost all of those he followed and who would succeed him, credited to *Augustinus in libro sententiarum Prosperi*.¹⁴ The decretum, together with the accompanying gloss, is

¹¹ For this ironic moment and a treatment of a considerable part of the history of this pseudonymous text from its origins in the eleventh century through to its use among the English Protestant controversialists and their Catholic adversaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, see my "'Magis...Pro Nostra Sentencia': John Wyclif, his mediaeval Predecessors and reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian Eucharistic Decretal," *Augustiniana*, 45: 3–4 (1995): 213–245.

¹² *Epistle* 98.9: PL 33, 363–364; CSEL 34, part 2, ed. Al. Goldbacher (Vienna, 1898), 530–31.

¹³ M. Lepin, *L'idée du Sacrifice de la Messe d'après les théologiens depuis l'origine jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1926), 786–797.

¹⁴ See *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. A. Friedberg, vol. 1, pars 3, *De consecratione*, dist. 2, cap. 48 (Lipsis, 1879/ reprint Graz, 1959), columns 1331 and 1332: *Sacramentum, et res sacramenti sacrificium ecclesiae conficitur. Item Augustinus in libro sententiarum Prosperi. Hoc est, quod dicimus, quod omnibus modis approbare contendimus, sacrificium ecclesiae confici duobus, duobus constare: uisibili elementorum specie, et inuisibili Domini nostri Iesu Christi carne et sanguine; et sacramento, et re sacramenti, id est corpore Christi, sicut persona Christi constat et conficitur ex Deo et homine, cum ipse Christus uerus Deus sit, et uerus homo, quia omnis res illarum rerum naturam et ueritatem in se continet, ex quibus conficitur. Conficitur autem sacrificium ecclesiae duobus, sacramento, et re sacramenti, id est corpore Christi. Est igitur sacramentum, et res sacramenti, id est corpus Christi. Item: ?. 1. Caro eius est, quam forma panis opertam in sacramento accipimus, et sanguis eius, quem sub uini specie ac sapore potamus. Caro uidelicet*

known from its first words, as “Hoc est.” “Hoc est” was widely quoted and discussed in the Middle Ages and the Early Modernity and we mention Gratian in particular because Lepin judges that “Gratian, if not Lombard, himself dependent on Gratian, appears to be the source where St. Thomas has taken the beginning... [of a sentence] from Lanfranc, which the Angelic Doctor attributes, like his predecessors, to St. Augustine.”¹⁵ Nonetheless, it was its use by the Master of the Sentences which required the scholastic theologians to confront the doctrine of “Hoc est.” I translate the decretum as follows:

the sacrifice of the church is made of two things, in two it remains: in the visible form of the elements and in the invisible flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; both in the sacrament and in the reality signified by the sacrament, that is the body of Christ, just as the person of Christ stands and is put together out of God and man, since he is true God and true man, for everything contains in itself the nature and truth of those things from which it is made. Now the sacrifice of the church is made out of two things: the sacrament and the reality signified by the sacrament, that is, the body of Christ. Therefore there is both the sacrament, and the reality to which the sacrament refers, that is, the body of Christ. Item: 1. There is his flesh, which we receive in the sacrament working in the form of bread, and there is his blood, which we drink under the form and taste of wine. Evidently flesh is sacrament of flesh and blood is sacrament of blood. By flesh and blood, each invisible, spiritual, intelligible, is signified the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, visible and palpable, full by grace and by divine majesty of all virtues. Item 2. Just as, therefore, the heavenly bread, which is the true flesh of Christ is called in its own way the body of Christ, since in very truth it is the sacrament of the body of Christ, namely of that body which being visible, palpable, and mortal was put on the cross, and, just as that immolation of the flesh which is made by the priest's hands, is called the passion, death, crucifixion of Christ, not in the very truth of the thing but in a signifying mystery, so the sacrament of faith, i.e. baptism, is faith.

carnis, et sanguis Sacramentum sanguinis; carne et sanguine, utroque inuisibili, spirituali, intelligibili, significatur corpus uisibile Domini nostri Iesu Christi, et palpabile, plenum gratia omnium uirtutum, et diuina maiestate. Item: ?. 2. Sicut ergo celestis panis, qui uere caro Christi est, suo modo uocatur corpus Christi, cum reuera sit sacramentum corporis Christi, illius uidelicet, quod uisibile, quod palpabile, mortale in cruce est positum, uocaturque ipsa carnis immolatio, que sacerdotis manibus fit, Christi passio, mors, crucifixio, non rei ueritate, sed significanti misterio: sic Sacramentum fidei, quod baptismus intelligitur, fides est.

¹⁵ Lepin, *L'idée du Sacrifice*, 797.

Happily, for the purposes of this paper, we do not need to explain the precise logic which compels and gives meaning to “Hoc est.”¹⁶ We must, however, follow Lanfranc this far: the mode of the similitude between the sacrament of the altar and the reality it signifies requires for him both a difference, so that the sacrament remains a signifying *figura*, and also an essential identity, so that it is effective *in veritate*. Thus, the sacrifice of the church is not only of the sacrament as distinguished from its reality, but also of the reality itself of the body and blood of Christ, the *re sacramenti*. The immolation at the hands of the priest is in a signifying mystery, there is no new death of Christ in real fact, but the sacrifice is nonetheless of the reality, not just of the sacramental sign.¹⁷ The second part says that the body is a sacrament of itself, an invisible thing is sacrament of another invisible reality. Or, to put it negatively, sacraments are not just outward and visible signs of inward invisible realities.

For Lanfranc, because of the relations to one another of the sacramental, the heavenly, and the earthly bodies of Christ—clearly distinguished for him—, and because of the union in the eucharistic sacrifice of the sacramental sign and the reality signified thereby—which he identifies as well as distinguishes—, the representative, figurative and mystical immolation in an external liturgical action at the priest's hands effects a real sacrifice. In order that this sacrifice make effective and really present for the ever-recurring needs of the sinful world the historical bodily death of Christ without slaying him again or affecting the impassibility of his glorious and ascended body, the distinction and the identity of liturgical mystery and sacramental reality are both required. He draws the consequences both that the church offers as her sacrifice the reality to which the sacrament refers, and that the body of Christ is a sacrament of itself, signifying and signified. From this derives his final consequence that the invisible is a sacrament of the invisible. All this Lanfranc came to Bonaventure and Aquinas, as well as to many others, as the position of Augustine and they perceived it to contradict other texts attributed to him.

¹⁶ For an explication see J. de Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérenger. La controverse eucharistique du xi^e siècle*, *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, études et documents*, 37 (Leuven: 1971), 404ff.

¹⁷ In so interpreting Lanfranc as teaching a real eucharistic sacrifice, because of the identity of *sacramentum* and *res sacramenti*, yet a sacrifice which is also figurative and not carnal, I follow Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérenger*, 410–15 who makes the point more strongly than H. Chadwick, “Ego Berengarius,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 40 (1989): 414–45 at 426–28. J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 5 vol., iii, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600 – 1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 184–204 gives a survey of the teaching and controversies concerning the real presence in this period and points to the emphasis on the sacrifice. Useful on what this means is G.H. Williams, “The Sacramental Presuppositions of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*,” *Church History*, 26 (1957): 245–274 at 265.

The assertion in the first part of “Hoc est” is necessary in order to draw together diverse statements of Augustine. He certainly makes the distinction of sacrament and sacramental reality and he certainly writes of an offering by the church of her own reality as contained in Christ's offering of himself.¹⁸ However, the two offerings are never drawn together in the manner of the *Sentences of Prosper*. The second of Lanfranc's assertions and the final consequences he draws do in fact contradict statements of Augustine well-known to our authors, for example: “A sign is something which over and above the specific form which it impresses on the senses causes some further object to enter our cognition.” “The visible sacrifice is the sacrament, i.e. the sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice;” and “A sacrament is a visible form of invisible grace.”¹⁹ I propose to consider how Aquinas deals with the problem this contradiction presents, comparing it to Bonaventure's treatment of the matter in his *Commentary on the four books of Lombard's Sentences*.

II. Aquinas, Augustine, and Dionysius

Aquinas was only beginning to develop his systematic theology when he commented on the *Sentences*, but, there, despite the use of the *quaestio*, the problematic texts deriving from Lanfranc masking as Augustine had to be dealt with somehow. Aquinas considered them in the *expositio textus* following on his theological questions in proper form, and, in his *Sentences* commentary. Bonaventure similarly dealt with them in *dubia* (*dubitationes circa litteram*). With the greater freedom of his *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas will use the Lanfranc texts, ascribing their source to Augustine and Gregory, but only so far as they are necessary for the complete formation of the theology of the sacraments.

¹⁸ See, for example, Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium* 26.11 (CCSL 36, 265), Sermon 292, *Ad Infantes de Sacramento* (PL 38, 1247), *de Civitate Dei* 10.20 (CCSL 47, 294) and 22.10 (CCSL 48, 828)

¹⁹ *Signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cognitionem venire, De doctrina Christiana* 2.1.1 (CCSL 32, 32) is found at Lanfranc, *de Corp. et Sang.*, cap. 12, PL 150, 422 B-C; Gratian, *Decretum*, pars 3, *de cons.*, dist. 2, cap. 33 (Friedberg i, 1324); Lombard, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, 2 vol. (Grottaferrata, 1981), lib. 4, dist. 1, quest. 3, vol. ii, p. 233; Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis Magistri Petri Lombardi*, ed. M. F. Moos, 4 vol., iv (Paris, 1947), lib. 4 dist. 1 quest. 1, art. 1, quaestiuncula 3, arg. 1; *ST* pars 3, quest. 60, art. 1, obj. 2. A similar list could be given for *Sacrificium ergo visibile invisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, id est sacrum signum est, De Civitate Dei*, 10.5 (CCSL 47, 277). There is an important bibliographical note at p. 232 of Volume 2 of the Grottaferrata edition of Lombard's *Sententiae* (1981). *Sacramentum est invisibilis gratiae visibilis forma* is equally well distributed. It becomes the standard definition and derives from Augustine, *Epistola* 105.3.12 (CSEL 34, 604). There are references at Gratian *Decretum*, pars 3, *de cons.*, dist. 2, cap. 32 (Friedberg i, 1324); Lombard, *Sententiae*, lib. 4, dist. 1, quest. 2 and lib. 4, dist. 8, quest. 6 (Grottaferrata, ii, pp. 232 and 284).

Bonaventure certainly faces the contradictions squarely. It is wrong to say, he observes, that the flesh is sacrament of the flesh because nothing is a sign of itself and, if you should respond that in diverse states something can be both sign and what is signified — Lanfranc's way of thinking — Bonaventure draws your attention to the fact that a sign must be better known than that to which it points, so what is invisibly in the sacrament can hardly be a sign of the body which is visible in heaven. Again, if you should say — as Lombard does — that the flesh signifies flesh in the form of bread, Bonaventure observes that it is the bread which is visible and palpable. However, finally, and determinatively for Bonaventure, Augustine says that the visible flesh is signified by the invisible flesh (perhaps the most problematic statement from “Hoc est”). Bonaventure answers by a demonstration that there is a double, not a single use of figurative speech: “because what belongs to the sign is attributed to the signified and what belongs to the signified is attributed to the sign.”²⁰ The key for him is what is contained in the sacrament. Thus, in the end, his solution is the same as Lanfranc's and all the texts are saved. Bonaventure's determination is markedly different from what we shall find in Aquinas. Ironically, because the great Franciscan allowed intellectual intuition for humans, Bonaventure proceeded from an Augustinian view of human knowing to a doctrine of the sacraments which contradicts the genuine texts of Augustine.²¹ Because Aquinas does not allow for such intuition, his result is the opposite.

²⁰ Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, lib. 4, dist. 10, quest. 1, dubia 4 (Quaracchi, 1889), vol. iv, 226 – 27: “Item quaeritur de hoc quod dicit: *Caro carnis et sanguis sacramentum est sanguinis*. Videtur enim male dicere, quia nihil idem est signum sui ipsius. *Si tu dicas mihi*, quod idem sub diversis statibus potest esse signum et signatum, ut caro, prout est sub Sacramento, sit signum sui, prout est in caelo, quod videtur dicere littera sequens; *contra*: signum debet esse notius sensibus quam signatum; sed caro, prout est sub Sacramento, est invisibilis et impalpabilis, in caelo visibilis et palpabilis; ergo non est signum eius. *Si tu dicas*, sicut dicit Magister, quod caro accipitur pro signo carnis, scilicet pane; *contra*: species panis est visibilis et palpabilis; sed Augustinus dicit, quod carne invisibili significatur caro visibilis. Respondeo: Dicendum, quod tropologicus est sermo, nec tantum uno tropo, sed duplici, quia quod est *signi* attribuitur signato, et quod est *signati* attribuitur signo. Species enim panis est signum, quoniam est visibilis, sed caro interius contenta est signatum, quia est invisibilis. Dicere ergo, quod caro invisibilis signat, hoc est dicere, quod species panis, quae est signum carnis invisibilis, signat corpus Christi visibile et palpabile; et illa species panis est caro invisibilis, non quia non videatur, sed quia contentum eius, quod est caro, est invisibile et intelligibile eatenus, qua ibidem continetur; quasi vellet Augustinus dicere: caro Christi visibilis et palpabilis signatur et continetur a specie panis invisibiliter et intelligibiliter.”

²¹ On the complex, unresolved, unsystematic “dualisme” of Bonaventure as compared to Aquinas, see É.-H. Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d'Aquin à Paris (1252–1273)*, Bibliothèque thomiste 41 (Paris: Vrin, 1974), 140–142 and idem, *La Personne humaine au xiii^e siècle. L'avènement chez les maîtres parisiens de l'acception moderne de l'homme*,

As indicated above, in the *Sentences* commentary of Aquinas the problematic texts from Lanfranc posing as Augustine are addressed in the *expositio textus* at the end of Distinction 10; they do not figure in his questions on the definition of sacrament in Distinction 1. In the *expositio textus* he gives less attention than does Bonaventure to addressing and reconciling all the texts. For him also there seem to be contradictions in what derives from Lanfranc. In another passage from Lanfranc, Thomas found the statement that “this is and this is not the body,”²² and, he agreed with Bonaventure that the part of “Hoc est” from which Bonaventure started seemed to be “false” because nothing is a sign of itself—for Bonaventure it seemed to be “badly said” for the same reason. Their agreement is not surprising. Many of their predecessors had been equally troubled and the gloss on “Hoc est” is occupied with the same problems: the notion of a self-signifying sacrament, a self-signifying body, indeed, with how, as “heavenly,” the body signifies at all.²³ Lombard himself makes the fact of a problem evident. Nicholas Häring tells us that the Master of the *Sentences* introduces our pseudonymous text with a formula which “generally heralds a troublesome text”:

He goes on to tell us that St. Augustine was conscious of the obscurity of his own words (*quia obscure dixerat*), a fact which prompted him (i.e. Augustine) to say that “the bread is called the body of Christ although in reality, it is the *sacramentum* of Christ’s Body...just as the *sacramentum* of faith is called faith.”²⁴

In his exposition of the text of the *Sentences*, Aquinas saves the problematic passage about an invisible sacrament of the invisible, not by anything as

Bibliothèque thomiste 46 (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 90–108 and Alain de Libera, “Une Anthropologie de la grace. Sur *La Personne humaine au xiii^e siècle* d’E.-H. Wéber,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 77 (1993): 241–254.

²² Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib. 4, dist. 10, quest. 1, art. 4, quaestiuncula 5, *expositio textus* (ed. Moos, 1947, §137, p. 426): “*Ipsum quidem et non ipsum corpus.*» **Videtur esse contradictio.**”

²³ The gloss reads: “The heavenly sacrament, which truly represents the body of Christ, is called Christ’s body, but not in plain speech. Therefore, it is called this “in a certain way,” not in the truth of the thing, but by a signifying mystery; so this is the sense: it is called the body of Christ, i.e. it signifies it. (*Coeleste sacramentum, quod vere repraesentat corpus Christi, dicitur corpus Christi, sed improprie. Unde dicitur, suo modo; sed non rei veritate, sed significante mysterio; ut sit sensus, Vocatur corpus Christi; id est, significat*)” in these London printings of the *Decretals*: Francois Fradin, 1533; apud Hugonem et Haeredes Aemonis à Porta, 1541; I. Ausultus, 1559.

²⁴ N.M. Häring, “A Study in the Sacramentology of Alger of Liège,” *Mediaeval Studies*, 20 (1958): 41–78 at 74.

elaborate as a double allegory, but still by reference to the same key as Bonaventure used, i.e. what is contained (*contenta*) in the sacrament. Aquinas writes: “these species [of bread and wine] with the flesh contained are called invisible flesh because under this form [the bread and wine] the flesh of Christ is not seen.”²⁵

In Thomas’ *Summa theologiae*, a head on confrontation with difficult texts like “Hoc est” could be avoided because the movement of theology was not from text to text, as in *lectio* or exposition, but from question to question. Logical structure, *ordo disciplinae*, dominated. Aquinas took up texts and placed them within his questions so as both to form his question as he willed, and to bring out only that aspect of the text which served the completeness and movement of theology. At the height of his powers, he was disposing of a vast and complex philosophical logic which enabled him to balance one text and the position it represented against others and, in fact, the architecture of his thought is constructed by that balancing. When he takes up the question of the definition of sacrament, the changes he carried through in the structure of theological system and the complex balancing of positions in his philosophical logic allow him to put all the elements together in an especially interesting way.

In asking “What is a sacrament?” Aquinas seeks first to determine to which genus it belongs, and inquires as to whether it belongs in the category of signs. He introduces, in objection 2 and the *sed contra*, i.e. on both sides of the question, two of the very well known statements of Augustine. One of them defines a sign as sensible and the other makes sacraments visible signs.²⁶ This visibility creates problems for sacraments insofar as they are also hidden, and Aquinas determines the article by placing sacraments as “sacred secrets” in the genus of signs but without making sensibility essential.

The second article asks “Whether every sign of a sacred thing is a sacrament?” The question is forced by our text from Lanfranc’s *De Corpore et Sanguine*, which lies behind the “some” who in the *sed contra* are the sources for

²⁵ Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib. 4, dist. 10, quest. 1, art. 4, quaestiuncula 5, expositio textus (ed. Moos, 1947, §139, p. 427): “«Caro carnis, et sanguis sacramentum est sanguinis.» **Videtur hoc esse falsum:** quia nihil est signum sui ipsius. **Et dicendum** quod carnem quae significat, nominat ipsas species, quae sunt signum carnis; et hoc tropice, ut Magister dicit: et ipsae species cum carne contenta dicuntur caro invisibilis, quia sub specie illa caro Christi non videtur. Carnem autem significatam nominat ipsam carnem Christi, secundum quod sub propria forma videtur; unde et «*visibiliter*» dicitur.”

²⁶ *ST*, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 1, “Quid sit sacramentum,” the texts of Augustine are *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.1.1: *signum est quod, praeter speciem quam sensibus ingerit, facit aliquid aliud in cognitionem venire* and *de Civitate Dei*, 10.5: *sacrificium visibile invisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, idest sacrum signum, est*. Compare *Super Sent.*, lib. 4, d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 2, co.: *signum importat aliquod notum quo ad nos, quo manuducimur in alterius cognitionem...etiam si non sit res cadens sub sensu.*

this definition. Aquinas supposes them to be supported by the authority of Augustine.²⁷ Here what is essential about signs is not their sensible aspect, but rather that they lead us from the known to the unknown, and Aquinas emphasizes about sacraments that they make men holy.²⁸

In article 3, as to “Whether sacraments are signs of one thing only?” Thomas uses the problematic decretal in order to strengthen further this aspect. The authority in the *sed contra* is “Augustinus...in libro Sententiarum Prosperi.” Its point, taken from what is in fact Lanfranc, is that “in the sacrament of the altar the reality signified is two-fold, namely, the true body of Christ and the mystical.”²⁹ By this means, Aquinas introduces the three-fold distinction of the body of Christ necessary to the developments in eucharistic theology where Lanfranc plays a crucial role: the eucharistic, the historical, and the glorified body.³⁰ The effect of the article is to establish that the sacrament is cause of holiness and in what sense. The sacrament sanctifies because it stands in relation both to the historical body of Christ, where the passion and death securing our salvation occurred, and also to the glorious body, in mystical union with which our hope lies. The essence of sacramentality consists in its being a sanctifying cause:

The very fact that the term “sacrament” signifies the reality which sanctifies means that it should signify the effect produced. For this notion is understood in the very concept of sanctifying cause just as sanctifying.³¹

²⁷ ST, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 2, s. c.: *Sed quidam definiunt sacramentum per hoc quod est sacrae rei signum, et hoc etiam videtur ex auctoritate Augustini supra inducta. Ergo videtur quod omne signum rei sacrae sit sacramentum.*

²⁸ ST, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 2: *signa proprie dantur hominibus, quorum est per nota ad ignota pervenire. Et ideo proprie dicitur sacramentum quod est signum alicuius rei sacrae ad homines pertinentis, ut scilicet proprie dicatur sacramentum secundum quod nunc de sacramentis loquimur, quod est signum rei sacrae in quantum est sanctificans homines. Compare Super Sent., lib. 4, d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 4.*

²⁹ ST, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 3, s.c.: *quod in sacramento Altaris est duplex res significata, scilicet corpus Christi verum et mysticum, ut Augustinus dicit in libro Sententiarum Prosperi.*

³⁰ Lepin, *L'idée du Sacrifice*, 765: “while for St. Augustine there are three manners of understanding ‘the Christ’: as God, as God made man, and as identified with the entire body of the church, of which he is the Head, Paschasius speaks of three manners of understanding “the body of Christ”, which is entirely different. And the explanation which he gives to his thought is in effect very divergent: the body of Christ is able to be: his natural body, his eucharistic body, his mystical body: the Church.”

³¹ ST, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 3, ad 2: *Dicendum quod sacramentum in hoc quod significat rem sanctificantem, oportet quod significet effectum, qui intelligitur in ipsa causa sanctificante prout est sanctificans.*

The fourth article of this question, “Whether a sacrament is always a sensible thing?” makes clear that, at this point, we have established only that a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing inasmuch as through it humans are sanctified. The question of its sensibility remains unsettled. It must now be faced. Augustine’s authority is prominent here but once again Aquinas places him on both sides of the question, in objection 3 and in the *sed contra!* Crucially, Aquinas’ philosophical authority for understanding the relevant logic is Aristotle and the determining sacred authority is Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite.³² This is by no means the only place where Dionysius’ Iamblichan Platonism is used in this context as an authority for the necessity of the human turn to the sensible. In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, when Aquinas is considering whether sacraments were needed before humans sinned, Dionysius is cited to the effect that knowing by way of the sensible is our natural way of cognition.³³ Again, near the end of his life in his *Exposition of John’s Gospel*, when Aquinas is considering the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, “you must be born again of water and the Holy Spirit,” Dionysius reappears.³⁴ A sensible sign is necessary to the sacrament of regeneration because “as Dionysius says, the divine wisdom orders everything so that each is provided for according to its own condition.” Humanity is “*cognoscitivus*” and “the natural mode of this kind of cognition is that spiritual things should be known through sensible things, because all our knowing begins from sense.”

³² *ST*, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 4: *Est autem homini connaturale ut per sensibilia perveniat in cognitionem intelligibilem. Signum autem est per quod aliquis devenit in cognitionem alterius. Unde, cum res sacrae quae per sacramenta significantur, sint quaedam spiritualia et intelligibilia bona quibus homo sanctificatur, consequens est ut per aliquas res sensibiles significatio sacramenti impleatur, sicut etiam per similitudinem sensibilibus rerum in divina Scriptura res spirituales nobis describuntur. Et inde est quod ad sacramenta requiruntur res sensibiles, ut etiam Dionysius probat, in I cap. caelestis hierarchiae.*

³³ *Super Sent.*, lib. 4, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 2, arg. 2 (ed. Moos, 1947, §57, p. 17): *Praeterea. Dionysius in I cap. Eccles. Hierar.,...assignat hanc causam institutionis hujusmodi sensibilibus figurarum in sacramentis; quia per hujusmodi materiale elementum melius reducimur ad spiritualia, propter connaturalitatem cognitionis nostrae ad sensibilia. Sed homo in statu innocentiae materialis erat, et ex sensibilibus cognitionem accipiens, propter quod etiam in paradiso dicitur positus ad operandum, ut naturales vires rerum experiretur. Ergo et tunc indiguit hujusmodi sacramentis.*

³⁴ Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, ed. R. Cai (Turin/ Rome: Marietti, 1951), cap. 3, lect. 4, §443: *propter humanam cognitionem: nam, sicut Dionysius dicit, divina sapientia ita omnia ordinat ut unicuique provideat secundum modum suae conditionis. Homo autem est naturaliter cognoscitivus; oportet ergo eo modo dona spiritualia hominibus conferri, ut ea cognoscant; I Cor. II, 12: ut sciamus quae a Deo donata sunt nobis. Naturalis autem modus huius cognitionis est ut spiritualia per sensibilia cognoscat, cum omnis nostra cognitio a sensu incipiat. Oportuit ergo ad hoc quod intelligamus id quod spirituale est in hac regeneratione, quod esset in ea aliquid sensibile et materiale, scilicet aqua: per quod intelligamus quod sicut aqua lavat et purgat corporaliter exterius, ita et per Baptismum homo lavatur et purgatur interius spiritualiter.*

The question as to whether something sensible is essential to a sacrament is not and could not have been settled for Aquinas on the authority of Augustine. In article 4 of question sixty of the *Summa*, he is represented both as thinking that sensible things are the least of things “without which humans are able to live well”, and also that sacraments involve a physical element and the coming of the divine Word. These are, both of them, genuine statements of Augustine difficult to reconcile.³⁵ Thus the matter turns rather on the question of human nature. If humans have intellectual intuition, then they do not need sensible signs to lead them to the holy. On this aspect of anthropology, Augustine and his followers are at best ambiguous. As heirs of one tradition of Neoplatonism, they seem to allow for an intellectual intuition independent of sensation. Dionysius is Aquinas’ source for another tradition of Neoplatonism affecting western mediaeval theology, a tradition cohering with what Aquinas will learn from Aristotle. For it we humans cannot come to the divine except through the sensible. And so, signs which would lead us must be sensible, not because signs are by nature sensible, but rather because what God would use to make us holy must be adapted to our condition. By this route we come back to affirm the genuine text of Augustine, the *De doctrina Christiana* text which appeared in the first objection of the first article in this question:

And hence what are principally called signs are what are offered to the senses, as Augustine says in the second book of *De doctrina Christiana*, “a sign is something which over and above the specific form which it impresses upon the senses causes some further object to enter our cognition.” Intelligible effects, however, do not have the essential reason of signs unless they are made known through some sign.³⁶

Because the invisible body is not itself sensible, it could then only be called a sacrament “insofar as it is signified through something sensible” (*quodammodo sacramenta in quantum sunt significata per aliqua sensibilia*). Augustine's definition is

³⁵ ST, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 4, obj. 3: *res sensibiles sunt minima bona sine quibus homo recte vivere potest* and s.c.: *Augustinus dicit super Ioan: “Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum.”*

³⁶ ST, pars 3, quest. 60, art. 4, ad 1: *Effectus autem sensibilis per se habet quod ducat in cognitionem alterius, quasi primo et per se homini innotescens, quia omnis nostra cognitio a sensu oritur. Effectus autem intelligibiles non habent quod possint ducere in cognitionem alterius nisi in quantum sunt per aliud manifestati, id est per aliqua sensibilia. Et inde est quod primo et principaliter dicuntur signa quae sensibus offeruntur: sicut Augustinus dicit in II De doctrina Christiana, ubi dicit quod “signum est enim res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, facit aliquid aliud in cognitionem venire.” Effectus autem intelligibiles non habent rationem signi nisi secundum quod sunt manifestati per aliqua signa. Et per hunc etiam modum quaedam quae non sunt sensibilia, dicuntur quodammodo sacramenta, in quantum sunt significata per aliqua sensibilia,...*

saved from its reversal by Lanfranc through an Aristotelian and Dionysian philosophical theology.

In sum, the pseudo-Augustinian *Sentences of Prosper* are not rejected as such, but their teaching is not able to overcome for Aquinas Augustine's genuine definitions of sign and of sacrament as visible sign. By an Iamblichan-Dionysian Neoplatonic anthropology Aquinas freed himself from the confused condition of the Augustinian textual tradition. The theology of the sacraments is determined by Aquinas' fundamental understanding of God and the human. The theological anthropology which provides a place for Augustine's definitions is very different from that of Augustine himself; indeed it is the historically actual alternative in the Middle Ages and perhaps the only philosophically possible alternative.³⁷

³⁷ On these alternatives in the Middle Ages, see the selections from M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle*, translated as *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago/ London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 20–26, 60–64, 119–128; my “The Place of the Proof for God’s Existence in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist*, 46:3 (1982): 370–393 at 380–393, and Richard Schenk, “From Providence to Grace: Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-thirteenth Century,” *Nova et Vetera*, in press, parts III and IV.