
July 2024

The Theological Method of Thomas Aquinas in the Beatific Vision

Kent T. Maitland
Liberty University, kmaitland@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eleu>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Maitland, Kent T.. 2024. "The Theological Method of Thomas Aquinas in the Beatific Vision." *Eleutheria: John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Academic Journal* 8, (1). <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eleu/vol8/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Rawlings School of Divinity at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Eleutheria: John W. Rawlings School of Divinity Academic Journal* by an authorized editor of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

The Theological Method of Thomas Aquinas in the Beatific Vision

Abstract

This essay posits that Thomas Aquinas's Beatific Vision may not be a biblically accurate conception of the Christian's eternal destiny because it is grounded in a problematic theological method. For Aquinas, theology is a science for deducing the saving knowledge of God, which can only be discovered through Scripture. The integrity of Scripture's place of prominence, however, is undermined by the apparent usefulness of other sources for interpreting Scripture's meaning. His use of other sources in interpreting Scripture is justified by a hermeneutic that emphasizes the importance of Scripture's figurative meaning over the literal in determining its usefulness for theological predication. Accordingly, the Beatific Vision is not predicated on Scripture's literal meaning, but a figurative interpretation that aligns with tradition and other philosophical considerations.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, Beatific Vision, Theological Method, Eschatology, Biblical Hermeneutics

Cover Page Footnote

Kent T. Maitland holds a ThM in New Testament from The Master's Seminary. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Biblical Studies at Liberty University.

The Theological Method of Thomas Aquinas in the Beatific Vision

Classical Theism (CT) refers to a centuries' old theological tradition¹ that has seen a healthy resurgence among Christian theologians over the past few years.² Its resurgence is credited to what some perceive to be its superior accuracy in explaining the Scriptures, its perceived usefulness for explaining the universe, and its robust historical pedigree, relative to other popular conceptions of God.³ Those who align with the CT tradition seek to maintain a sharp ontological distinction between man, the “creature,” and God, the “creator,” who is espoused to be “the ultimate reality in the order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the order of discovery.”⁴ This distinction entails a number of significant theological predications—divine simplicity,⁵ divine immutability,⁶ divine impassibility,⁷ and divine timelessness⁸—that reflect God’s prerogative as the greatest conceivable being and the ultimate first cause of all existence.

The individual most often cited in substantiating this conception of God is Thomas Aquinas, the medieval scholastic. Aquinas is an important authority for a variety of reasons, not least of which is his body of work, which comprises one of

¹ Key historical figures commonly associated with Classical Theism include Augustine, Anselm, Boethus, and Aquinas. For a survey of the historical development of Classical Theism, cf. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 57–100; Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher, eds., *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 95–193; Daniel A. Dombrowski, *A History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016), 9–60.

² Recently published works dedicated to advancing Classical Theism include Robert C. Koons and Jonathan Fuqua, *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022); Peter Sammons, *Forgotten Attributes of God: God’s Nature and Why It Matters* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2023). Additionally, the first issue of *The Journal of Classical Theology* was released in Fall 2022, whose stated mission is to “facilitate rigorous theological discussion pertaining to the retrieval of and advancements in classical theology.”

³ These three qualities are stressed in the introductory chapter to James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 14–17, a polemical work contending for the superiority of Classical Theism over modern alternatives.

⁴ Edward Feser, “What is Classical Theism?,” 10.

⁵ Arguably CT’s most significant predication, which conceives God as a non-composite being, identical with His existence and essence, with attributes that are ontologically identical both with His existence and with each other (So James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011], 1). See also Jordan P. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

CT's most coherent explications.⁹ As a historic voice, Aquinas lends credibility to the prominence of CT in the church's history. Moreover, he for his part had a unique ability to improve upon the theology of his predecessors by articulating their ideas in a way that more neatly synthesized with loftier philosophical principles; in doing so, his work reflects not only his own thought, but an entire chorus of thinkers from the centuries that preceded him.¹⁰ Furthermore, he is useful not just as a theologian, but a philosopher, exhibiting an ability to articulate the known universe in a way that better substantiates CT's theological assertions.¹¹

⁶ The belief that God does not change, which many theologians share to some degree. Unique to CT is the belief that God is incapable of any intrinsic or extrinsic change. For recent cases on the Classical conception of immutability, see Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*, 2nd edition (Baltimore, MD: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), esp. 46–160; Mats Wahlberg, “Why Can't a First Mover Be Accidentally Moveable? Bolstering Aquinas's Case for Divine Immutability in the Face of Objections from Theistic Personalists,” *Nova et Vetera* 20, no. 4 (September 2022): 1305–22.

⁷ The belief that God cannot be acted upon by any created being outside of Himself. Practically, this means that He is without passions or incapable of suffering because such experiences would be stimulated by external forces that act upon Him. See Ronald S. Baines et al., eds., *Confessing the Impassible God: The Biblical, Classical, & Confessional Doctrine of Divine Impassibility* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2015); James E. Dolezal, “Strong Impassibility” in *Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering*, ed. Robert J. Matz (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 13–37; idem. “Defending Divine Impassibility,” 252–68.

⁸ The belief that God is an atemporal being who exists outside of time. See Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier, eds., *God, Eternity, and Time* (Routledge: New York, 2011) for essays in defense of the Classical position along with other alternative views in dialogue with it; also Paul Helm, *Eternal God*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹ His perennial work includes *Summa Theologica* (*ST*) (subsequent references derived from Father Laurence Shapcote, trans. *The Summa Theologica*, ed. Mortimer Jerome Adler, Clifton Fadiman, and Philip W. Goetz, Great Books of the Western World 17 [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1990]) and *Summa Contra Gentiles* (*SCG*) (subsequent references derived from The Dominican Fathers, trans., *Summa Contra Gentiles* [London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1924]). Also relevant to his metaphysics is *On Being and Essence* (*OBE*) (subsequent references derived from Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas On Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*, Reprinted [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004]).

¹⁰ For further study on Aquinas's innovation on the Patristic fathers, see Leo J. Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers* (Catholic University of America Press, 2018); Peter Sammons, “The Ox's Exalted Doctrine of God: The Rich Inheritance of Aquinas” in *Journal of Classical Theology* 1 (2022): 21–48.

¹¹ E.g., Dolezal makes use of the act-potency composition of being and the conception of God as an “unmoved mover” in making his case for divine simplicity (*God without Parts*, 31–66)

Despite his strengths as both a philosopher and a theologian, Aquinas's usefulness for demonstrating CT's biblical accuracy leaves much to be desired. Indeed, a close analysis of his seminal work reveals that his philosophical commitments often lead to certain theological conclusions that do not so clearly align with the explicit teaching of Scripture. One significant example is the Beatific Vision (BV), which concerns Aquinas's conception of the Christian's eternal destiny. While the BV has become a relatively popular conception of heaven in the history of the church,¹² this essay suggests that it was initially predicated on a problematic theological method that privileged philosophical considerations over the explicit teaching of Scripture. For Aquinas, the literal meaning of Scripture was subservient to its figurative meaning, and its figurative meaning was thought to align with what philosophy affirmed. Accordingly, philosophical considerations took priority over the literal meaning of Scripture in formulating theological ideas, which only served to undermine his stated commitment to Scripture's supremacy. To demonstrate this error, I will first delineate Aquinas's theological method. Then, I will demonstrate the inadequacy of the passages he cites to support his ideas concerning the BV, highlighting the disparity between what he asserts and what their literal meaning would otherwise suggest. To conclude, I will describe the philosophical commitments from which he was likely to derive a more suitable interpretation for the Scripture he cites. To be sure, neither his theological method, nor his philosophy, invalidates his contribution to Christian theology; but they each deserve consideration when assessing his value for identifying a biblical conception of God.

Aquinas's Theological Method

Aquinas adumbrates his theological method in the opening pages of *ST* in a discussion concerning the nature of theology. Theology, he argues, is a science for discovering the saving knowledge of God, a category of knowledge unique from what is otherwise generally available through rational inquiry. Whereas in the other sciences man can deduce the existence of God and His work in creation, the saving knowledge of God reveals God as He is known to Himself—His character, His will, and His sovereign plan. This knowledge concerns what man could not perceive on his own, and it is therefore only available through God's sovereign

and impassibility ("Strong Impassibility," 23–6). Duby, *Jesus*, 94–8 makes a case for the eternal generation of the Son by appealing to Aquinas's nuance of "substance" in explaining the nature of the divine persons in the Godhead.

¹² For a survey of the historical development of the Beatific Vision, see Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 129–61, esp. 163f for its development in eras subsequent to Thomas Aquinas.

initiative to disclose it. Consequently, the saving knowledge of God must be discovered in the pages of Scripture, the sole source of God's written revelation.¹³ Importantly, however, this does not invalidate the usefulness of other sources in discovering the saving knowledge of God, since those sources can aid the inquirer in determining what Scripture reveals.¹⁴ Human reason, for example, has a place in clarifying what Scripture affirms to be true, and philosophy can therefore clarify Scripture through what philosophers discern in their exercise of reason. Likewise, church tradition (i.e., "doctors of the church") can provide an additional chorus of voices from the church's academic leaders to substantiate an interpreter's conclusions. Historic church thinkers do not necessarily speak with the same authority as Scripture, but they provide complementary evaluations of what Scripture teaches, which serve to establish the interpreter's conclusions as more or less certain. In either case, Scripture remains the superior source, since Scripture reveals what man could not perceive on his own; but philosophy and tradition are useful for ensuring that what the interpreter discerns from Scripture is both plausibly and probably correct.¹⁵

Aquinas applies this theological method in *ST*'s subsequent treatises by predicating his theological ideas on a combination of Scripture, philosophy, and complementary opinions from prominent church thinkers. This holds true specifically in the case of the *BV*, the doctrine for which he is arguably the most famous. The doctrine comprises his conception of the Christian's eternal destiny, which he envisions as a state of unending mental contemplation of God's divine essence.¹⁶ This is conceived as a "vision" of God's essence, not with physical eyes, but the mind. As the mind is brought to a place of beholding God's essence, it is then that the knowledge of God will be at its highest state of perfection, comprising knowledge not merely of the effects of God, or of what God is not, but of who God is *ad intra*, the very knowledge of His essence that He has of Himself.¹⁷ The question is whether or not, and to what extent, Scripture can maintain its primacy with such a doctrine when other sources are used to explain it. When does Scripture hold the final word when its predications are typically qualified by philosophy or tradition? Can the normative authority of Scripture obtain when other sources are a regular part of interpreting its meaning? What happens when Scripture appears to contradict philosophy, tradition, or both? Can a true statement be predicated of God when Scripture is its only basis? These questions suggest that Aquinas's method should be carefully scrutinized, since his

¹³ *ST* I.1.5.ad 2, 6.ad 3.

¹⁴ *ST*, I.1.8.ad 2.

¹⁵ *ST*, I.1.5.ad 2, I.1.6.ad 3.

¹⁶ *ST* I–II 3.8; III-Sup. XCII.1.

¹⁷ *ST* III-Sup. XCII.1.ad2.

theological predications may not always derive from Scripture, but an interpretation of Scripture derived from what the other sources have said.

Aquinas's Use of Scripture

In support of the idea that man's ultimate end is mental comprehension of God's essence, Aquinas points to 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2 as biblical proof. With 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Apostle Paul writes concerning the eventual phasing out of certain revelatory gifts endowed to the church because of a surpassing revelation that awaits in the eschaton. In a word, Paul describes this revelation in v. 10 as "the perfect" (τὸ τέλειον). For Aquinas, this would refer to God's essence, the revelation of which would be, as v. 12 indicates, a state of existence where the Christian's vision of God is no longer a dim reflection. The case is wanting, however, that Paul had a future vision of God's essence in mind. It is not clear, for example, whether "perfect" is the best translation of τὸ τέλειον, given how pregnant the term is in the NT, and given how Paul tends to use the term in his letters.¹⁸ Yet only "perfect" comes closest to capturing what the divine essence entails.¹⁹ More significantly, Paul says that the Christian will see "face to face," an expression that seems to suggest the τέλειον Paul anticipates is one to be experienced not just mentally, but physically via sensation. This would encompass the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ and the new paradigm his appearing initiates for the Christian's communion with God.²⁰ Accordingly, the

¹⁸ The term is rarely used in Paul to signify "perfect." Many commentators prefer "completion," as if referring to a purpose or goal that has reached its end (e.g., Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010], 656–57; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987], 644n22). Others have suggested "mature" (e.g., Mark Edward Taylor, *1 Corinthians* [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2014], 316–17), seeing as the term is often used in conjunction with νήπιος, as here, to signify a child's "maturity" (1 Cor. 2:6; 3:1; 14:20). With this translation, Paul could be referring to the apparent immaturity of the Corinthians in their exercise of the spiritual gifts. Alternatively, he could be referring to the full maturation of the church universal in the progression of God's divine program. Ephesians 4:13–14 is an especially apt parallel that pictures the maturing of Christ's body in a similar discussion of spiritual gifts. For further discussion on this latter interpretation, see Robert L. Thomas, "Tongues...Will Cease," *JETS* 17, no. 2 (1974): 80–89.

¹⁹ A survey of the Vulgate—Aquinas's preferred translation—suggests the term was not well nuanced in its translation. The Latin *perfectus* is used to translate this passage and all other instances of τέλειον where commentators have generally acknowledged a more nuanced translation (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:6, 14:20; and Eph. 4:13).

²⁰ Taken literally, the expression, "face to face," harkens to beholding the face of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). The expression is further recognized as a Hebrew idiom that speaks to

analogy of the mirror in v. 12 would illustrate a contrast between an inferior way of knowing God in the present age vs. a superior way of knowing him when Christ returns: to know God now requires an object to mediate what is only a reflection—a mere mental image—of who he is; knowing God in the future will bring the added experience of physical sensation, to see and hear God in a way that no object can mediate. With these considerations, the text’s literal meaning would seem to undermine the theology Aquinas has set out to prove.

Turning to the other leg of Aquinas’s argument, 1 John 3:2, the Apostle John writes concerning the eschatological significance associated with becoming children of God. As with 1 Corinthians 13:12, John draws a contrast between the present and future state of the Christian’s existence: at present, he is a child of God; but in the future, his present state will be manifested more conspicuously. For Aquinas, the quintessential feature of this future manifestation is the ability to behold the essence of God—to “see him as he is.” John’s language is not easy to decipher, and its veracity as proof for the BV rests on interpretive decisions that are worth scrutinizing. Taking the larger context into consideration, the stated object of the verbs “be” (ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα) and “see” (ὀψόμεθα αὐτὸν) can refer to God the Father or God the Son.²¹ This decision is tied with the preceding verb, “revealed” (φανερωθῆ), whose subject, also unclear, would seem to be synonymous with the two αὐτός pronouns.²² He who is revealed is He whom the Christian will see. Aquinas’s interpretation identifies God the Father as both the subject of φανερωθῆ and the object of ὀψόμεθα, signifying the Christian’s vision

direct and unhindered communication between God and man (e.g., Exod. 33:11; Deut. 5:4). Some commentators point to this idiom to explain what Paul envisions, namely, a future time of direct, unmediated communication with God and the knowledge that ensues therefrom (e.g., David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 625). This idea cannot be divorced from the parousia, however, since it is Christ specifically that makes direct communication with God possible (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12), and, according to Paul, it is Christ’s appearing specifically that will inaugurate the eschaton (1 Cor. 15:23; cf. Rev. 22:4).

²¹ This problem persists among commentators. For God the Father, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 86–7; Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 88. For God the Son, see Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, NAC 38 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 166–67; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 172n29.

²² Regardless of who the αὐτός pronouns refer to, some commentators prefer to tie the subject of φανερωθῆ with the preceding “what” (τί) in reference to the state of existence that will be revealed (e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible 30 [New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2008], 394; Gary W. Derickson, *First, Second, and Third John*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014], 285). Hence, a rendering of “when it is revealed.” Aquinas’s citation in *ST* suggests that he does not take this position.

of God. Hence, in the eschaton, the Father will be revealed, and the Christian child of God will see the Father and be like him. On the other hand, the larger context of the NT suggests that the Father cannot be seen,²³ and there is no promise anywhere else that the Christian will one day be like the Father. It is noteworthy, moreover, that the verb φανερωθῆ is used here in combination with the conjunction ἐὰν (i.e., “when he appears”), and this same combination appears only a few verses prior in 2:28 with an unmistakable reference to Christ.²⁴ On balance, there are good reasons to think John has Christ in mind. His assertion, then, would be that the Christian will see Christ when He appears, and the Christian will be like Him when He is made manifest. Hence, it is not easy to extract the doctrine of the BV from this text. As with 1 Corinthians 13:12, the emphasis is on the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ—a sensory experience—and what that will initiate at the dawning of the eschaton.

Aquinas points to some additional Scripture passages to suggest that it is the common desire of all saints to comprehend the essence of God. Arguably the most significant of these is Exodus 33:18, in which Moses implores God, “show me your glory.”²⁵ For this text to be demonstrative of Aquinas’s point, the “glory” in view must be mental in nature, not physical; but, there is little to suggest that Moses yearns for a mental manifestation of God. In the broader context of the Exodus narrative, Moses’ prior experience with God’s glory included multiple manifestations of a cloud in the midst of the people of Israel, which served to signify His presence with them (Exod. 16:10; 24:16–17). This was compromised, however, by the people’s idolatry with the golden calf, which kindled God’s wrath and compelled Moses’ intercession for their forgiveness (Exod. 32:10–13). Fundamentally, Moses requested the assurance that God was precisely who He had already revealed Himself to be—not vengeful or prone to relent on His promises, but still in the midst of His covenant people and loyal to what He had sworn. The manifestation he was seeking, then, was no different than what he had already experienced: a physical manifestation that signified God’s loving presence in the midst of His covenant people. God’s response was that He would go well beyond the initial request, providing not just a visual manifestation to behold, like prior experiences, but an audible one to be heard through a declaration of His character. This He fulfilled on Mt. Sinai in the subsequent verses when His glory emanated in a cloud just as it had before, and He passed before Moses declaring

²³ In Johannine literature, see John 1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12, 20. In Paul, see 1 Tim. 6:16.

²⁴ See also 3:8, which, although not including the conjunction, uses φανερώω with reference to the advent of Christ.

²⁵ Other texts include the plea of the congregation, “Let your face shine, that we may be saved!” (Ps. 79:19), and Philip’s plea to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8).

His goodness (Exod. 34:5–7).²⁶ It would seem that neither Moses' request, nor God's response, suggests anything other than what can be experienced through sense perception. If it is the desire of all saints to mentally comprehend the essence of God, this desire is not well substantiated by Moses' experience.

Based on this preliminary analysis of Aquinas's supporting texts, it would seem that a biblical case is wanting for the doctrine of the BV. For Aquinas, however, this may not be so problematic, given the hermeneutic he employs. Fundamentally, since God is the ultimate author of Scripture, and since God understands all things at once, it is conceivable for Scripture to contain more than one meaning. This is not to suggest that the meaning of Scripture is always elusive to the interpreter, or that Scripture inherently contains multiple contradictory ideas. Rather, multiple significations can conceivably derive from the explicit words of Scripture.²⁷ Drawing from Augustine's semiosis,²⁸ Aquinas assumes that a word's literal meaning is nothing more than the object to which the word itself points.²⁹ The word's object, however, can also point to something beyond its own literal sense, rendering the object figurative.³⁰ Interpreting the figurative meaning of objects, he says, is one of the key tasks for the discipline of theology: "whereas in every other science things are signified by words, [theology] has the property that the things signified by the words have themselves also a meaning."³¹ With Scripture, there is the "literal" meaning made up of the material objects to which the words of Scripture point³²; but there is also the

²⁶ So Eugene E. Carpenter, *Exodus*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 352; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 709–10. Some commentators apparently prefer to interpret this manifestation as a separate occurrence from what occurs in Exodus 34:5–7 (e.g., Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library [Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014], 651). An important element to the interpretation I have alluded to here is Mt. Sinai signified by "the rock" (צור) in vv. 21–22. See Stuart, *Exodus*, 710n146.

²⁷ For a helpful description of the key precepts of Aquinas's hermeneutic, see Robert George Kennedy, "Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Sacred Scripture" (Ph.D. Dissertation, United States, Indiana, University of Notre Dame), 135–44.

²⁸ *Doct. chr.* I, 2.2. For an evaluation of Augustine's theory of language, its philosophical roots, and its implications for his hermeneutic, see Kent T. Maitland, "Platonism's Influence on the Hermeneutic of Augustine: Exploring the Philosophical Roots of Augustine's Interpretive Approach," *Eleutheria* 7, no. 1 (2023): 76–99.

²⁹ *Doct. chr.* I, 2.2.

³⁰ Consider, e.g., 1 Corinthians 9:9. The literal sign of "ox" is the animal the word would signify, but the animal itself is a figurative sign that points to a preacher.

³¹ *ST*, I.1.10.

³² Aquinas distinguishes multiple senses of Scripture's "literal" meaning, including (1) the "historical" sense, which refers to the literal objects that have existed in history; (2) the

“figurative” meaning which concerns the spiritual significance God intends those objects to carry.³³ In the mind of God, material objects are an appropriate vehicle for communicating spiritual truths, since all human knowledge begins with sensory experience.³⁴ Scripture’s interpreter, however, must look past the literal objects to the ultimate spiritual meaning those objects signify. Accordingly, it is not enough to determine Scripture’s literal meaning when predicating ideas about God. The theologian must make it his goal to discern the ultimate spiritual significance to which the literal meaning is ultimately subservient.

All this makes for a convenient escape hatch when the literal meaning of Scripture does not align with Aquinas’s theological predications. In the case of the BV, the literal meaning of the passages he cites does not so clearly suggest that the Christian’s ultimate end is to behold the essence of God; but they are sufficient if the idea can be derived from their figurative meaning.³⁵ Observing Aquinas’s additional considerations for the BV, it would seem that Scripture’s

“etiological” sense, which refers to the explanation of why such objects existed in the way that they did; (3) the “parabolic” sense, which signifies when real objects are used to signify other objects which are of greater spiritual significance; and (4) “analogy,” which is a harmonization of the truth of one Scripture passage with the truth of another. These are similar to the various senses espoused by Augustine, though their nomenclature may vary (see *Util. cred.* 3.5). What Aquinas calls “etiology” Augustine refers to “the aspect of explanation.” More significantly, what Augustine calls “allegorical” Aquinas prefers to call “parabolic” so as to distinguish the allegorical sense as that which pertains to Scripture’s figurative meaning. For “analogy,” Aquinas may have in mind the harmonization of two texts’ historical or etiological senses rather than their ultimate spiritual significance. Augustine specifies that it is the harmonization of an OT and NT text. Aquinas does not explicitly draw this distinction, however.

³³ The multiple senses of Scripture’s figurative meaning include (1) “allegory,” which refers specifically to the objects of the law (i.e., Mosaic Law) that signify the new law in Christ; (2) the “moral” sense, which refers to the object of Christ and His earthly example signifying the sort of life a Christian ought to lead; and (3) the “analogical” sense, which refers to the objects that signify that which relates to “eternal glory.” It is not immediately clear what Aquinas may have in mind with this final sense, since he does not explain what he means by that which relates to eternal glory. If it means objects that refer to God Himself, then it is not clear how he would distinguish this sense from the parabolic. Perhaps he means objects which are themselves analogous of what is true of God. So, for example, in 1 John 4:8, “love” speaks of an affection on a human level, which would be analogous of the “love” that characterizes God.

³⁴ Aquinas argues that by using material objects, God communicates His Word “closer” to man’s experience, which ensures that His Word is more easily and universally understood. *ST*, I.1.9.

³⁵ Aquinas may have in mind the “analogous” sense. In the case of the two NT passages, the figurative sense would interpret the phenomenon of seeing Christ analogously: seeing the person of Christ at His return is analogous with comprehending the essence of God in the eschaton. In Exodus 33:18, Moses’ request to behold God’s glory is analogous with the Christian’s desire to comprehend the essence of God.

figurative meaning can be demonstrated by its relative coherence with the other theological sources. In other words, Scripture's figurative sense consists of the interpretation that more clearly aligns with what we are told in philosophy, and what is affirmed by other church thinkers. This is at least apparent in his appeal to the interpretations espoused by other church fathers.³⁶ More significant, however, are the various philosophical predications that inform his thinking.

Philosophical Basis for the Beatific Vision

According to Aquinas, man's ultimate happiness is to comprehend immaterial substances according to their being. Accordingly, man can obtain the highest degree of happiness when his mind is brought to full comprehension of the immaterial God. If man's ultimate end is to obtain God's immaterial essence, then heaven is a state of existence where man's immaterial mind can apprehend God's essence without the hindrances of the material world. Fundamentally, this conception of the Christian's eternal destiny reflects Aquinas's commitment to the superiority of the immaterial over the material, an important assumption that can be discerned in the philosophical framework he articulates in other parts of *ST*.

Inferiority of the Material in Aquinas's Metaphysic

Aquinas was committed to an Aristotelian metaphysic, which served as the basis for his conception of being. Fundamentally, everything that exists is a composite of actuality and potentiality.³⁷ Actuality is the principle that accounts for what a being is in the now; potentiality is the principle that accounts for what a being can become through change or movement. These two are associated respectively with the "form" and "matter" of an individual substance—"form" with what the substance is, and "matter" with what the substance may become through change or movement. The "essence" of an individual substance is the composite of these two principles.³⁸ Within this framework, the being of God is unique. Other

³⁶ Aquinas appeals to Pope Gregory's assertion on Exodus 33:20 that the text refers not only to God's glory, but His nature—His essence; also to Chrysostom's explanation of John 1:18, that John refers to the inability of anything created to comprehend the Son with the same level of knowledge that the Father does.

³⁷ *Metaph.* IX.1.

³⁸ *OBE* c.5. This is an important distinction from Aristotle, who espoused that essence is identical to form (*Metaph.* VII.17). For Aquinas, essence is a principle that limits existence to a specific mode. It ensures that substances can be identified by their activity by ensuring that substances act in a predictable way (*SCG* I.43). Form, on the other hand, is an individuating principle that designates substances into a species of being with unique features. Such features are

substances must derive their existence from that which exists outside themselves, since their existence is not necessary or sustained by what they are.³⁹ God, on the other hand, is the supreme First Being whose existence is necessary, by virtue of His supremacy, and self-sustaining, because His very essence is existence itself. The unifying principle of all being is the act of existence, that is, a derived existence from God, the supreme First Being who moves all other essences from potential to actual.⁴⁰

Within created universe, Aquinas perceives a hierarchy that distinguishes substances by their relative degree of contingency. Such a hierarchy was first conceived in Plato's hierarchy of forms,⁴¹ and was further appropriated by Plotinus and various other Christian thinkers in the church's first few centuries.⁴² For Aquinas, all contingent beings participate in the act of existence, and it is their relative degree of participation that determines their place in the hierarchy of being.⁴³ Practically, their participation is reflected in their relative capacity for action, and their relative dependence on the material world for their own

actuated in material beings as the species is received into matter, producing, for example, different elements and compounds in the case of inanimate substances, different kinds in the case of plants and animals, and different individuals in the case of humans (cf. *ST* I.45.4; *SCG*, II.68, 81).

³⁹ This also is an important distinction from Aristotle, who espoused that a substance's form accounted for its existence in addition to its defining quality. For Aquinas, a substance's form could not adequately account for its own existence, since its essence can only describe what it is like with no sufficient explanation for why it had to exist. Moreover, he stressed that existence is itself a contingent reality; the essence of a thing will exist for only as long as it does not go out of existence. Hence, a being must derive its existence from that which exists outside itself in order to account for the contingency of its own existence.

⁴⁰ *ST* I.4.1.ad 3. For the act of existence, see also James M. Jacobs, *Seat of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy in the Catholic Tradition* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 100–6.

⁴¹ Plato espoused that the forms, as abstract universals, could be conceived as relatively inferior and superior to each other based on their relative proximity to “the Good,” the highest principle of reality and truth (Ed Miller and Jon Jensen, *Questions That Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*, 6th ed. [New York: McGraw Hill, 2008], 69).

⁴² Plotinus nuanced Plato's hierarchy into a hierarchy of being rather than form: the “One” sits atop the hierarchy as the principal of ultimate cause; the “Intellect” is the higher level which serves as the principle of essence or “whatness”; the “Soul” is the principle of desire which characterizes all living things; material existence in the natural world is, again, the furthest removed from reality, most deprived of intelligibility, and most dependent on the activity of the higher principles (Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* [New York: Routledge, 2014], 7–8). Other Christian thinkers appropriated Plotinus's hierarchy with God at the top and all other beings underneath (e.g., Augustine [*Conf.* VII, 10.16, 11.17], Dionysius [*De div. nom.* 4.2], and John Scotus Erigena [in Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, 122–24]).

⁴³ *SCG* I.40.

existence.⁴⁴ Inanimate substances are the most dependent on external stimuli for their own existence and therefore the lowest on the hierarchy.⁴⁵ Living things, however, have the power to grow and change within themselves and are therefore distinguished by their relative capacity for action. Plants are the lowest of living things because they are immovable, possessing only the power to grow and change, and only when they receive water and nutrients. Animals are higher because they are characterized by sensory consciousness that allows them to react to their environments; however, their consciousness is limited to their material environment, and their choices are instinctive rather than acts of volition. Human beings are higher still because they possess a rational soul, which renders them capable of making conscious decisions; they are still dependent, however, on the material world to inform their decisions. Angels surpass humans because they are immaterial beings whose activity does not depend on the material world, even as they are still dependent on God for their own existence. God is the supremely independent being whose existence and action depends on no one but himself. In the end, immaterial substances are placed higher on the hierarchy, and material substances are ordered by the extent to which they depend on the material world.

Aquinas's hierarchy is further explained by his conception of the soul, which he develops into a taxonomy corresponding with the hierarchy of living things. Borrowing Aristotle's idea that the soul can be rightly applied to all living substances,⁴⁶ Aquinas distinguishes between three soul forms which fall into a hierarchy determined by the quality of their powers: the vegetative soul, the sensitive soul, and the rational soul.⁴⁷ The vegetative soul is generally applied to plant life. It is associated with the lowest powers of the soul—nutrition, growth, reproduction—because such powers are limited to a substance's own material body. The sensitive soul, on the other hand, is generally applied to animals. It is thought to be of a relatively higher order because it acts in a substance's material body to produce a conscious awareness of its environment and an instinctive reaction to the environment as beneficial or harmful. The rational soul is unique to human beings. It possesses intellectual cognition, which is considered to be the highest power because it is an immaterial power of the mind that produces a

⁴⁴ SCG 4.11.

⁴⁵ The elements are a traditional example of such substances. Aquinas uses the example of fire: Fire can exist only for as long as it can be fed material objects.

⁴⁶ *De Anima*, II.1. Aristotle says that a soul is the first actuality of a natural body potentially possessing life which is true for any body that possesses organs. Aquinas specifies any living thing with the power of self-movement, that is, the ability to grow or develop on their own and not simply in reaction to another (*ST* I.18.1).

⁴⁷ *ST* I.78.1.

conscious awareness of immaterial universals.⁴⁸ The relative material and immaterial powers of these respective souls reflect the relative degree of participation between living things in the actuating principle of the First Being.

This metaphysical framework explains Aquinas's conception of heaven in the BV. For him, a state of perfection is not primarily that which is without flaw or defect, but that which is fully actual without any potential for change. In his words, "a thing is said to be perfect according as it is in act."⁴⁹ On the other hand, a state of imperfection is potentiality, since any unrealized potential signifies a being that is not fully actual. God is a wholly perfect being in the sense that He is pure actuality—He is the full realization of all that He is, and there is nothing on which He depends for His own existence. Man, on the other hand, is by nature a contingent being—there is nothing to suggest that he must exist and he must derive His existence from that which exists outside of himself. The realm of man is the material world, a world of perpetual change. The realm of God, however, is the spiritual world, a world of pure actuality with no potential for change. To obtain perfection, that is, pure actuality, man must unite with God, the most actual being, in a place where he no longer depends on the material realm.

Inferiority of the Material in Aquinas's Epistemology

Aquinas's epistemology serves as an important corollary to his metaphysical framework. For Aquinas, if all being is characterized by existence and essence, then there exists a universal intelligibility in which all being is knowable.⁵⁰ This state of knowability—truth—is achieved when a concept in the mind conforms with the essence of a being.⁵¹ The ability to achieve this state is a power of the rational soul, and therefore uniquely exhibited in human beings. It is achieved in two stages: through sensation, the human mind grasps the material composition of substances and distinguishes their individuality; through intellect, the mind grasps the form of substances, and discerns their universal nature.⁵² The result is an idea, a stable object of knowledge comprising a representation of a being's essence based on the information gathered through sensory experience.⁵³ The extent to

⁴⁸ Adding to the superiority of the rational soul is that it contains all the inferior powers of the sensitive and vegetative souls (*ST I.76.3*).

⁴⁹ *ST I.4.1*.

⁵⁰ *ST I.16.3*.

⁵¹ *ST I.16.1*.

⁵² *ST I.16.5*.

⁵³ An idea functions as "a bridge between the mind and reality" (Jacobs, *Seat of Wisdom*, 163n84).

which this idea is true is the extent to which the idea represents a being's essence as it exists in reality.⁵⁴

This foundation implies that, even within sensation itself, there are inferior and superior experiences based on where they fall in the process of elevating from the material to the immaterial. To demonstrate this, Aquinas explains the activity of sensation with a carefully distinguished taxonomy consisting of the "external" and "internal" senses. The external senses comprise the traditional five senses, which are used to gather information about material objects. These are arranged in a hierarchy according to the changes required to produce their effect.⁵⁵ The internal senses, however, comprise four additional senses which move sensation from material awareness to spiritual awareness.⁵⁶ As such, these senses add a layer of sensory experience that is necessarily superior to the external senses. Taking the information gathered from the five external senses, these internal senses organize and interpret the information so as to produce an awareness that is not only felt bodily, but impressed on one's consciousness.⁵⁷ On one level, the relative superiority of each of the five external senses is contingent on their respective relationships with the physical world, the most inferior being completely dependent on the physical world and the most superior capable of operating without it; on a deeper level, however, the internal senses surpass the external altogether, because they produce an awareness of the immaterial realm.

In the same way that knowledge is acquired through a process of moving from the material to the immaterial, so the knowledge that one can acquire will vary in significance depending on how it relates to the material and immaterial worlds. Borrowing from Boethius's scheme of the sciences, Aquinas arranges various bodies of knowledge into a hierarchy of abstraction beginning with the

⁵⁴ *ST I.16.5.*

⁵⁵ *ST I.77.3.* The most inferior of the senses are taste and touch, since their respective organs cannot operate without a material object to stimulate them. Sound and smell are more superior because they only require natural change on the part of an object for their respective organs to operate. Sight is the most superior of the senses because it does not require any physical change to the object or the sense organs.

⁵⁶ *ST I.78.4.* These senses include (1) common sense, which unites the information received from a single object derived from multiple senses; (2) imagination, which forms an image in the mind to act as a representation of the object one perceives according to all the information they've attained by their senses; (3) judgment, which is one's instinctive evaluation of things in the environment as useful or harmful; and (4) memory, which is the ability to recall the value of objects and past experiences.

⁵⁷ *ST I.77.3, 78.3.*

study of material objects and moving gradually to the immaterial.⁵⁸ The highest of the sciences is theology, which comprises the study of the immaterial First Being, the ultimate cause of all reality.⁵⁹ As a science, theology is unique, however: whereas the body of knowledge for any of the lesser sciences is accumulated entirely through the sensible objects of the material world, theology's body of knowledge is incomplete if left only to what the natural world reveals. There are, of course, certain ideas that can be derived from the material world, but these ideas are only enough to account for the fact that a First Being exists.⁶⁰ To discern the essential properties of the First Being, the science of theology must look to the sole sensible object by which they are revealed, namely, inspired Scripture.⁶¹ This superior science, therefore, constitutes a superior body of knowledge that comes through sensory awareness of this one unique sensory object. As such, the knowledge it yields moves beyond the normal process of acquiring knowledge to the realm of faith—faith that the material Scripture is the sole sensory object for acquiring the knowledge of the ultimate First Being—since it is the very Word of the First Being Himself.

In sum, this epistemological framework provides the rational basis for the Christian's ultimate end in the BV. According to Aquinas, the most "perfect" principle of man is the rational soul—the mind—because it is through the rational soul that man participates in God's actuality.⁶² Hence, in this life, the material world is a necessary part of the human experience by virtue of how the rational soul operates; but the material world is only useful to the extent that man can exploit it to perceive immaterial reality. Fundamentally, man's participation is reflected in the accumulation of knowledge, when his mind engages with the immaterial essence of things, the principle of actuality that pervades all being. It is

⁵⁸ *CBDT* 5.1; cf. *ST* I.85.1.ad 1. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the knowledge of the natural world, which concerns material objects in light of the potentiality that enables them to change (i.e., physics). Mathematics constitutes a higher order of the knowledge of material composition with a focus on the intrinsic intelligibility of matter. Metaphysics is an even more superior body of knowledge comprising the study of immaterial objects and unchanging principles.

⁵⁹ *ST* I.1.1–2.

⁶⁰ *ST* I.2.2.ad 1. These, commonly referred to as the "preambles to the faith," include, according to Aquinas, "The existence of God and other like truths about God which can be known by natural reason." *SCG* 1.3 includes the proposition that God is one, "and others like these, which even the philosophers proved demonstratively of God, being guided by the light of natural reason." In light of *ST* I.32.1.ad 1, "others like these" might include certain attributes such as God's power, wisdom, and goodness.

⁶¹ In contrast to the "preambles to faith," these are the "mysteries" of faith. *ST* I.32.1 posits the Trinity as an example.

⁶² *ST* I-II 3.8.

by tapping into this principle of actuality that the mind satisfies its appetite for happiness, that is, the ultimate good to which everything is aimed. If the Christian's eternal destiny is to attain the fullest degree of perfection, therefore, he must attain the most perfect operation of the mind. This can only come by comprehending the greatest conceivable being, whose essence is the purest degree of actuality. In this, the mind can fully satisfy its appetite for happiness.⁶³

Conclusion

On balance, the BV is demonstrative of why Aquinas should be scrutinized carefully to ensure his usefulness for constructing a biblical conception of God. While he gives Scripture a place of prominence in theological predication, he undermines such a commitment by privileging the figurative meaning of Scripture over the literal. Consequently, what he perceives to be evidence from Scripture for his theological ideas relies little on exegetical considerations and more on his own philosophical commitments. This is evident in the passages he cites as proof for his conception of the Christian's eternal destiny. A closer analysis of these passages suggests that their literal meaning does not adequately reflect what Aquinas sets out to prove, and perhaps even undermines his point. Therefore, their usefulness as evidence must be predicated on other considerations explained elsewhere. This essay suggests that such considerations include the hierarchy of being and an epistemological framework that establishes the knowledge of God's immaterial essence as the apex of human happiness.

Seeing as, for Aquinas, human reason and philosophy are legitimate sources alongside Scripture for discovering the sacred doctrine of theology, it is not surprising to discover instances where philosophy takes a heavy priority. For those, however, who prefer to prioritize the literal meaning of Scripture in their evaluation of sacred doctrine, Aquinas's philosophical conclusions should be measured against the biblical evidence he cites, and the hermeneutic he employs to evaluate the evidence. With this in mind, the merit of CT and its peculiar doctrines should be carefully evaluated. The merit Aquinas lends should not be assumed on the basis of his stature as a theologian or the enduring legacy of his ideas. Rather, the doctrines he espoused should be scrutinized by the literal meaning of Scripture to determine whether they align more closely with what Scripture says, or with other ancillary considerations beyond what Scripture plainly reveals.

⁶³ *ST III-Sup. XCII.1.*

Bibliography

- Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Theologica: Volume I*. Edited by Mortimer Jerome Adler, Clifton Fadiman, and Philip W. Goetz. Translated by Father Laurence Shapcote. 2nd ed. Great Books of the Western World 17. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1990.
- . *The Summa Theologica: Volume II*. Edited by Mortimer Jerome Adler, Clifton Fadiman, and Philip W. Goetz. Translated by Father Laurence Shapcote. 2nd ed. Great Books of the Western World 18. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, 1990.
- Augustine. *On Christian Belief*. Edited by Boniface Ramsey. Translated by Michael Fiedrowicz. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990.
- . *Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana)*. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Translated by Edmund Hill. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996.
- . *The Confessions*. Edited by John E. Rotelle. Translated by Maria Boulding. 2nd Edition. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012.
- Baines, Ronald S., Richard C. Barcellos, James P. Butler, Stefan T. Lindblad, and James M. Renihan, eds. *Confessing the Impassible God: The Biblical, Classical, & Confessional Doctrine of Divine Impassibility*. Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2015.
- Barrett, Jordan P. *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.
- Bobik, Joseph. *Aquinas On Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*. Reprinted. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.
- Boersma, Hans. *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018.
- Brown, Raymond E. *The Epistles of John*. Anchor Bible 30. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2008.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

- Carpenter, Eugene E. *Exodus*. Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.
- Cessario, Romanus. *A Short History of Thomism*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005.
- Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010.
- Derickson, Gary W. *First, Second, and Third John*. Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.
- Diller, Jeanine, and Asa Kasher, eds. *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013.
- Dodds, Michael J. *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*. 2nd edition. Baltimore, MD: Catholic University of America Press, 2008.
- Dolezal, James E. *All That Is in God*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017.
- . *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.
- Dombrowski, Daniel A. *A History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016.
- Duby, Steven J. *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism: Biblical Christology in Light of the Doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022.
- Elders, Leo J. *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers*. Catholic University of America Press, 2018.
- Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987.
- Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Garrett, Duane A. *A Commentary on Exodus*. Kregel Exegetical Library. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014.

- Gilson, Etienne. *Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.
- Gilson, Étienne. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019.
- Helm, Paul. *Eternal God*. 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Hett, Walter S., trans. *Aristotle: On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*. The Loeb Classical Library 288. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Jacobs, James M. *Seat of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy in the Catholic Tradition*. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Kennedy, Robert George. “Thomas Aquinas and the Literal Sense of Sacred Scripture (Hermeneutics, Biblical Interpretation, Exegesis, Medieval).” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame.
- Koons, Robert C., and Jonathan Fuqua. *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God*. New York: Routledge, 2022.
- Maitland, Kent T. “Platonism’s Influence on the Hermeneutic of Augustine: Exploring the Philosophical Roots of Augustine’s Interpretive Approach.” *Eleutheria* 7, no. 1 (2023): 76–99.
- Matz, Robert J., ed. *Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God’s Emotions and Suffering*. Spectrum Multiview Books. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Miller, Ed, and Jon Jensen. *Questions That Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.
- Remes, Pauliina. *Neoplatonism*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Sammons, Peter. *Forgotten Attributes of God: God’s Nature and Why It Matters*. Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2023.
- . “The Ox’s Exalted Doctrine of God: The Rich Inheritance of Aquinas.” *Journal of Classical Theology* 1 (2022): 21–48.

- Strecker, Georg. *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Stuart, Douglas K. *Exodus*. NAC 2. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006.
- Stump, Eleonore. *Aquinas*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003.
- Svensson, Manfred, ed. *Aquinas among the Protestants*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017.
- Tapp, Christian, and Edmund Runggaldier, eds. *God, Eternity, and Time*. Routledge: New York, 2011.
- Taylor, Mark. *1 Corinthians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. New American Commentary 28. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Thomas, Robert L. "Tongues...Will Cease." *JETS* 17, no. 2 (1974): 80–89.
- Wahlberg, Mats. "Why Can't a First Mover Be Accidentally Moveable? Bolstering Aquinas's Case for Divine Immutability in the Face of Objections from Theistic Personalists." *Nova et Vetera* 20, no. 4 (September 2022): 1305–22.