



THOMAS AQUINAS
AND THE CRISIS OF
CHRISTOLOGY



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this perspective, suffering and hardships have always been part of God's plan to help man "come to an awareness of himself and his proper dignity" and thereby detach himself from the material things of this world that keep him from God. This perspective has the benefit of maintaining the connection between original sin and the experience of physical suffering and death while cohering with the likelihood that the suffering and death that have always been part of earthly reality, allowed by God in order to make room for love. To recast Maximus's insight along Ratzingerian lines, one might say that God created a world with suffering not primarily in view of *sin* but rather in view of *love*.

In the end, our knowledge of the events that transpired at the origin of human history is limited. Yet, thankfully, the most important thing about our human nature is something we do in fact know with certainty: that the crucified and risen Jesus is the true and definitive Adam who reveals man to himself, and that we will therefore find ourselves only through a sincere gift of self in union with our Lord's *kenosis*. Seen in this light, the very imperfection of our evolving world with all the suffering it entails affords us creatures the opportunity to become ever more like Christ—and thereby more like God. No matter where each of us comes down on the issue of whether human suffering and death would have been part of a sinless world, my hope is that this essay has cast fresh light on this profound relationship between suffering and love and on what the New Adam has to do with it all.

CHAPTER 13

"NO ONE KNOWS WHO DOES NOT FIRST TASTE"

The Spiritual Senses in Aquinas's Christology

Gerald P. Boersma

Knowledge of divine realities by way of experience or connaturality is an important feature of St. Thomas's religious epistemology. This theme is particularly prominent in two contexts: first, in the discussion of the invisible missions of Son and Spirit to the soul of the believer, and second, in the discussion of wisdom and understanding that are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In these contexts, Thomas draws especially on the language of *taste* and *touch* to articulate how the spiritual senses operate with respect to apprehending the things of God. After briefly surveying the category of experiential knowledge generated by the invisible missions and the gifts of wisdom and understanding, I argue that the spiritual senses are an extension of St. Thomas's Christology. The spiritual senses express the experiential movements—especially of taste and touch—that belong to the saint as a member of Christ's mystical body.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE INVISIBLE MISSIONS

In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas contrasts speculative knowledge of God with the experiential knowledge of God generated in the soul

that is the terminus of the invisible missions: "Each of them (Son or Spirit) is sent when he is known. This is to be understood as not only a speculative knowledge (*cognitione speculativa*), but also a knowing that has a certain experiential character (*quodammodo experimentalis*). This is shown by what follows: '[known] and perceived,' (*cognoscitur* *atque percipitur*) which suggests an experience properly speaking (*proprie experientiam*) in the gift possessed."¹ The origin of the phrase "known and perceived" (*cognoscitur atque percipitur*) is the fourth book of Augustine's *De Trinitate* and is the wellspring of considerable medieval commentary.² Peter Lombard suggests that the African doctor hereby distinguishes two ways the Son is "sent": he is "known" (*cognoscitur*) when he is sent in the flesh in the Incarnation (i.e., a visible mission), and he is "perceived" (*percipitur*) in the souls of the just when he is experienced in love (i.e., an invisible mission). Subsequent commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* gave considerable attention to the Augustinian phrase "known and perceived" (*cognoscitur atque percipitur*) as articulating the distinction between the visible and invisible divine missions.³ In the subsequent distinction in the *Scriptum*, Thomas maintains, "In the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit, grace overflows into the soul on account of the fullness of the divine love. And through that effect of grace, the experiential knowledge of this divine person is received by one to whom this mission is made (*cognitio illius personae diuinae experimentalis ab ipso cui fit missio*)."⁴

To what degree is this experiential knowing *intellectual*? This is a much-debated question. Some commentators hold that Thomas intends a wholly emotional, nondiscursive, noncognitive type of knowing. Others give a thoroughly intellectualist vector to *experimentalis cognitio*. I will return

1. In *I Sent.* d. 15, a. 3, q. 5, *expos. expositio secundae partis textus* (translation mine).

2. Augustine, *Trin* 4.28 (trans. Edmund Hill): "[The Word] is precisely sent to anyone when he is known and perceived (*cognoscitur atque percipitur*) by him, as far as he can be perceived and known to the capacity of a rational soul either making progress toward God or already made perfect in God. So the Son of God is not said to be sent in the very fact that he is born of the Father, but either in the fact that the Word made flesh showed himself to this world; about this fact he says, *I went forth from the Father and came into this world* (Jn 16:28). Or else he is sent in the fact that he is perceived in time by someone's mind, as it says, *Send her to be with me and labor with me* (Wis 9:10). That he is born means that he is from eternity to eternity—he is the brightness of eternal light (Wis 7:26). But that he is sent means that he is known by somebody in time."

3. Cf. John F. Dedek, "Quasi experimentalis cognitio: A Historical Approach to the Meaning of St. Thomas," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 357–90.

4. In *I Sent.* d. 16, a. 2, q. 1, co. (translation mine).

to this question later. Regardless, it is clear that for Thomas, the indwelling of the divine persons in the soul of the just effects a new type of unitive or connatural knowledge of God that is experiential. In the Dominican's discussion of the divine missions in the *Summa* (ST I, q. 43), he argues that the Son is sent "not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love."⁵ Drawing once again on the much-discussed quotation from Augustine, Thomas remarks, "Thus Augustine plainly says: *The Son is sent, whenever He is known and perceived* (*cognoscitur atque percipitur*) *by anyone*. Now perception implies a certain experimental knowledge (*experimentalem . . . notitiam*); and this is properly called wisdom (*sapientia*), as it were a sweet knowledge (*sapida scientia*)."⁶ Tasting, savoring, and relishing are the verbs Thomas uses to express the connatural or experiential knowledge of God given to the saint in the invisible missions.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE GIFTS OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

The second context in which Thomas addresses experiential or connatural knowledge of God is his discussion of the gifts of wisdom and understanding. In Christian maturity, the distinct and radical union of God and the soul effected in baptism manifests itself through the gifts and virtues. The Thomist tradition identifies these as habits; that is, the gifts and virtues articulate the divine life insinuated in the intellectual and moral fiber of the baptized.⁷ The life of God becomes "connatural" to the saint. The intel-

5. ST I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2. All quotations from the *Summa Theologiae* are from the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1948).

6. ST I, q. 43, q. 5, ad 2: *Et ideo signanter dicit Augustinus quod filius mittitur, cum a quoquam cognoscitur atque percipitur, perceptio enim experimentalem quandam notitiam significat. Et haec proprie dicitur sapientia, quasi sapida scientia*. Bernard McGinn notes, "Thomas, like most medieval thinkers, derived *sapientia* from *sapida scientia*, that is, knowledge that 'tastes' its object, rather than merely considering it from afar or abstractly." "Contemplatio Sapientialis": Thomas Aquinas's Contribution to Mystical Theology," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 95 (2019): 327.

7. The Spanish Dominican Francisco Martín-Sola, in *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dog-*

lectual gifts of wisdom and understanding allow for a new sense (a taste or touch) for divine truth that is principally not speculative but affective.⁸

Three texts from the *Summa* demonstrate the connection between the intellectual gifts and connatural knowledge of divine truth.⁹ First, in addressing the nature of *sacra doctrina* (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 6), Thomas distinguishes two ways according to which wisdom renders judgment: by inclination (*per modum inclinationis*) and by cognition (*per modum cognitionis*). Thomas quotes Dionysius, whose mentor Hierotheus was “taught not by mere learning, but by experience of divine things (*patiens divina*).”¹⁰ Second, in the question on wisdom (*ST* II-II, q. 45), Thomas contends, “It belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about Divine things after reason has made its inquiry (*ex rationis inquisitione*), but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Ghost to judge aright about them on account of connaturality (*quandam connaturalitatem*) with them.”¹¹ Here Thomas advances the same quotation from Dionysius: “Hierotheus is perfect in Divine things, for he not only learns, but also experiences Divine things (*patiens divina*).”¹² Divine caritas obtains this unique, connatural wisdom: “Now this sympathy or connaturality for Divine things is the result of charity, which unites us to God, according to 1 Corinthians 6:17: ‘He who is

ma, trans. Antonio T. Piñon (Manilla: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988), describes how connatural knowledge becomes a habit, i.e., a new *sensing* nature:

That faith, that grace, that charity, those virtues, those gifts—especially the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge—are objective supernatural realities, *second natures*, grafted onto what in modern parlance would be called the *subconscious* of our being. By means of them we are able to perceive, judge, and develop connaturally, intuitively, through contact, quasi experimentally, many supernatural truths which the speculative theologian comes to know only through science, as a conclusion, through study, through laborious reasoning. (403)

8. *ST* II-II, q. 162, a. 3, ad 1: “Knowledge of truth is twofold. One is purely speculative ... the other knowledge of truth is affective.” Although the discussion of connatural knowledge is most explicit in Thomas’s theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the broader category of “affective knowing” equally undergirds his theology of the virtues and emotions. See Thomas Ryan, “Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 49–68.

9. An important locus for Thomas’s treatment of connatural knowledge through the gift of wisdom is the early sentence commentary (*In III Sent.* d. 34–36). Here Thomas also identifies the union with God through charity as the cause of a supernatural wisdom that involves a “taste of experience” (*In III Sent.* d. 34, q. 1, a. 2, 2c).

10. *ST* I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3.

11. *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

12. *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2; translation altered.

joined to the Lord, is one spirit.”¹³ Finally, in *ST* II-II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2, we read,

There is a twofold knowledge of God’s goodness or will. One is speculative (*speculativa*) ... the other knowledge of God’s will or goodness is affective or experiential (*affectiva seu experimentalis*) and thereby a man experiences in himself the taste of God’s sweetness, and complacency in God’s will (*experitur in seipso gustum divinae dulcedinis et complacentiam divinae voluntatis*), as Dionysius says of Hierotheus (*Div. Nom.* ii) that “he learnt divine things through experience (*ex compassione*) of them.” It is in this way that we are told to prove God’s will, and to taste His sweetness (*gustemus eius suavitatem*).¹⁴

The identical quotation from Dionysius in all three texts from the *Summa* underscores both the *immediacy* of experiential or connatural knowledge and the soul’s *passivity* to such knowledge.¹⁵ Connatural knowledge is affective knowledge of God, which belongs to the saint who “experiences in himself the taste of God’s sweetness.”¹⁶ The saint has become morally and intellectually acclimatized to divine things through experience and has developed new spiritual senses to savor the things of God.¹⁷

13. *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

14. *ST* II-II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2.

15. Thomas’s most extensive discussion of Dionysius’s description of his master Hierotheus “suffering divine things” is (unsurprisingly) in the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, which I treat below (*DDN*, c. 2, lect. 4, nos. 189–92). Bernhard Blankenhorn’s masterful study *The Mystery of Union with God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015) considers the Dionysian features of Thomas’s account of union with God. Blankenhorn points out that Eriugena’s Latin translation of Dionysius is the source of not only Gallus’s “affective” interpretation, but also of the interpretation given by Albert and Aquinas. Eriugena translates Hierotheus’s experience of “not only learning but suffering divine things” as “not only learning but also an affection for divine things (*affectus divina*)” (42).

16. The seventeenth-century Dominican John of St. Thomas, in *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Dominic Hughes (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951), 4.4, offers what is perhaps the most trenchant treatment of connatural knowledge of divine truth realized through the gifts of wisdom and understanding. He accents the saint’s distinct union with God as the wellspring of this wisdom:

Its [the gift of wisdom] judgment is unique, proceeding from a special impulse, by which the mind is elevated to judge with promptitude, and by which the soul is united and subjected to God from a connaturality and experience of divine things.... The gift of wisdom does not judge from any knowledge derived from study and reasoning about causes or even by a light which manifests them in themselves. It judges from a connaturality and union with the supreme cause which is possessed as it were through experience. (124–25)

John of St. Thomas underscores the immediacy and intimacy of connatural knowledge given through gifts of wisdom and understanding. This immediacy is also the emphasis in St. Thomas’s treatment, for which reason the spiritual senses—especially touch and taste—play such a decisive role in his account of the intellectual gifts.

17. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 11: “For just as the sense of taste judges flavors according to its own dis-

THE CORPUS MYSTICUM
AND THE SPIRITUAL SENSES

Experiential or connatural knowledge is not simply a heightened spiritual sensitivity, some type of unique spiritual superpower. The recurring emphasis in Thomas's treatment of the invisible missions and the gifts of the Holy Spirit falls on the participatory character of this connatural knowledge. The formal cause of the spiritual senses is the saint's union with God, whereby he experientially discerns divine things in participation with Christ the Head as a member of his mystical body.¹⁸ Although Thomas's entire corpus contains only approximately fifteen explicit references to the "spiritual senses," the bulk of those are found in discussion of Christ's mystical body.¹⁹

The efficient cause of the spiritual senses is baptism, which communicates a new spiritual life along with the attendant spiritual senses of that life. The baptized are united to God and incorporated into Christ's mystical body. The gift of divine filiation given in baptism allows the soul to become the terminus of the invisible missions and bestows the gifts of the Spirit according to which the soul is moved with docility to the promptings of the

position, so too a man's mind judges something to be done according to his own habitual disposition. Hence, in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, 'As each one is, so will such-and-such an end seem to him.' John of St. Thomas comments, "The formal nature by which wisdom knows the highest causes is an internal experience of God and divine things. It is a taste, love, delight, or internal contact, of the will with spiritual things. By reason of its union with spiritual truth the soul is, as it were, made connatural to things divine.... The divine reasons through which wisdom proceeds to give its account are not known in their essence by this gift of wisdom, but lovingly, mystically, and for a connaturality and union, or interior experience of divine things" (*Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, 4.6, 4.8, 125–26).

18. *ST* III, q. 69, a. 5. A key text is *In Philipp.* lect. 2.52, in which Aquinas details how the five spiritual senses realize by "experience" the Apostle's injunction: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

19. Richard Cross maintains that Thomas makes only fifteen explicit references to the spiritual senses in his oeuvre. "Thomas Aquinas," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul Gavriluk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 185. A lemma search in the "Library of Latin Texts" (Brepols) for various forms of *sensus spiritualis* indicates the paucity of Thomas's treatment of the topic. Of the approximately twenty-five references to forms of *sensus spiritualis* (and eighteen to various forms of *sensus interior*), the majority concern the interpretation of Scripture. Texts that I do not treat here but that have bearing on the doctrine of the spiritual senses of the soul include *ST* III, q. 8, a. 2, c; *In III Sent.* d. 13, a. 2, q. 3, obj. 2; *In IV Sent.* d. 5, a. 1, q. 3, 2 c; *De Ver.* 27, 3 obj. 5; *De Ver.* 27, 4 c; *Super I Cor.* 11, lect. 1; *Super I Cor.* 12, no. 17; *Super II Cor.* 11, lect. 1; *Super epistolam ad Ephesios lectura*, 1.8.71.

Spirit. It is important to note that the spiritual senses are not reserved to a spiritual elite—say, mystics—but are part and parcel of the new life bestowed in baptism.²⁰

It is axiomatic for Thomas that the soul receives knowledge of sensible realities through the physical senses in an experiential mode.²¹ A parallel epistemology operates with respect to divine truth. The spiritual senses perceive the things of God in an experiential manner. Just as our natural life is equipped with physical senses to apprehend the material quiddity of sensible realities, so, in an analogous fashion, the supernatural life given in baptism is equipped with spiritual senses to apprehend divine realities.

20. Admittedly, the spiritual senses of some are more "attuned" to the things of God than others. Thomas's treatment of folly (*stultitia*) (*ST* II-II, q. 46) is an important locus for discussion of the spiritual senses. Folly dulls the spiritual senses and, in its extreme, metastasizes into fatuity, which denotes the "entire privation of the spiritual sense" (*ST* II-II, q. 46, a. 1). Thomas describes folly as the loss of taste or *sapor* for divine things and develops the etymology provided by Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae libri X*, 10 [PL 82.393C]):

For "*sapiens*" [wise] as Isidore says (*Etym.* x) "is so named from *sapor* [savor], because just as the taste is quick to distinguish between savors of meats, so is a wise man in discerning things and causes." Wherefore it is manifest that "folly" is opposed to "wisdom" as its contrary, while "fatuity" is opposed to it as a pure negation: since the fatuous man lacks the sense of judgment, while the fool has the sense, though dulled, whereas the wise man has the sense acute and penetrating. (*ST* II-II, q. 46, a. 1, c)

In keeping with Thomas's general epistemology, wisdom is ordered to judgment; wisdom is the "savor of discretion and sense" (*ST* II-II, q. 46, a. 1, ad 2). Folly, its contrary, "denotes dullness of sense in judging, and chiefly as regards the highest cause, which is the last end and the sovereign good" (*ST* II-II, q. 46, a. 2, c). Folly may either be a natural deficiency or can be the result of sin. The spiritual senses of the person who has plunged himself into earthly things have become so dull that they are rendered incapable of perceiving divine things. They are condemned by the verdict of the Apostle Paul: "The sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God," [1 Cor 2:14] even as sweet things have no savor for a man whose taste is infected with an evil humor: and such like folly is a sin" (*ST* II-II, q. 46, a. 2). Acute spiritual senses render perceptive judgments with respect to good and evil; "taste" and "savor" describe the operation of this intuitive sense of wisdom.

The *Commentary on Job* offers a similar example. Commenting on Job 12:11 ("Does not the ear judge words when it hears them, and when the palate relishes the taste of food, does it not discriminate? There is wisdom in the ancients and prudence comes with advanced age"), Thomas remarks that wisdom and prudence are required to judge what the senses deliver. This involves experience, however, and experience is obtained only with time ("advanced age"). Hearing and tasting designate two types of experiential knowledge. Hearing, which is the "most teachable of all the senses," is correlated with wisdom and regulates the contemplative life. Taste, which has to do with food and the necessities of life, is correlated to prudence and regulates the active life. Thomas concludes, "From the judgment of the two senses, he shows the value of experience in both speculative things and practical things." *Commentary on the Book of Job*, vol. 28 (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute 2016), 12.2, p. 154. *In Job XII*, 11–14, Leonine, 26:81, ll. 163–226.

21. Cf. *ST* I, q. 54, a. 5, c: "We have experience when we know single objects through the senses."

The ecclesiology of the *corpus mysticum* serves as the foundation of Thomas's doctrine of the spiritual senses. According to this ecclesiology, the members participate in the spiritual realities predicated of the Head. In his treatment of the effects of baptism, Thomas writes, "Just as the members derive sense and movement from the material head, so from their spiritual Head, i.e. Christ, do His members derive spiritual sense (*sensus spiritualis*). . . . It follows from this that the baptized are enlightened by Christ as to the knowledge of truth (*cognitionem veritatis*), and made fruitful by Him with the fruitfulness of good works (*bonorum operum*) by the infusion of grace."²² Here we see the participatory character of the spiritual senses that gives a more literal connotation to the traditional locution *sentire cum ecclesiae*. The senses exist perfectly in Christ the Head and overflow to those who comprise his mystical body. The members do not possess the spiritual senses autonomously, but on account of their incorporation in the Head. The final cause of the spiritual senses is the intellectual illumination of the truth and fecundity in good works, which is a share in Christ's own light and grace.

Thomas's insistence on the real union of Head and members leads him to correct Peter Lombard, who in his *Sentences* maintains that while all the spiritual senses are in Christ, only the sense of touch obtains for the members. Lombard holds that just as in the physical body all five senses are found in the head and only touch in the members, so too only touch and not the other spiritual senses obtains for the members of the mystical body.²³ Further, Lombard admits only a "likeness" of the spiritual senses in the members, as they do not participate in "the same grace as to the essence" that belongs to the Head. In his *Scriptum*, Thomas disagrees with the Master, insisting that a real union of Head and members constitutes the mystical body:

22. *ST III*, q. 69, a. 5.

23. Peter Lombard, *Sent.* 3, d. 13, n. 2. Lombard holds that Christ alone is filled with every grace because in him dwells the fullness of divinity. He quotes Augustine (*Ep.* 187): "Just as 'in our body there is a sense in each of the members, but not so much as in the head: for in the head there is sight and hearing and smell and taste and touch, but in the others there is only touch,' so also in Christ dwells the fullness of divinity, because he is the head in which are all the senses; but in the saints there is, as it were, touch alone, for to them the spirit was given according to measure, when they took from his fullness [Lk 2:40]. How 'we took from his fullness,' is to be understood. But they took from his fullness not according to essence, but according to likeness, because they did not receive the same grace as to essence, but a like one."

"In the Saints there is only touch." This seems to be false, because Origen, *On Leviticus*, distinguishes five spiritual senses, saying that spiritual sight occurs when we see God; hearing when we hear who speaks; smell, by which we smell the good odour of Christ; taste, when we taste his sweetness; touch, when we touch, with John, the Word of life. All of these things are in all the saints. So they do not have merely touch. I reply by saying that the spiritual senses can be distinguished [1] by likeness to the acts of corporeal senses (*per similitudinem ad actus sensuum corporalium*), and thus they are in all the saints, as Origen says, and [2] by likeness to certain properties of the senses (*per similitudinem ad quasdam proprietates sensuum*), according to which touch is necessary, and the others not, and in this way, because there are in the saints all things necessary to salvation, whereas in Christ there are all things which simply pertain to the perfection of grace, it follows that all the senses are said to be in Christ, whereas in others there is only the sense of touch.²⁴

The striking claim is not just that the spiritual senses refer to the distinct ways the saint perceives Christ, but also that the believer sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches with Christ's senses. Contrary to Lombard, who admits only a "likeness" of the spiritual senses in the members, Aquinas holds that if all the senses exist perfectly in Christ the Head, they must also obtain for his members. In Christ, who was a *comprehensor* in this life, they obtain perfectly, whereas for the members of his mystical body, they operate sufficiently for salvation.²⁵

The distinction at work in this paragraph serves to balance competing authorities. Origin of Alexandria first develops a doctrine of five spiritual senses corresponding to the five physical senses. Origin held that the members of Christ's mystical body share in *all* the senses of the Head. This significant feature of Greek mystical theology was widely known in the Middle Ages because of its transmission in the *Glossa*.²⁶ Peter Lombard instigates a

24. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 13 q. 3 a. 2 qc. 3 expos. Trans. Cross, "Thomas Aquinas," 187.

25. I see nothing in this paragraph that warrants Richard Cross's supposition that the *sancti* refer to the *comprehensores* possessing the beatific vision. Rather, the spiritual senses discussed seem the possession of the saints *in via*. See Cross, "Thomas Aquinas," 187.

26. See Karl Rahner, "The Doctrine of the 'Spiritual Senses' in the Middle Ages," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 106; Boyd Taylor Coolman, *Knowing God by Experience: The Spiritual Senses in the Theology of William of Auvergne* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 113n10. Elsewhere, Boyd Coolman underscores how the doctrine of the mystical body underwrites the theology of the spiritual senses throughout the twelfth century, including William of St. Thierry, Hugh of St. Victor, Hilbert, Hervaeus, Peter Lombard, and especially Alexander of Hales. He also notes the uniqueness of

new and vexed discussion when he maintains that Origen (and the *Glossa*) contradicts Augustine. In *Epistle* 187, Augustine develops the metaphor of bodily sense perception to explain the distinction of Christ the Head, in whom alone the “the fullness of divinity dwells” (Col 2:9), from his members. Just as a physical head possess all five senses but only touch operates in the rest of the body, so too the Headship of Christ’s assumed humanity is of a singular grace far exceeding any of his members. Lombard appeals to Augustine in maintaining that the members of Christ’s mystical body only possess the spiritual sense of touch. The distinction Aquinas proposes is that the members of the mystical body *act* with Christ’s spiritual senses, but that the proper nature of the spiritual senses belong exclusively to Christ the Head. This permits Aquinas to affirm with Origen (and the *Glossa*) that Christ’s members fully participate in all the spiritual senses of the Head and affirm with Lombard (and Augustine) the uniqueness of Christ’s assumed humanity.

Richard Cross maintains that Thomas does not have an account of “spiritual senses” as a distinct faculty for apprehending spiritual realities. He holds that “sensory language is not evidently anything other than metaphorical.”²⁷ This seems to run contrary to Thomas’s theology on two counts. First, the spiritual senses are metaphorical only on the supposition that the new “life” of baptism is also metaphorical (i.e., not ontological). But the relation between natural and supernatural life is analogous rather than metaphorical. Baptism gives a real and new supernatural life that is analogous to and continuous with natural life. As natural life is equipped with sense perception, so too supernatural life is equipped with spiritual senses. Thomas argues that although the spiritual senses are “first and principally” senses of the soul, the unity of body and soul entails that spiritual sense operate “secondarily” in the body in an “instrumental” mode.²⁸ Second, the spiritual senses of the members of Christ’s mystical body are a participation in the sense and movement of the spiritual Head. As such, the spiritual senses can be metaphorical only on the supposition that the doctrine of the *corpus*

Lombard’s controversial opinion proposed in *Sent.* 3, d. 13. See “Alexander of Hales,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 121–39.

27. Cross, “Thomas Aquinas,” 186.

28. *ST* III, q. 8, a. 2.

mysticum as a whole is metaphorical.²⁹ Thomas is clear, however, that the relation between head and members is a real (rather than linguistic) relation. He writes, “The head influences the other members in two ways. First, by a certain intrinsic influence, inasmuch as motive and sensitive force flow from the head to the other members; secondly, by a certain exterior guidance, inasmuch as by sight and the senses, which are rooted in the head, man is guided in his exterior acts.”³⁰ The “intrinsic influence” of Christ the Head is his justifying power given in an unmediated manner to his members. The “exterior guidance” of Christ the Head is given to his members in a mediated mode, as bishops direct the members of the body, for example.

“NO ONE KNOWS WHO DOES NOT FIRST TASTE”

Commenting on Psalm 34 [33]:8 (“O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet”), Thomas offers greater detail on how the spiritual senses operate distinctly as *experiences* of God, which coalesce in a type of spiritual sensorium.³¹

29. Admittedly, Thomas does describe the mystical body as “metaphorically called one body” (*corpus similitudinarie dictum*). But he does so in contrast to a “natural body.” The mystical body, like a domestic or civil multitude, borrows the term “body” to express an “ordered multitude” (*ST* III, q. 8, a. 1). But this does not entail that the term “mystical body” is a linguistic contrivance. The mystical body is still a “real” body. Helpful here is the medieval theological articulation of the *triforme corpus Christi* that distinguished between (1) “physical body” of the incarnate Christ, (2) the “mystical body” of the Eucharist, (3) and the “real body” of the Church. (The designations “mystical” and “real” were reversed on account of the Berengar controversy, so that the Eucharist was subsequently held to be the “real body” in distinction to the “mystical body” of the Church.) Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

30. *ST* III, q. 8, a. 6.

31. This sensorium is perhaps best understood as a spiritual analogue to the inner sense or *sensus communis*. A number of times, Thomas refers to the *sensus interior* in a way that corresponds to his account of the *sensus communis* (or common sense). The *sensus communis* mediates between the lower power of the exterior senses and the higher power of intellect. It can be considered in relation to both. First, with respect to the external senses, it is passive and receptive. The *sensus communis* is responsible for sensory unification, simultaneously integrating the various external sense experiences into a coherent whole. Second, the *sensus communis* is proximate to the higher power of the intellect and on account of this affinity participates in the power of understanding, which it exercises when it judges the deliverances of the senses. As such, a hierarchal chain structures Thomas’s process of cognition, which proceeds from the material external senses to the immaterial internal sense (*sensus communis*) and, finally, to the spiritual power of the intellect. The relevant texts are spread throughout Thomas’s

When the Psalmist says *taste and see how sweet*, he urges an experience.... [Regarding taste] he does two things: first he urges the experience; second he describes the effect of the experience, when he says *and see how*. And so he says *taste and see*, etc. Now the experience of anything comes through the senses but in different ways, depending on whether the object is close or at some distance. If it is removed at a distance (*de absente*), then the experience of it comes through sight, smell or hearing. If it is close (*de praesente*), then touch and taste come into play, but each in its own way. For touch senses the outside (*de extrinseca*) of the object, whereas taste senses the inside (*de intrinseca*). Now God is not far from us nor outside us, but rather He is in us, as Jeremiah 14 says: *You are in us, O Lord*. Thus the experience of divine goodness is called tasting (*experientia divinae bonitatis dicitur gustatio*).... Next he shows that the effect of this experience is twofold: the certitude of understanding (*certitudo intellectus*) and the security of love (*securitas affectus*). With respect to the first effect he says *see*. For in corporeal things, something is first seen and then tasted, but in spiritual things something is first tasted and then seen, because no one knows who does not first taste: and for this reason he first says "taste," and then "see."³²

The spiritual senses allow for experiential knowledge of God but according to a differentiated mode of experience, depending on the kind of sense that is involved. Spiritual sight, smell, and hearing apprehend divine reality at a distance—they grasp reality remote from us (*de absente*). Touch and taste, by contrast, imply an immediacy and contact with divine realities proximate to us (*de praesente*).³³ The intimacy of the soul indwelt by the divine persons

corpus: *Summa contra Gentiles* I, c. 61; *De Ver.* 15, 1; *ST* I, q. 78, a. 4, ad 2; I, q. 77, a. 3, obj. 4 and ad 4; I, q. 57, a. 2; *Questiones disputate de anima*, 13 obj. 15 and ad 15; 20 obj. 17 and ad 17. Traditional Thomistic interpretation of the *sensus communis* includes Mark Gaffney, *The Psychology of the Internal Senses* (St. Louis: Herder, 1942); George Klubertanz, *Notes on the Philosophy of Human Nature* (St. Louis: St. Louis University Press, 1949); H. D. Gardeil, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 3, *Psychology* (St. Louis: Herder, 1956). A helpful overview is Stephen Laumakis, "The Sensus Communis Reconsidered," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82 (2008): 429–43.

32. In *psalmos* 33, n. 9, ed. S. Frettté, *Doctoris angelici divi Thomae Aquinatis opera omnia*, 34 vols. (Paris: Vivès, 1871–80), 18:419. Translation mine, drawing on Gregory Froelich, "The Aquinas Translation Project," accessed October 28, 2020, <http://hosted.desales.edu/w4/philtheo/loughlin/ATP/index.html>, and Cross, "Thomas Aquinas," 188.

33. The paring of touch and taste goes back to Aristotle, for whom each sense correlates to one of the four elements: we see with water, hear with air, smell with fire, and touch with earth. Taste is considered a species of touch. Here Aristotle makes a fascinating remark germane to the topic of experiential knowledge: "This explains why the sensory organ of both touch and taste is closely related to the heart. For the heart, as being the hottest of all the bodily parts, is the counterpoise of the brain" (*De Sensu* 438b30–439a3). In treating of the spiritual senses, Thomas not only follows Aristotle in holding taste and touch together, but also seems to transpose Aristotle's physiognomic insight regarding the heart as the seat of taste and touch to a spiritual register. Connatural knowledge is a knowledge of the heart that operates through spiritual touch and taste.

and animated by the gifts of the Spirit suggests that touch and taste better express the soul's experiential knowledge of divine realities. Thomas advances a further distinction between these last two spiritual senses. Touch apprehends divine realities outside of us (*de extrinseca*), whereas taste apprehends divine realities within (*de intrinseca*). The interiority of the experience of God in the soul is the reason the psalmist enjoins the believer to *taste* God. The divine goodness—which is God himself—is savored within: "Thus the experience of divine goodness is called tasting (*experientia divinae bonitatis dicitur gustatio*)."

It is telling that here Thomas prioritizes the senses of taste and touch to express the immediacy of the soul's experience of God. In this respect, he does not adopt the traditional philosophic hierarchy of the senses that proceeds from the "lowly" bodily senses of taste and touch to the "higher" spiritual senses of hearing and vision. Aquinas departs (at least in this instance) from an established pattern of articulating the hierarchy of the spiritual sense that emerged with Origen and was adopted by Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Bonaventure. This broadly Platonic pattern held the "intellectual" senses of sight and hearing to be more appropriate to express how we know the immaterial God than the "corporeal" senses of touch or taste that are eminently somatic and often associated with the dangers of bodily pleasure.³⁴

34. The distinction between the higher intellectual senses and the lower corporeal senses goes back to classical philosophy (Cf. *Timaeus* 47). Aristotle identifies touch and taste with "animal" senses as opposed to the "human" senses of seeing and hearing (*On the Soul*, 413–29). Christian discourse of spiritual sensation evinces significant exceptions to this hierarchy. Mystical writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Hadewijch of Brabant, Jan Ruusbroec, and others seem to prefer taste and touch to express their experiential knowledge of God. And even among figures such as Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, who in the main favor seeing and hearing as expression of the soul's union with God, one can discover significant exceptions. Cf. Gordon Rudy, *The Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002); Gavriluk and Coakley, *Spiritual Senses*; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Fessio, SJ, and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982–89), 365–80; Mariette Canévet, "Sens spirituel," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, 14:598–617. Boyd Coolman has demonstrated the priority of the spiritual sense of touch for Alexander of Hales: "He arranges them on a continuum of proximity to their object: vision and audition are most remote; smell, taste, and touch are respectively closer to their objects. Tellingly, he does not construct a vertical hierarchy here of 'lower' to 'higher' senses. He observes, rather, a progression from faith's vision and audition of divine *veritas*, through hope's olfaction of divine things, to charity's taste and especially touch of divine *bonitas*, a movement from the most distant to the most intimate and certain knowledge of God." Coolman, "Alexander of Hales," 128.

Thomas typically follows the traditional hierarchy of the senses, prioritizing seeing and hearing on account of their exalted place in the discovery of knowledge. Thomas offers three reasons why

After considering the psalmist's exhortation to experience the divine goodness by taste, Thomas considers the effect of this experience as having bearing on the "certainty of the intellect" (*certitudo intellectus*) and the "security of the affect" (*securitas affectus*). Here we touch on the difficult question raised earlier: Does experiential or connatural knowledge of God belong more properly to the intellect or the will? In the question on wisdom (*ST* II-II, q. 45), Thomas gives a succinct answer: "The wisdom that is a gift has a cause in the will, viz., charity, but it has its essence in the intellect."³⁵ Experiential knowledge of God is certainly a type of *knowledge*, but it is a "loving knowledge"—a knowledge of divine love and knowledge *by means* of divine love. It involves both the will and the intellect. While it belongs to the intellect to illumine, it belongs to the will to move the intellect. Love pulls the object of affection to itself; it focuses the intellect, giving it greater attention and interest in the object of its delight. We might say that the "loving taste" of the will carries the intellect toward its object as something experienced.³⁶

In the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Thomas considers the power of divine inspiration given to Dionysius's master, Hierotheus, which was more acute and penetrating

Aristotle's claim for the superiority of sight at the outset of the *Metaphysics* is true. First, sight knows in a more perfect way because the operation of vision is the most spiritual and immaterial of the senses. Only sight involves a "spiritual modification" in that the eye receives the immaterial form of color. Sight alone is exempt from the "material modification" of both the sense organ and the medium in the process of sensation. As such, sight operates in a more spiritual manner, enabling it to judge sensible objects in a more certain and perfect mode than the other senses (*Metaphysics* I.1.6). Second, sight has the capability to obtain and deliver more information than the other senses (*Metaphysics* I.1.7). Finally, sight (along with touch) apprehends the sense object itself rather than a secondary effect. Hearing and smell only apprehend the accidental qualities that flow away from the sense object. (Thus it is the odor of the food, not the food itself, that I smell. Likewise, the sound of footsteps indicate to me a passing person, but the person is not the sound of the footsteps that I hear.) While the proper objects of sound and smell diminish with time, the proper objects of touch and sight remain: "The judgment of sight and touch is extended to things themselves, whereas the judgment of hearing and smell is extended to those accidents which flow from things and not to things themselves" (*Metaphysics* I.1.8).

35. *ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2.

36. Marín-Sola remarks, "Love excites and concentrates our attention, it makes one dwell on the loved object more constantly and with greater fixedness. This concentration of attention is tantamount to an increase in cognitive power.... The lover fixes his gaze intensely, and even exclusively on the beloved; he thus receives impressions with great force and greater purity, and discerns more quickly certain properties or features that others fail to notice, or come to notice much more later. It is the Beloved Disciple who before all others recognizes the risen Christ on the shore, and exclaims: 'It is the Lord'" (*Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, 400–401).

than is commonly made to many, "not only learning, but also suffering divine things"—that is, not only receiving the knowledge (*scientia*) of divine things in the intellect, but also by loving, [he] was united to them through affect (*per affectum*). For passion appears to pertain more to appetite than to cognition, for realities known are in the knower according to the knower's mode and not according to the mode of the realities known, but the appetite moves to the realities according to the mode by which they are in themselves, and so in a way he is moved (*afficitur*) to the very realities.³⁷

A gap between knower and known defines the nature of *scientia*; I grasp the cognitive object not in itself but in a new manner, "according to the mode of the knower." The intellect desires its object under a new ratio of "knowable," entailing a residual duality that is ever present between knower and known. This cogitative gap does not apply to the will, which does not seek a distinct intellectual account of its object of affection, but seeks rather to penetrate and unite itself to the very object of its affection. It does not want to engage the object as "knowable" but to "experience" it.

Love holds the object desired under the light of the intellect, disposing the intellect to its illuminating task. But even on the supposition that love moves the intellect to greater attention, specifying its illuminating task, surely we cannot say that love *knows*. Can affection add anything to intellectual illumination? While it is true that only the intellect knows, the will enters into the formal causality of knowing. John of St. Thomas helps to unpack Aquinas's theology on this point:

The will does not formally illumine the intellect. However, it can causally furnish the intellect with greater light, in so far as love makes the object more united to the soul, more immediately attached to it and tasted by it. Thus the object is presented anew to the intellect with a different suitability and proportion to the will. The object is felt as if by an immediate experience.... Thus the intellect proceeds to judge of things and divine truths according as it knows them in this loving experience of God.³⁸

While the intellect apprehends the object of knowledge at a remove, as distinct from itself, love apprehends the object of its affection by uniting with

37. *DDN*, c. 2, lect. 4, no. 191, as quoted by Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union with God*, 417.

38. John of St. Thomas, *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, 4.15 (p. 180).

it.³⁹ And so connatural or experiential knowledge has its seat in the will; that is, it is driven by the impetus of love for union, even as its essence remains in the intellect inasmuch as it is a genuine knowledge.

Sight and hearing are standard conceptual metaphors for intellectual experience. By contrast, touch and taste are standard conceptual metaphors for affective experience. Perhaps this is because the former involve mediation. We see and hear things at a distance, mediated through air, light, water, or something else. Because knowledge engages its object at a distance—the intellect grasps reality extrinsic to itself—knowledge involves mediation. Touch and taste, by contrast, involve a direct, unmediated, and intimate union. The intellectual virtue of faith is typically allied with sight and hearing: its divine object is mediated (“through a glass dimly”). Faith comes through what is heard and is realized in seeing. Love, which has its seat in the will, is unmediated; it does not seek to know its object at a distance but desires union with it. Love desires to possess, to enjoy that which it loves. And so the unique type of divine knowledge that is experiential or connatural is not content to know God through the intellect, at a remove, by way of faith (through hearing and seeing), but aims also at a knowledge generated by the experience of love (through touch and taste). In Thomas’s words, it “has its cause in the will, viz., charity, but it has its essence in the intellect.” It is for this reason, contends Thomas, that the order “taste and see” proposed by the psalm is fitting. Unlike material reality, which I first see and then taste (e.g., I first see the apple and then reach out to taste it), the love of spiritual things is prior to my knowledge of them: “In spiritual things something is first tasted and then seen, because no one knows who does not first taste: and for this reason he first says ‘taste,’ and then ‘see.’”⁴⁰

Aquinas’s theology of the spiritual senses is the outworking of his conception of the *corpus mysticum*—of the intimacy between the Head and the

members. The soul that because of baptismal incorporation into Christ is made the terminus of the invisible missions and the recipient of the gifts of the Spirit apprehends divine things with new spiritual senses. These senses obtain perfectly for Christ the Head and are participated in by his members. The immediacy and intimacy of such experiential knowledge of God in this life are the reason Thomas prioritizes the spiritual sense of taste above the others. And indeed he contends that, at least for spiritual reality, “no one knows who does not first taste.”

39. In the question on charity (*ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 1, ad 2), Thomas remarks that while charity’s proper seat is the will rather than the intellect, it “is not alien to reason” but has an “affinity to reason.”

40. In *psalmos* 33, n. 9. A similar motif is found in Bernard of Clairvaux: “Doubtless the Lord is sweetness (*suavitas*), but unless you have tasted, you will not see (*nisi gustaveris, non videbis*). For it is said: ‘Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.’ This is hidden manna, it is the new name which no one knows except him who receives it. Not learning, but anointing teaches it; not knowledge (*scientia*), but conscience (*conscientia*) grasps it.” Bernard, *Ad clericos de conversione*, sermon 13, par. 25 (Leclercq, Talbot, and Rochais, *Sancti Bernardi opera*, 4:99–100; trans. Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation*, 63, slightly altered).