

DIVINE *INSTINCTUS* AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS AQUINAS

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Abstract

The principal way Aquinas comes to articulate the movement proper to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in his mature corpus is with the term *divinus instinctus*. Aristotle is the source for this articulation. For Aristotle, a “divine instinct” explains how some fortunate souls seem consistently to move through life in the right direction. They are impelled by an external, supernatural force. Aquinas discovered in Aristotle’s “divine instinct” a fruitful way to articulate the external, divine agency that belongs to gift movement in the life of the believer. I argue that Aquinas radically transforms the Aristotelian conception of “divine instinct” making it amenable to the Christian doctrine of the graced movement that belongs to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the *divinus instinctus* provides Aquinas with a strong account of divine agency (*auxilium*) necessary to move the believer towards divine things. However, Aquinas shears this doctrine of the deterministic associations it has in Aristotle. Rather than short-circuit free will, the divine instinct elevates human freedom.

Introduction

Aquinas defines the gifts of the Holy Spirit “as something given by God according to the order of His own motion (*datur a Deo in ordine ad motionem ipsius*), something, to wit, that makes man to follow well the promptings (*instinctus*) of God.”¹ The decisive feature of the gifts, then, is their unique *moving* principle, namely the Holy Spirit. The primary way Aquinas expresses the divine *motio* proper to the gifts is with the term *instinctus*. In the question devoted to the gifts of the Holy Spirit (ST I-II q. 68), *instinctus* appears sixteen times. The gifts express the *instinctus divinus* by which a person is both *moved* according to the *superiori instinctu Spiritus Sancti* and equipped to *follow* the *instinctum Spiritus Sancti*.

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¹ ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1. ad. 3 (translation modified). The Latin text of the *Summa* is from *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia: Iussu impensaue, Leonis XIII P.M. edita* (Ex typographia polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882); the translation is that of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers, 1947). All other texts from Aquinas are drawn from the *Opera omnia* published by the Aquinas Institute unless otherwise noted.

I contend that the immediate textual source for Aquinas's doctrine of *instinctus* is Aristotle. However, Aquinas substantially transforms this inheritance. For Aristotle, the *instinctus divinus* refers to a determined and alien principle of operation that overpowers free will. By contrast, in Aquinas's theology of the gifts, *instinctus* serves, I suggest, to *enable* free will. I will proceed in three movements. First, I will demonstrate the Aristotelian provenance of Aquinas's use of the term "instinct" in his theology of the gifts. Second, I will argue that the doctrine of the "divine instinct" serves Aquinas's intention to highlight the absolute primacy of the divine *auxilium* for supernatural life. This becomes evident when we analyze a conspicuous comparable theological use of "instinct," namely Aquinas's treatment of the first movements of faith. The settled position of Aquinas's mature theology is that both the "beginnings of faith" (*initium fidei*) and the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are best accounted for with the doctrine of the *instinctus divinus*. In both cases, a "divine instinct" expresses God's initiative in the life of grace. Third, despite its Aristotelian provenance and the manner in which Aquinas uses "divine instinct" to underscore the primacy of divine grace in supernatural life, Aquinas radically transforms the doctrine, shearing it of the deterministic associations it has in Aristotle. Rather than being averse to free will, the *instinctus divinus* is constitutive thereof.

Divine *Instinctus* and the Aristotelian *De Bona Fortuna*

Perhaps we most readily associate the term "instinct" with the behavior of non-rational animals. We commonly contrast an "instinctive approach" to a "rational approach." And, to the extent that instinct bypasses rational inquiry, it also lacks free will. Consider the definition proposed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

An innate propensity in organized beings (esp. in the lower animals), varying with the species, and manifesting itself in acts which appear to be rational, but are performed without conscious design or intentional adaptation of means to ends.²

The OED confirms our typical association of the term "instinct" with action deprived of reason and free will ("appear to be rational" and "without ... intention").

Aquinas's most common use of the word "instinct" conforms to this definition. "Instinct" refers especially to animal behavior: it is non-deliberative, unreflective, and reflexive; in a word, action that proceeds apart from discursive reason.³ Of the 252 times *instinctus* appears in the Thomistic corpus, 94 are in relation to "natural instinct" (*instinctus naturae*).⁴ Representative is *ST I* q. 83 a. 1. Aquinas contrasts the judgment of beasts from the "free judgment" (*libero iudicio*) of rational animals. The "free judgment" proper to human agents, writes Aquinas, "is not from a natural

² https://www.oed.com/dictionary/instinct_n?tab=meaning_and_use#379683

³ For Aquinas, *instinctus* frequently designates "a drive, inclination, prompting or urging inherent in the very nature of a being and impelling it to action. ... [it refers] abstractly to the dynamic impetus of the nature as a whole." *Summa Theologiae: Volume 24, The Gifts of the Spirit: 1a2ae. 68-70*. Vol. 24, edited by Edward O'Connor (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138. See also Robert Greene, "Instinct of Nature: Natural Law, Synderesis, and the Moral Sense," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997): 182-85; John Meinert, *The Love of God Poured Out: Grace and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Emmaus Academic, 2018): 89-94.

⁴ Greene, "Instinct of Nature," 182.

instinct (*ex naturali instinctu*), but from some act of comparison in the reason.”⁵ Natural instinct refers particularly to the cognition of animals moved only by sense judgement.⁶

We might, therefore, be perplexed by Aquinas’s use of the term “instinct”—associated with non-rational creatures lacking free will—to articulate the operation of the gifts in the lives of believers. Nevertheless, in *Summa Theologiae* (ST I-II q. 68)—the final, mature treatise on the gifts—Aquinas decisively settles on the term “instinct.” The use of this term is not only innovative for Aquinas but introduces a novum to medieval theology in general. Aquinas’s teacher Albert the Great is representative of the preceding scholastic tradition that was quite content to retain the traditional language of “inspiration” to express the moving action of the gifts of the Spirit.⁷

Aquinas’s use of *instinctus* is not only innovative, but could even be taken as subversive—after all, it is a pagan author, Aristotle, who sets the terms for its use. At the very beginning of the article, after observing that Isaiah teaches that seven gifts are “infused by God” and in us by “Divine inspiration” (appealing to Isaiah 1:5: “The Lord ... hath opened my ear, and I do not resist”), Aquinas substitutes Aristotle and instinct for Isaiah and inspiration:

Even the Philosopher says in the chapter *On Good Fortune* (*Ethic. Eudem.*, vii, 8) that for those who are moved by Divine instinct (*moventur per instinctum divinum*), there is no need to take counsel according to human reason, but only to follow their inner instinct (*interiorem instinctum*), since they are moved by a principle higher (*meliori principio*) than human reason.⁸

This is a most unexpected transition. Effortlessly Aquinas modulates from Isaiah’s “divine inspiration” to Aristotle’s “divine instinct.” And, thereafter, the term “inspiration” is dropped altogether in the analysis of the gifts.⁹ But surely the Angelic Doctor would admit a world of difference between the “divine instinct” of the pagan philosopher and the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s gifts, which prompt divine initiatives, protect from spiritual dangers, and help ascertain spiritual truth? In a word, yes. Indeed, we will see how Aquinas transforms a pagan notion of *instinctus* such that it becomes theologically amenable to articulate his theology of the gifts.

⁵ ST I q. 83 a. 1. For a similar contrast between natural instinct and human free will see ST I q. 18 a. 3; q. 78 a. 4; q. 115 a. 1. See A. Leo White, “Instinct and Custom,” *The Thomist* 66 (2002): 577–605.

⁶ Nevertheless, natural instinct does impinge on human beings. In this respect, Aquinas points to pre-rational activity: human sensitive faculties that are not yet taken up by reason, for example, the nursing child seeking his mother’s breast without being taught (II *Sent* 20 q. 2 a. 2 ad 5). Likewise, the first act of the will, which comes not from deliberation and the judgment of reason but derives *ex instinctu naturae* (ST I-II q. 17 a. 5). It is, likewise, *ex instinctu naturae* that all necessarily desire happiness (ST I q. 78 a. 4). Finally, Aquinas’s discussion of natural law witnesses several references to natural instinct. It is in this respect that Aquinas observes, “Under the state of the law of nature man was moved by inward instinct (*solo interiori instinctu*) and without any outward law, to worship God” (ST III q. 60 a. 5 ad. 3). The common denominator to these uses of natural instinct is their non-rational character. Such instincts might participate in reason (as they exist in humans or in natural law), but they remain primordial and dispositive to reason as its stimulus and source. And, to operate apart from reason is, for Aquinas, to operate apart from free will.

⁷ See O’Connor, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 131.

⁸ ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1 (translation modified).

⁹ There is one brief reappearance of “inspiration” in q. 68 a. 3 obj. 3. A fuller account of the relation between *inspiratio* and *instinctus* would attend to their joint use in the questions on prophecy (ST II-II qq. 171–174).

It is fruitful to look more carefully at the Aristotelian text to which Aquinas first refers when he opens the question on the gifts. In the text that came to be known as *De Bona Fortuna*, Aristotle writes,

Those are called fortunate who succeed in whatever they undertake, without using reason [*sine ratione*]. And it is no good for them to deliberate, for they have within themselves a kind of principle or starting point better than mind and deliberation [*melius intellectu et consilio*]. (On the other hand, those who have reason do not have this.) They have inspiration (*enthousiasmon*) [*divinos instinctus*], but they are not capable of deliberation. For without using reason [*sine ratione*] they attain even that which is characteristic of the prudent and wise—swift divination. Only we must not specify this as the divination of reason. Rather, some attain this quick divinization through experience, others by the practice of observation, but these men by use of the divine.¹⁰

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* VIII, 2. 1248a24–38. *De Bona Fortuna* consists of Latin translations of two chapters from two distinct works from the Aristotelian corpus that circulated in the thirteenth century: the *Magna Moralia* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. The manuscript tradition of *De Bona Fortuna* is elusive. It is not even clear whether the text was originally composed in Greek or Latin. Subsequent Latin editions from the fifteenth century are almost unintelligible. Valérie Cordonier recently published a critical edition of *De Bona Fortuna*. See *Aristoteles Latinus, Ethica Eudemia (fragmentum); Liber de bona fortuna, Translatio Moerbekana, Recensio Vulgata, textus praevious praeeparatus a Valérie Cordonier*. *Aristoteles Latinus Database, Release 3 (ALD-3)* (Brill, 2016). See also O'Connor, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 143–44. Mikko Posti maintains that the *De Bona Fortuna* was frequently referenced in medieval theologies of providence, but that Aquinas's use of it was unique: "Thomas Aquinas was the first medieval author to argue that LDBF [*Liber de Bona Fortuna*] demonstrated that Aristotle thought God had providence for particular beings." *Medieval Theories of Divine Providence: 1250-1350* (Brill, 2020), 197. See also, Valérie Cordonier, "La Doctrine Aristotélécienne de la Providence Divine selon Thomas d'Aquin," in *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, edited by P. D'Hoine, G. van Riel (Leuven University Press, 2014), 495–515, esp. 508–09. *Ibid.*, "Sauver le Dieu du Philosophe – Albert le Grand, Thomas d'Aquin, Guillaume de Moerbeke et l'Invention du 'Liber de Bona Fortuna' comme Alternative Autorisée à l'Interprétation Averroïste de la Théorie Aristotélécienne de la Providence Divine," in *Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, edited by L. Bianchi (Brepols, 2011), 65–114.

In an appendix to his translation of the questions on the gifts, Edward O'Connor has helpfully provided extensive selections from the two Aristotelian texts that constitute *De Bona Fortuna*. It is likely that Aquinas knew these texts in their original form and that they informed his thinking about the primacy of the divine initiative in the life of grace. In addition to the text quoted above, two other texts from *De Bona Fortuna* are particularly relevant: "Good fortune is, therefore, an irrational nature; for the fortunate man is one who has an unreasoning drive (*hormē*) towards good things and obtains them. But this pertains to nature. For by nature there is implanted in the soul something by which we are driven (*hormēn*) quite without the use of reason toward that which is to our advantage. And should anyone ask a person for whom things are thus, 'Why do you see fit to do so?' He replies, 'I don't know; it just looks good to me.' His case is like that of men inspired (*enthousiazontes*) for these also have an unreasoning drive (*hormē*) to do something. (*Magna moralia* II, 8. 1207a36–64)"

"If, therefore, some men have good natures—just as people of musical ability have a natural aptitude for singing even without having been trained—and without using reason are carried or driven (*hormōsin*) in the way that nature itself inclines, so that they desire the right thing in the right way at the right time, they will succeed even though they are foolish and irrational, just as the others will sing well although they are not able to teach others how to do it. Such men are fortunate men, who, without using reason, succeed most of the time. (*Eudemian Ethics* VIII, 2. 1247b21–28)"

The translations of the *Magna Moralia* and the *Eudemian Ethics* are from Edward O'Connor, "Appendix 6," in *Summa Theologiae: Volume 24, The Gifts of the Spirit* (Blackfriars, 1973): 143–44. The Latin terms in square brackets—note especially *divinos instinctus*—come from the 1274 Latin manuscript of *De Bona Fortuna*, selections of which were published by Thomas Deman: "Le 'Liber de bona fortuna' dans la théologie de S. Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 17 (1928): 40. See also, Max Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Matthias-Grünwald, 1962), 106–8. John Bowlin, *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Here Aristotle is remarking on the phenomenon of “lucky people”—those who seem always to land on their feet, who enjoy great success despite their rather unremarkable talents or effort. What explains such good fortune? It is not art, for such people lack pronounced native or cultivated talent. Nor can it be attributed to the gods, because the gods do not smile on the imprudent and irrational. Although neither prudent nor wise, they consistently make prudent and wise choices that lead to their good fortune. They land on such judgments not by discursive reason and deliberation. No, another principle is at work in them: they are seized and driven by “the divine in us.” A divine *instinctus* is at work in them, which moves them beyond the capacities of their native reason.¹¹

¹¹ Perhaps these more mystical flourishes in Aristotle stem from his appreciation for the Platonic notion of divine direction given through *daimones*. The character of Socrates is marked in a special way by his attunement to his personal *daimonion*: he is “daimonic and wonderful” (δαμονίῳ καὶ θαυμαστῷ) (*Sym.* 219c). Socrates’s *daimonion* expresses itself as a “sign” or a “voice” that addresses Socrates directly to provide immediate council and warning (see *Apology* 40a-b, 41d; *Euthyphro* 3b; *Euthydemus* 272e-273a; *Theaetetus* 151a; *Republic* 496c; *Phaedrus* 242c-e; *Alcibiades* 1.103a-b; and Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.14, 4.8.6). When giving a defense for his strange way of life at his trial, Socrates appeals to his *daimonion* who establishes him in his vocation to live privately as a philosopher (as opposed to a life of public civic service). Socrates states, “You have heard me give the reason for this in many places. I have a divine or spiritual sign which Melitus has ridiculed in his deposition. This began when I was a child. It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything. This is what has prevented me from taking part in public affairs. (*Apol.* 31c-d).” Socrates frequently appeals to this “customary divine sign” that guides his actions (*Euthydemus* 272e4; *Phaedrus* 242b9). This *daimonion* is an external authority that inveighs upon critical junctures of Socrates’s life. It functions principally as a negating authority—barring his way from a specific activity he was considering, prohibiting him from traversing down (what proves to be) a dangerous road. Socrates credits his *daimonion* with stopping him from addressing potential students until just the right moment (*Alc.* 1 103a) and the silence of his *daimonion* in the face of his impending execution assures Socrates that death is not an evil worth fearing (*Apol.* 40a-b).

The Thomistic notion of “divine instinct” finds few pagan analogues as proximate as Socrates’s *daimonion*. Mark McPherran describes Socrates’s *daimonion* as an “extra-rational” phenomenon that accompanies and complements his own native reason. (*The Religion of Socrates* [University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996], 189.) As such, Socrates admits—with particularly clarity at his trial—two complementary sources for his unparalleled wisdom: his rational, elenctic method (*elenchos*) and the mystical attunement he enjoys with his *daimonion*. A.A. Long contends, “What the divine sign gives to Socrates is not the kind of generalized true belief about moral concepts that Socrates sought by reasoning with his interlocutors, but intuitive certainty concerning the nonrectitude of a quite particular action he was contemplating. This intuitive certainty is something quite different from the full-blooded moral knowledge that Socrates consistently disclaimed having. (“How does Socrates’ divine sign communicate with him?” in *A Companion to Socrates*, edited by Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Wiley, 2009), 67.”

The “reasoning” of the elenctic method is distinct from the “intuitive certainty” of daimonic knowledge. They are distinct in their *source* and, therefore (to use the Thomistic lexicon), distinct in their *mode of operating*. If we can borrow the language of the *Scriptum*, the first proceeds in a “human mode” and the second in a “super human mode.”

The source of the Socratic *daimonion* is external, it intervenes from a divine realm but comes to inhere as an internal guide. In its mode of operating, the *daimonion* guides and directs through intuition (*noēsis*), which is, nonetheless intelligible (*logos*), perhaps even propositional. Such daimonic knowledge is also connatural knowledge. Long familiarity and experience with his *daimonion* (from childhood) give Socrates a habitual sense of how to proceed. He has come to trust the instinct of his *daimonion*.

The Platonic corpus proposes that one who has devoted his life to the pursuit of wisdom—i.e., the philosopher—is particularly alive to the presence of his personal *daimonion*; he has cultivated an acute divine instinct. As such, writes Plato, punning on *daimonion* and *eudaimonia*, the philosopher is already living an eschatological life: “Keeping well-ordered the *daimonion* (τὸν δαίμονα) that lives within him, a man is supremely happy (*εὐδαιμόνα εἶναι*)” (*Timaeus* 90c). In a word, attending to one’s *daimonion* allows for *eudaimonia*.

Aquinas's conception of the *divinus instinctus* has its immediate textual source in Aristotle. It is from the paragraph of *De Bona Fortuna* quoted above that Aquinas draws when he sets the stage for his theology of the gifts; it is there that we first witness the term *instinctus* (ST I-II q. 68 a. 1). It is Aristotle who proposes a "divine instinct" to account for a moving principle that operates (as Aristotle repeatedly says) "without the use of reason." An exterior "unreasoning drive" (*hormē*) possesses and impels some truly fortunate men. One who possesses this gift (or better, is possessed by it—*enthousiasmos*) is unable to account for its advent or its operation.¹² It lies beyond the ambit of reason and can, therefore, neither be received by teaching nor communicated by teaching—it is an *instinct*. In this way, explains Aristotle, it is like one with a genius for singing—he cannot explain it, he cannot account for how he comes to possess it, and finally, he cannot teach it to others. Aristotle's text opposes human action moved according to reason from human action moved according to the *instinctum divinum*. In this regard, Mikko Posti rightly observes that "Aquinas's interest in LDBF [*Liber De Bona Fortuna*] was largely based on its remarks on the need for a principle of willing outside the human being."¹³ It is fair to say that Aquinas's initial appeal to Aristotle's notion of a *divinus instinctus* when establishing his theology of the gifts in ST I-II q. 68 serves to advance a particularly strong account of divine agency.

The shock of discovering the traditional Christian noun *inspiratio* exchanged for *instinctus*—its provenance being Aristotle's discussions of *fortuna*—is not ours alone. As if it were an embarrassing secret, most translations hide the dominant role that "instinct" plays in Aquinas's theology of the gifts and do not render the term literally. In fact, one can quite easily read the entirety of ST I-II q. 68 and never see the term "divine instinct." The standard English Blackfriars translation is representative. "Divine instinct" has been rendered by the more indeterminate (and anemic) "divine

¹² In the quotations above, Aristotle consistently uses two terms that become essential to Stoic thought. First, *hormē*, which is a native, primordial drive or impulse that overcomes a person and according to which he acts. Second, *enthousiasmos* or "inspiration," which is a compound of *en-theos* such that its literal meaning is "possessed by god." The idea is that one so possessed comes to think and act under (or in) the power of a divine force—empowered by the "god in" you. We might consider *enthousiasmos* a pagan analogue to the Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν of St. Paul (Colossians 1:27). Greek Stoic terminology of *enthousiasmos* and *hormē* was rendered as *instinctus* by its Latin philosophic counterparts. The *Thesaurus linguae latinae* points to Cicero (*instinctu divino afflatusque*), Livy (*divino spiritu instinctus*), and Quintilian (*oracula quae instinctu divino afflatuque funduntur*). Pagan authors use the term *instinctus* to speak of a numinous force that stirs or incites human action, analogous perhaps to how we might speak of inspiration. See Max Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Matthias-Grünwald, 1962), 34–37. See also Robert Greene, "Instinct of Nature," 176; O'Connor, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 136. The most significant source for Aquinas, however, is Aristotle mediated through the composite work, *De bona fortuna*. See Deman, "Le 'Liber de bona fortuna,'" 38–58.

¹³ Posti, *Medieval Theories of Divine Providence: 1250–1350* (Brill, 2020), 211. SCG III c. 92 concerns the question, "How a Person is Favored by Fortune." The text contains multiple references to *De Bona Fortuna*. Other instances in Aquinas's corpus where the text is referenced include SCG III, c. 89; *De malo*, q. 3 a. 3; q. 6, a. 1; ST I, q. 82, a. 4; ST I-II q. 9, a. 4; q. 68 a. 1; q. 80, a. 1; q. 109, a. 2; *Quaestiones de quodlibet*, I^a 7; *De sortibus*, 4. These are listed in John Farrell, "St Thomas Aquinas' treatment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the *Summa Theologiae*," (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1984), 166.

prompting.”¹⁴ The opening of the body of the second article in the Blackfriars translation reads:

The gifts are perfections of man, whereby he is disposed so as to be amenable to the promptings of God (*instinctum divinum*). Wherefore in those matters where the prompting of reason (*instinctus rationis*) is not sufficient, and there is need for the prompting of the Holy Spirit (*spiritus sancti instinctus*), there is, in consequence, need for a gift.¹⁵

Why does the word “instinct” make modern translators uncomfortable? I would suggest the primary reason is that it connotes a conception of human action that is opposed to reason and, therefore, inimical to free will. (Humorously, Pinckaers observes, “Modern moralists have a deep distrust—which we could qualify as instinctive—for the very term instinct.”¹⁶) We will return to this concern in the last section of the essay.

Nevertheless, “instinct” is the term Aquinas uses. He employs the term deliberately, decisively, and repeatedly in his mature corpus. The principle with which we should begin is that Aquinas considered “instinct” the best—most precise—way to articulate how the divine *motio* proper to the gifts operates and that the term best expresses how human

¹⁴ Servais Pinckaers has also noted the softening of *instinctus* in modern translations. Father Drioux’s French translation of the *Summa theologiae* (Paris 1852) rendered *instinctus* as *impulsion*. The German *Thomasausgabe* used *Antrieb* rather than *Instinkt*. “Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit: Aquinas’s Doctrine of Instinctus,” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, edited by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 385n.1. John Berkman has also detailed the misrepresentation of *instinctus* in the standard Blackfriars translations of the *Summa*. He points out that while “*instinctus*” is simply translated as “instinct” through this translation an exception is made for “divine instinct” in the treatment of the gifts. A mechanistic conception of animal instinct as “hard-wired” biology explains the distaste for applying the term to human action, argues Berkman. But such a notion is not only contrary to sound biology, but fails to recognize that “instinct” is, for Aquinas, especially a *teleological* term. It refers “to actions that are oriented to some good for a human person or non-human animal.” “Aquinas’s Ethics beyond Thomistic Virtue Ethics: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Spiritual Instinct, and Complete Human Perfection,” *Nova et Vetera* 21 (2023): 55. Further, translating “*instinctus*” as “promptings” is problematic: “It is clear that *instinctus* is a stable, interior principle of motion, which neither ‘promptings’ nor ‘impulse’ connote. Furthermore, how can one translate *instinctus* as ‘promptings’ when *instinctus* is singular? Or as ‘impulse’, with its connotations of irrationality? *Instinctus divinis* surely cannot imply that!” Berkman, “Aquinas’s Ethics,” 59.

¹⁵ ST I-II q. 68 a. 2. *Summa Theologiae: Volume 24, The Gifts of the Spirit: 1a2ae. 68-70*. Vol. 24, edited by Edward O’Connor (Cambridge University Press, 2006). O’Connor explains his decision to translate *instinctus* with *prompting* (in the Blackfriars translation) was not intended to evoke the image of a theater assistant who feeds lines to a forgetful actor from behind the curtain. Rather, explains O’Connor, “prompting in the sense intended here means whatever stirs a man to a particular action, as in the question, what prompted you to do that?” (*Summa Theologiae: Volume 24, The Gifts of the Spirit*, 131). According to O’Connor, Aquinas chose the word *instinctus* because of its unspecified nature. Unlike *inspiration*, the term *instinctus* did not commit Aquinas to specify a particular mode in which the gifts operate. Indeed, *instinctus* “does not designate a type of action at all. It refers to that by which an action is provoked or elicited” (132). Aquinas’s choice of *instinctus* liberated him from all the medieval debates swirling about the word “inspiration” and, according to O’Connor, offered Aquinas a more generic affirmation that somehow the Holy Spirit was involved in bringing about human action (132). This is not wholly convincing, not least because Aquinas first uses the traditional theological term of art, “inspiration,” before replacing it with “instinct.” We are obliged to search for an account with more explanatory valence, taking as our starting point the conviction that Aquinas had a specific theological intention (rather than a lack of specificity) he sought to convey with the term “instinct.”

¹⁶ Pinckaers, “Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit,” 385. Consider Andrew Pinsent’s remark on “instinct” in his volume on Aquinas’s theology of the virtues and the gifts: “The connotations evoked by the modern word ‘instinct’ are unhelpful, given the association of the word with the behavior of animals rather than the union of persons.” Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (Routledge, 2013), 38. On the other hand, Pierre Rousselot commenting on Aquinas’s notion regarding moral judgments by way of connaturality remarks, “If from below it seems to continue the instinctive knowledge of animals, it offers, if we look from above, an image of the intuition of angels, which is always essential, concrete and sympathetic.” Pierre Rousselot, “Petit Théorie du Développement du Dogme (1909),” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 53 (1965): 377 (translation mine).

loving and knowing becomes disposed to respond to divine agency. In sum, as Aquinas receives the term from Aristotle, “divine instinct” denotes a powerful supernatural agency operating on the human person as an exterior moving principle.¹⁷

¹⁷ A striking example of how Aquinas considers the *instinctus divinus* to operate in the life of the believer is found in his *Liber contra Doctrinam Retrahentium a Religione*. This polemical work was written to defend the mendicant way of life and to advocate for the spiritual and salvific value of a life devoted to poverty in the service of Christ. Central to Aquinas’s argument is that those whom God calls to a religious life have an obligation to follow this admonition at once. This refers not only to Christ’s universal, external, and audible admonitions, but especially to the Holy Spirit’s interior call that is heard by the heart alone. If one is called to religious life, he should not tarry by seeking out many advisors, explains Aquinas. Once called “*ex instinctu divino*,” the believer ought not engage in a belabored discernment process to determine the nature and status of his call (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9). Instead, he is bound “... unhesitatingly and unresistingly, to obey the interior whisper, whereby the Holy Spirit changes the heart of man. Hence, in Isaiah 50:5, it is said by the mouth of the prophet, or rather of Christ himself: *the Lord God has opened my ear* (i.e. by interior inspiration [*interius inspirando*]) and I do not resist. I have not gone back, as it were forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before (Phil 3:13). St. Paul again says, *whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God* (Rom 8:14). The Gloss of St. Augustine has the following comment: *such men do not perform anything, but act under the impulse of grace*. But he who resists or hesitates, does not act by the impulse of the Holy Spirit (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9).”

We will see in the third section that Romans 8:14—being “led by the Spirit”—is the preeminent text to which Aquinas appeals when he discusses the *instinctus divinus*. A host of other Scriptural texts coalesce around this verse in Aquinas’s mind. Each text underscores the primary agency of the Spirit in moving the receptive believer according to a divine instinct: “It is then the distinguishing mark of the sons of God to be carried forward by grace to better things, without waiting for counsel. This impulse of grace is alluded to in the prophet Isaiah, *when he comes as a violent stream, which the spirit of the Lord drives on* (Isa 59:59). St. Paul teaches us that this impulse of grace is to be obeyed: *walk in the Spirit* (Gal 5:16), and again, *if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law* (Gal 5:25). St. Stephen thus reproached certain men, *you always resist the Holy Spirit* (Acts 7:51). St. Paul says, *do not extinguish the Spirit* (1 Thess 5:19). On which words, the Gloss comments: *if the Holy Spirit should at any time reveal something to a certain man, do not forbid him to make known what he has heard*. Now, the Holy Spirit gives his revelations not only by teaching man what he ought to speak, but by suggesting to him what he ought to do (John 14). When, therefore, a man is inspired by this Holy Spirit to enter religious life (*instinctu spiritus sancti movetur ad religionis ingressum*), it is his duty to follow the inspiration at once, without waiting to take counsel of human advisers. This is shown us by the words of the prophet Ezekiel, *wherever the spirit went, they went, and the wheels rose along with them* (Ezek 1:20) (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9).”

Aquinas attributes the call to enter religious life in a special way to the *instinctu spiritus sancti*. This divine instinct takes priority and initiative in moving the believer towards a higher state of life. And yet, the *instinctu spiritus sancti* operates sweetly, in accord with the intellectual and volitional nature of the believer whose own “wheels” ascend smoothly with the Spirit.

Having treated the moving power of the *divinus instinctus* in Scripture, Aquinas turns to a catena of quotations from the Church Fathers, each of which underscores the urgency of following Christ’s interior call immediately, prescinding from the solicitation of counsel. Aquinas is fascinated by the examples Augustine advances in the *Confessions* regarding the spiritual dangers of not responding directly to the fierce urgency of the Spirit’s call. Aquinas appeals to Augustine’s *On the Predestination of the Saints* where the Bishop of Hippo quotes John 6:45: *everyone who has heard of the Father and has learned, comes to me*. This divine learning takes place in the interior school of the heart, explains Augustine. It is there that the Father teaches his children and is heard by them. This effective, invincible, interior teaching of the Holy Spirit is the work of grace. Next Aquinas turns to Gregory the Great who also highlights the efficacy of the *inspirationis internae*: “As soon as he touches the heart, he teaches it. His touch is teaching. He changes the human mind as soon as he enlightens it; and the man taught by him at once forsakes what he was, in order to show what he was not” (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9). The conclusion of this patristic testimony is unambiguous: “He who hesitates to obey the impulse of the Holy Spirit for the sake of taking counsel either knows not this impulse, or else resists it” (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9).

The obligation to follow the *instinctus divinus* is taught not only by Scripture and the Fathers, but also by pagan philosophers, maintains Aquinas. Strikingly in this treatise defending religious life Aquinas appeals to the *Eudemian Ethics*—the same text deployed in the treatise on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the *Prima Secundae*. Aristotle writes, “Those who are moved by God do not need to be counselled; for they have a principle surpassing counsel and understanding” (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9). Recall that Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* proposed that the phenomenon of consistent good luck that befalls certain people can be attributed to a “divine instinct” that moves such folks in a manner “beyond reason.” Aristotle’s appeal to a “divine instinct” (*enthousiasmos*) to account for *fortuna* was employed in Aquinas’s treatise of the gifts to explain a moving principle beyond human willing. Aquinas is withering in his critique of those who would seek human confirmation after the interior call of the Spirit: “Shame then on him who, calling himself a Catholic, would send men inspired by God (*divinitus inspiratos*), to take advice of human counsellors, of whom even a heathen philosopher tells us they have no need” (*Contra Doc. Retr.* 9).

Divine *instinctus* and the *initium fidei*

The use of Aristotle's "divine instinct" to express a particularly strong emphasis on external divine agency in Aquinas's theology of the gifts finds a fascinating parallel in Aquinas' account of the beginning of faith (*initium fidei*). Both Aquinas's theology of the gifts and his theology of how a person first comes to believe rest on the term *instinctus*. In both cases, Aquinas deliberately settles on the term *instinctus* after a long germination. In his early theology of the gifts and in his early theology of the beginnings of faith, the term "instinct" plays virtually no role at all.¹⁸ Only when Aquinas later comes to a new awareness of the absolute priority of the divine *auxilium* for supernatural Christian life does he rely heavily on the term *instinctus*. The two places this development is most evident are his theology of the gifts and his theology of the *initium fidei*.

Aquinas's settled position on the question of how a person first comes to possess faith is that it obtains externally—a divine instinct endows a person with faith. Just as the first act of the will comes not from human reason, but issues immediately from God in the form of the *instinctus naturae*, so too (analogously) comes the beginning of faith in the form of the *instinctus fidei*. Aquinas worked towards this position slowly. The pioneering work of Henri Bouillard first traced Aquinas's development on this question. In his 1941 doctoral dissertation, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin*, Bouillard demonstrates that in Aquinas's early theology, as evidenced in the *Scriptum*, faith was understood to come "from what is heard." For the early Aquinas, this meant that the proclamation of the Gospel includes *ratio credenda* by which what is heard is judged to be believable. The *ratio credenda* are attractive, compelling, and dispositive to faith. Thus, upon hearing the gospel and being persuaded by the invitation to believe,

¹⁸ Prior to the composition of the *prima secundae*, the notion of the divine *instinctus* hardly features in Aquinas's theology of the gifts. In Aquinas's great masterpiece this changes dramatically. In the early *Commentary on the Sentences*, the only significant reference to *instinctus* appears in Aquinas's discussion of the gift of counsel. Aquinas explains that human counsel lacks certitude because it concerns contingent matters. It is otherwise with God, who foresees with certainty the outworking of contingent reality. Counsel, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, allows one to participate in the certainty that belongs to divine counsel: "To have this certitude the mind must be elevated above the human mode by an instinct of the Holy Spirit (*mens eleveatur supra humanum modum instinctu spiritus sancti*), for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 8:14)" (III *Sent.* d. 35 q. 2, a. 4. qc. 1, co). There are three theologically noteworthy things to observe about this sentence.

First, we again see Aquinas's early distinction between a "human" and a "super human" mode of operating. As many commentators have observed, Aquinas abandons that terminology in his mature corpus. Second, the *instinctus spiritus sancti* allows for a certitude of judgment beyond what natural human counsel might afford through prudence. A few distinctions later, Aquinas proffers an example of such "instinct" when he treats of lying. The objection asks whether Jacob committed the sin of lying when he deceived his father, Isaac, to obtain the blessing reserved for the firstborn. No, responds Aquinas: "The Holy Spirit ordained the words, from whose instinct and understanding he was speaking (*instinctu et intellectu loquebatur*)" (III *Sent.* d. 38 q. 1, a. 3, ad. 1). In this case, Jacob was passive to the primary *motio* of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is not even clear whether Jacob himself explicitly understood the truth of the words he spoke or whether, by the gift of counsel, he spoke truth implicitly as the Spirit ordained. Regardless, Jacob is free of the charge of lying because, following the instinct of the Holy Spirit, he truthfully asserts what seems false by the lights of human counsel, namely, that he, being younger, was owed primogeniture. (Aquinas goes on to explain that "all the statements that appear to savor of a lie" [*mendacium sapere*] among the saints of Scripture of whom it would be "loathsome to grant that they lied" can likewise be explained by appeal to the *instinctus spiritus sancti* [III *Sent.* d. 38 q. 1, a. 3, ad. 1]).

Finally, as we will see below, the reference to Romans 8:14 retains a significant place in Aquinas's theology of the gifts. Divine filiation is the result of baptism. The baptized becomes a "co-heir" with Christ, becoming by grace what the eternally begotten is by nature. Sharing in Christ's divine sonship, the baptized are also led by the same Spirit who leads Christ. In his mature treatment of the gifts, Aquinas often links Romans 8:14 ("all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God") with Luke 4:1 ("Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit.")

humans are free to respond or not. To the question of whether we can prepare ourselves for grace, the early Aquinas responds in the affirmative:

The will itself may draw near to God by affection and desire, and be ordered to grace by the removal of any impediment, which impediment, of course, is sin. And so, by displeasure with sin and affection for God someone prepares himself for grace (*ad gratiam praeiparat*).¹⁹

In an important respect, then, Aquinas's early theology suggests that the initiative and the *initium fidei* come internally, from the human agent.²⁰

During his first residency in Italy (1259–1260), Aquinas fundamentally altered his position on the question of the *initium fidei*. Bouillard demonstrates that at the papal court in Orvieto Aquinas had occasion to study in detail four sets of texts that proved decisive for the revolution in his understanding about the beginnings of human faith: (1) the decrees of the Council of Orange condemning semi-Pelagianism; (2) Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*; (3) the letters of the Apostle Paul; and (4) Augustine's later anti-Pelagian writings. The common variable Aquinas found in these texts was the primacy of divine *motio* for any human disposition or action directed to supernatural life.

Aquinas became convinced that conversion, the *initium fidei*, and the new life of grace are exclusively and wholly a divine prerogative. A starkly different answer from that of the *Scriptum* is offered to the same question in Aquinas's mature corpus. *ST I-II* q. 112 a. 2 asks, "Whether any preparation and disposition for grace is required on man's part?" Aquinas responds in the negative:

If we speak of grace as it signifies a help from God to move us to good, no preparation is required on man's part, that, as it were, anticipates the Divine help (*quasi praeveniens divinum auxilium*), but rather, every preparation in man must be by the help of God moving the soul to good. And thus even the good movement of the free-will, whereby anyone is prepared for receiving the gift of grace is an act of the free-will moved by God.²¹

In short, a new emphasis on the absolute priority of the divine *auxilium* for the beginning of all supernatural life emerges in Aquinas's mature writings.²²

¹⁹ *Sent.* IV d. 17 q. 1 a. 2 qc. 2.

²⁰ Bouillard explains Aquinas's early theology: "Through free will alone, man can prepare himself for grace. If this were not so, the adage '*facienti quod in se est Deus dat gratiam*' would be meaningless. The acts by which man prepares for grace need not go beyond human nature. Once the truths to be believed are known through preaching or inner revelation, 'it is within the power of free will to proceed to the act of faith.'" Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin: Etude Historique* (Aubier, 1941), 102 (translation mine).

²¹ *ST I-II* q. 112 a. 2.

²² Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce*, 92–134. Many have explored and extended Bouillard's groundbreaking thesis. See Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (University of Toronto Press, 2005); Joseph Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 34–59; Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 139–44; Michael G. Lawler, "Grace and Free Will in Justification: A Textual Study in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 35 (1971): 601–30; James Stroud, "Instinctus and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Explaining the Development in St. Thomas' Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit," *Journal of Moral Theology* 8 (2019): 60–79. Anton Ten Klooster, *Thomas Aquinas on the Beatitudes: Reading Matthew, Disputing Grace and Virtue, Preaching Happiness* (Peeters, 2018), 136–40; Shawn Colberg, "Aquinas and the Grace of Auxilium," *Modern Theology* 32, no. 2 (April 2016): 187–210.

In 1962, Max Seckler added a substantial finding to Bouillard's discovery.²³ He noticed that concurrent with the new emphasis on external grace as wholly responsible for the beginnings of faith, Aquinas also began to refer to the *instinctus fidei* as the mode by which the *initium fidei* comes to possession in the soul. Seckler points out that the term *instinctus* plays an important role both in the decrees of the Council of Orange and in Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*, two documents that Bouillard had demonstrated were decisive in Aquinas's developing account of the *initium fidei*.²⁴ In his mature theology, Aquinas comes to express the primacy of divine grace for the beginning of faith with the language of *instinctus*. It is not primarily external motives—*ratio credendi*—that serve to elicit the assent of faith, but especially a "divine instinct" that serves as the moving principle. Aquinas comes to hold that faith is nothing less than "an inner instinct from God (*interiori instinctu Dei*) drawing him."²⁵

Divine *instinctus* and Human Freedom

I observed the reluctance of many translators to offer a literal translation of *instinctus* in Aquinas's theology of the gifts. The reason for this animadversion, I opined, is that the word "instinct" seems to threaten the authenticity of human free will. A similar hesitation can be observed in the discussion of the term *instinctus fidei*. In an otherwise outstanding and judicious review of the term *instinctus* in Aquinas's account of faith, Edward Schillebeeckx urges us to desist from use of the term "instinct." Contemporary, personalistic understandings of the human person as a free agent should preclude the use of the term "instinct," maintains Schillebeeckx. The term is laden with deterministic associations. (However, given that the term *instinctus fidei* is Aquinas's own, Schillebeeckx permits historical analysis.)²⁶

It is time to address this concern head-on. To what extent is the term "instinct" as Aquinas uses it in his theology of the gifts opposed to a genuine account of human freedom? Does the prevalence of the term "instinct" in Aquinas's exposition of the gifts compromise human freedom? Are the (seeming) fears of translators to plainly render the term "divine instinct" on the mark? Our ordinary use of the term "instinct"

²³ Max Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz, 1962).

²⁴ See Seckler, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille*, 90-132 and Edward Schillebeeckx's extensive review of Seckler's study: *Revelation and Theology*, vol. 2, translated by N. D. Smith (Sheed and Ward, 1968), 30-78. Schillebeeckx notes, "It is a remarkable fact that the term *instinctus* played a part both in the Church's documents condemning Semi-Pelagianism and in the Latin translation of the *Eudemian Ethics*. The word *instinctus* is the only connection that can be established in Thomas's thought between anti-Semi-Pelagianism and these *Ethics* of Aristotle. Just as the danger of Semi-Pelagianism was adverted in the writings of the Church Fathers by an appeal to the *instinctus divinus*, so too did this same term play a similar part centuries later in the works of Aquinas." Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, 36-37.

²⁵ ST II-II, q. 2 a. 9 ad. 3. More recently, John Meinert has made a compelling case that in Aquinas's mature theology the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* is identical with the divine *auxilium* given to the believer post-justification. Both are described as disposing the believer to operate meritoriously and preserving and protecting one from temptation. Comparing how Aquinas describes the theological role of *instinctus* in ST I-II q. 68 aa. 1-3 with the term *auxilium* in ST I-II q. 109 a. 9, Meinert concludes, "The *instinctus* of the gifts is identical with *auxilium* in subject. It is the grace (as motion) necessary post-justification." John Meinert, *The Love of God Poured Out*, 109.

²⁶ Schillebeeckx writes, "Since Seckler's book [*Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz, 1962)] is primarily a historical analysis, we should not be daunted by the word *instinctus*. It would be right for a modern study of faith to avoid this word, as 'instinct' and 'religion' call quite different notions to the mind of modern man, and, what is more, the word *instinctus* (*motio*) is no longer appropriate to a more personally oriented view. But we are after all concerned with Aquinas's view of faith, and he was bound to express himself in the language of his time." Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, 54.

to describe animal behavior, Aquinas's consideration of natural instinct, and his initial (and perhaps subversive) appeal to the term as used in *De Bona Fortuna*, all entail a movement that proceeds from an *exterior force*, *apart from the reasoning process* and (precisely as such) *apart from free will*. We might be led to wonder whether Aquinas has misfired in abandoning the term "inspiration" to seize on the radically new term "instinct" to express the operation of the gifts. Does the term "divine instinct" introduce an antinomy between the divine *motio* and human free will that is simply insuperable?

Three structuring features of Aquinas's doctrine of the gifts safeguard his account from falling into type of theological determinism while still affirming that by the gifts the believer is *moved* by a divine *instinctus* to which he is principally receptive. First, the disposition to be moved by the Spirit imparted through the gifts is congruent with the nature of the human person. This is fundamental to Aquinas's notion of gift movement. Were it not so, such movement would be "violent." For Aquinas, violent movement is the external introduction of *motio* contrary to a being's "natural" ordering. A rock thrown in the air is Aquinas's standard example of violent movement. A rock catapults through the air only when an external agent introduces a force contrary to its natural gravitational pull downward. Not even God can make it natural for a rock to move upwards for to do so would require endowing the rock with a different nature.

Although gift movement animated by the *divine instinctus* comes "from without," it is not violent movement. Consider Aquinas commentary on John 6:44 ("No man can come to me unless the Father, who has sent me, draws him). God does not draw people to himself with coercion or compulsion (*violentiam*), explains Aquinas.²⁷ Rather, God can draw people to himself through "an interior instinct (*instinctus*) that incites and moves us to believe (*impellens et movens ad credendum*). And so the Father draws many to the Son by the instinct of a divine action (*per instinctum divinae operationis*), moving a person's heart from within to believe."²⁸ Although the verb of John 6:44 (*traxerit* / ἐλκύσῃ) suggests a particularly strong account of divine agency, Aquinas insists that this interior divine instinct is a connatural movement rather than a violent one.

This is why Aquinas insists that the gifts come to inhere in the person as habits. While the source of such movement is external divine agency, the movement comes to operate in the person internally, in a way congruent and perfective of a person's volitional and intellectual powers. In other words, the divine *instinctus* of the gifts dispose and proportion the believer to be "well moved (*bene moveatur*) by its mover."²⁹ To be "well moved" is not an arbitrary or violent movement, but answers to a muted summons already present in human nature. For the gifts to "dispose" or "proportion" a person, there needs be a latent potency in human nature for such disposing and proportioning. Thus, as John Meinert puts it, "A disposition is according to one way of being moved and not another." He provides an illuminating example:

²⁷ *In Ioan.* 6, lec. 5, Marietti, no. 935.

²⁸ *In Ioan.* 6, lec. 5, Marietti, no. 935.

²⁹ ST I-II q. 68 a. 1. As Aquinas puts it commenting on the "Spirit of Truth" in the Gospel of John: "[The Spirit] moves us to act and work well (*movet nos ad bene agendum et operandum*). For the word 'spirit' indicates a certain impulse (*impulsionem*), and that is why the word 'spirit' can also mean the wind: for all who are impelled by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 8:14); let your good Spirit lead me on a level path (Ps 143:10)." *In Ioan.* 14, lec. 4, Marietti, no. 1916.

A train has the disposition to be moved by its engine along a track. When it is moved by its engine, it is moved well, for it is disposed to be so moved. ... The train is disposed to be moved along the track. Motion pushing the train off the track will be violent because there is no disposition in the train to be moved in that way. If a very powerful wind pushes the train off the track, it was certainly moved, but it had no disposition to be moved that way. It was in no way connatural to it. In other words, disposition in general is not only the potency towards a particular mover (the engine), but the potency to be moved well—that is, according to the nature of the mobile (on the track).³⁰

Just as a train should be moved (1) by its engine (2) along the tracks (or else the movement would be violent), so too, the gifts dispose the baptized to be moved (1) by the Spirit (2) according to their human nature. This is what Aquinas means by “well moved” (*bene moveatur*) i.e., moved in a way connatural to humans.³¹

Second, Aquinas’s theology of the “passions” offers a fruitful analogue in the natural order for understanding gift movement. Aquinas contrasts human “action” from human “passion.” Action is the result of reason’s deliberation.³² Passion results when human beings are “acted on”—they are *moved* by their passions. Recently, Monica Marcelli-Chu has demonstrated that Aquinas’s account of the passions is structured on a conceptual framework proximate to that used in his exposition on the gifts. As the etymology of the word suggests, a “passion” is something one undergoes, suffers, or receives rather than something one does. Passion effects the subject; the person is, in some way, *moved* by the desired object. In the question, “Whether love is a passion?” Aquinas responds affirmatively: “The appetible object moves the appetite, introducing itself, as it were, into its intention.”³³ Aquinas’s account of the passions is representative of his broader logic of love in which the appetitive object lodges itself, so to speak, in the lover’s appetite, driving him towards union with the object of his desire. Both gift movement and passion movement involve human activity that issues from external agency that moves a fundamentally receptive subject.

Action and passion express two moving forces that belong to the human will. Or, because they always operate inseparably, action and passion are two “stances” from which we can analyze a movement of the will. In any act of the will I both move and am moved. What do I mean when I say, “I want chocolate”? Do I mean, “I choose, peruse, and seek out chocolate.” Or, do I mean, “I am drawn, attracted to, enticed by chocolate.” I mean both. Marcelli-Chu puts it well:

All human action reflects both aspects, namely, being a self-mover and being moved; ... these two aspects provide two paradigms for human activity, wherein the first emphasizes interior powers of agency, and corresponds especially to virtue

³⁰ John Meinert, *The Love of God Poured Out*, 129.

³¹ This comports with Aquinas’s broader understanding of God’s agency in his creatures according to which he “orders all things sweetly” that is, in a manner congruent with their nature: “God moves everything according to its mode” (*ST* II-II q. 52 a. 1).

³² *ST* I-II q. 1 a. 1: “Actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.”

³³ *ST* I-II q. 26 a. 2.

formation, and the second emphasizes exterior agency, and corresponds especially to gift-formation.³⁴

It belongs to rational nature, maintains Aquinas, to direct and lead itself to its end. Irrational nature, by contrast, is “led” to its end by another.³⁵ It is striking that in both his treatment of the passions and the gifts, Aquinas refers to the human person as “led” by an external mover to which that person is fundamentally receptive. Both movements are in this sense “irrational.” Not that they are contrary to reason, but that they are moved otherwise than by reason.³⁶ The decisive feature of the *motio* of the gifts is that—unlike the operation of the infused virtues—human reason is receptive to the primary motion of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ As Marcelli-Chu puts it, “The object of the act is received more than it is conceived according to reason’s deliberation.” In the case of “passion movement,” the person is moved by something below reason such as the appetites, but

³⁴ Monica Marcelli-Chu, “Moved by the Spirit: Patterning the Gifts on the Passions in Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 86 (2022): 284.

³⁵ ST I-II q. 1 a. 1: “It is proper to the rational nature to tend to an end, as directing and leading itself to the end: whereas it is proper to the irrational nature to tend to an end, as directed or led by another.”

³⁶ William Mattison identifies a common and problematic rendering of the relation between the virtues and the gifts in Aquinas thought. Frequently it is proposed that the gifts express divine agency (as moved by a divine *instinctus*) and the infused virtues express human agency (as moved by reason). This cannot be the case: the infused virtues and the gifts share a common supernatural end and, precisely as such, both require a supernatural moving principle to attain that end. When Aquinas maintains that human reason is the motive force of the infused virtues it is vital to remember that he means human reason *as elevated by grace*. Likewise, when he holds that motive force of the gifts is a divine *instinctus*, he insists at the same time that the human person is himself an agent, who acts by his free will. And, by definition, free will is the expression of reason. As Mattison puts it, “The human agent, even when grace-enabled, is a moved mover, she is moved by her own (graced) rationality and by the *instinctus* to use of the Holy Spirit.” William Mattison, “Are the Actions of a Person Operating out of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit the Same as the Actions of That Person Operating out of Infused Virtue?” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36 (2023): 365. The infused virtues express interior agency, they are animated by a motive force “from within” (i.e. reason elevated by grace). The gifts, by contrast, express exterior agency, they are animated by a motive force “from without” (i.e. a divine *instinctus*). But, as Mattison argues, to be moved “from without” does not mean to be moved apart from reason, precisely because it is the rational faculties that are moved in a way that is congruent with their nature (Mattison, “Actions of the Gifts,” 366). See also, William Mattison, *Growing in Virtue: Aquinas on Habit* (Georgetown University Press, 2023), 134–44.

³⁷ The traditional way of parsing Aquinas’s distinction between the virtues and the gifts is by distinguishing their primary moving principle—the virtues move the human person according to human agency whereas the gifts move the human person according to divine agency. More recent accounts of Aquinas’s theology of the gifts suggests this division is too simple and that more attention should be given to Aquinas’s insistence that the gifts (like the virtues) come to inhere in the human person as “habits,” perfective of the human subject. As such, the graced operation of the gifts remains *human* action, carried out by *human* agency (albeit under the auspices of grace). The gifts dispose a person to *respond* with docility to the prompting of the Spirit; they are not operative but responsive. Bernhard Blankenhorn summarizes this recent emphasis on human agency in Aquinas’s theology of the gifts: “God’s impulse does not bypass but rather elevates the act of deliberation. ... The Spirit perfects rather than replaces the acts of the theological virtues. ... The gifts as *habitus* grant deeper receptivity, enabling higher subsequent, active spontaneity. Aquinas does not speak of being passive before the Spirit but of ‘being movable (*mobilis*).’” Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God* (Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 275–76. Similarly, see Joseph de Guibert, “Dons du Saint-Esprit et mode d’agir ‘ultrahumain’ d’après saint Thomas,” *Revue d’Ascétique et de Mystique* 3 (1922): 394–411; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, translated by Geoffrey Chapman (Crossroad, 1983), vol 2, “He is the Lord and Giver of Life,” 135–36; Cruz Gonzalez-Ayesta, *El don de sabiduría según santo Tomás* (Eunsa, 1998), 43–52; Ulrich Horst, *Die Gaben des Heiligen Geistes nach Thomas von Aquin* (Akademie Verlag, 2011), 57, 71–79; Servais Pinckaers, “Morality and the Movement of the Holy Spirit: Aquinas’s Doctrine of ‘Instinctus,’” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, edited by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 388–89; Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics*, 31–63.

in the case of the gifts the person is moved by something above reason, namely the Holy Spirit.

It is worth recalling that, for Aquinas, passions need not be morally negative or enslaving. If my appetite tends to an end that is objectively good and fulfilling for me (i.e. connatural), and if the passion aroused by this appetite is experienced rightly, that is, if I take delight in the end that my appetite seeks, then such passion is generative of greater freedom. This is because my passions allow me to incline to my connatural good with prompt ease and alacrity, apart from rational deliberation. In short, if it is possible to be bound by one's passions, it is also possible—indeed, it is most proper to the passions—also to experience them as a liberating *instinctus* by which one is carried along with eager celerity to the good. Like the gifts, the passions can (and should) be expressions of “led freedom.”

In Aquinas's account of both the passions and the gifts, the person is not moved in the first place by his own reason, but by an external force that, nevertheless, comes to direct the person interiorly, as if by instinct. The result is that his native reason (and, therefore, free will) is taken up and participates in the movement whose source is external to reason. In both cases Aquinas insists that such moved action is not inimical to human freedom. On the contrary, it is conducive to greater freedom. In neither case is the person moved violently, but by a connatural principle. “Passion movement” expresses the ease and alacrity by which rectified appetite (*amor*) “carries” the person to connatural goods apart from reason's deliberation. Similarly, “gift movement” expresses how the believer is “moved by a principle higher than human reason”—“disposed,” we might say, to run on God's tracks.

Third, the humanity of Christ is the preeminent manifestation of gift movement. The humanity of Christ shows in a superlative way how the agency of the Holy Spirit is expansive of, rather than inimical to, authentic human freedom. As such, Christ serves for the believer as an exemplar of Spirit-led freedom. In the question treating the grace of Christ, Aquinas explains that Christ possessed habitual grace. This might be a surprising postulate—in the words of the first objector, “Christ is God not by participation, but in truth.”³⁸ Nevertheless, the distinction of Christ's human and divine natures means the soul of Christ is not “essentially divine” but, “divine by participation, which is by grace.”³⁹ By insisting that Christ possessed habitual grace, Aquinas wants to underscore that Christ was like us: his soul, like ours, was incapable of naturally knowing and loving God. Like all human beings, Christ needed a supernatural habit to attain divine things. Aquinas concludes, “Because it is necessary to admit a human operation [in Christ], distinct from the Divine operation, it was necessary for Him to have habitual grace, whereby this operation might be perfect in Him.”⁴⁰ Habitual grace is the source of charity, which is in turn the source of the gifts. The infused moral virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are, in turn, operative habits that flow from this supernatural principle of habitual grace. For Aquinas, the elevating gift of habitual grace and the operative habits of this new life—the virtues and the gifts—are in Christ in a preeminent way. Christ's graced humanity, then, serves as the perfect exemplar for the believer animated by the Spirit.

³⁸ ST III q. 7 a. 1 obj. 1.

³⁹ ST III q. 7 a. 1 rep. obj. 1.

⁴⁰ ST III q. 7 a. 1 rep. obj. 2. That Christ was possessed of habitual grace is a sustained teaching of Aquinas: ST III q. 7 a. 13; III *Sent.* d. 13, q. 1, a. 1; *De Verit.*, q. 29, a. 5 ad 2.

It follows that if we want an account of “gift movement” we do well to attend to how Scripture describes Christ as “led” by the Spirit. And this is precisely what Aquinas does in the Christology of the *Tertia Pars*. He begins by recalling the definition of the gifts similar to that which he advanced in the *Prima Secundae*: “The gifts, properly, are certain perfections of the soul’s powers, inasmuch as these have a natural aptitude to be moved by the Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ In this case, the “perfection” referred to is the soul’s complete ordering to the supreme good. Such “perfection” requires a disposition on the part of the subject to be made perfect—what Aquinas calls a “natural aptitude to be moved.” It is this “natural aptitude” that precludes gift movement from being a “violent” movement. It is because of “natural aptitude” that gift movement remains connatural and perfective of the soul’s nature.

The objector reasons that Christ had no need for the gifts because the gifts are ordered to assist the virtues which Christ already possessed perfectly. Aquinas’s response leans on the account of the gifts he developed in the *Prima Secundae* according to which the gifts are distinguished from the virtues by perfecting them:

What is perfect in the order of its nature needs to be helped by something of a higher nature; as man, however perfect, needs to be helped by God. And in this way the virtues, which perfect the powers of the soul, as they are controlled by reason, no matter how perfect they are, need to be helped by the gifts, which perfect the soul’s powers, inasmuch as these are moved by the Holy Spirit.

The virtues move the soul according to the intrinsic human power of reason. In contrast, the gifts move the soul by the extrinsic divine power of the Holy Spirit (even as the gift comes to inhere in the soul interiorly by way of a *habitus*). Even Christ’s human nature, which perfectly possessed the natural virtues, cannot attain its supernatural end apart from a moving principle that is also supernatural.⁴²

Gift movement is, for Aquinas, specified in that it moves the soul in the manner of an instrument (*ut instrumentum*). In the exposition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit Aquinas writes, “The mind of man is not moved by the Holy Spirit (*movetur a spiritu sancto*), unless in some way it be united (*uniatur*) to Him: even as the instrument (*sicut instrumentum*) is not moved by the craftsman, unless there be contact (*contactum*) or some other kind of union (*unionem*) between them.”⁴³ By the disposition of gifts, God acts in the believer through union and contact analogous to a craftsman with his tools. We might say the tools are “taken up” such that they become connatural principles of divine loving and knowing. However, unlike the carpenter’s hammer, the one moved as an instrumental cause by the gifts retains free will. The spiritual man is not simply “acted upon.” It is for this reason that the gifts come to inhere in the soul as habits. As Aquinas puts it, “[Man] is so acted upon (*agitur*), by the Holy Spirit, that he also acts (*agit*) himself, insofar as he has a free-will (*liberi*

⁴¹ ST III q. 7 a. 5.

⁴² As Daria Spezzano puts it, “The human soul of Christ is itself not capable of God’s uncreated act of knowledge and love, so it needs grace to attain to God by a created act of fruition.” *The Glory of God’s Grace: Deification according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Sapientia, 2015), 169.

⁴³ ST I-II, q. 68, a. 4 ad. 3.

arbitrii). Therefore he needs a habit."⁴⁴ And so, Aquinas proposes an instrumental cause that retains free-will—certainly, a unique category in his metaphysical lexicon.⁴⁵

But not wholly unique. Recall that the preeminent way in which Aquinas accounts for God's saving activity in Christ is by describing the humanity of Christ as the instrument of his divinity. The gifts of the Holy Spirit dispose the humanity of Christ to be moved easily and docilely as an instrument. Thus, Christ's human will was moved by a divine *instinctus* to offer himself up to God on behalf of humanity: "This was done [the shedding of Christ's blood] by the Holy Spirit, through whose movement and instinct [*motu et instinctu*], namely, by the love of God and neighbor, he did this: *when he shall come as a violent stream which the spirit of the Lord drives on* (Isa 59:10)."⁴⁶ And yet, the gifts come to operate in Christ as a habit, such that his supernatural operations are expressions of his free human will. The objector reasons that, since Christ's humanity is moved *ut instrumentum*, he need not possess habitual grace because the source of the action of an instrumental cause lies with the primary agent. Aquinas's response is consonant with his exposition of the gifts in the *prima secundae*. In both cases Aquinas offers an account of the soul being moved *ut instrumentum*, but in a way that retains free will and, therefore, demands a habit:

The humanity of Christ is the instrument of the Godhead—not, indeed, an inanimate instrument, which nowise acts, but is merely acted upon; but an instrument animated by a rational soul, which is so acted upon as to act. And hence the nature of the action demanded that he should have habitual grace.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ ST II-II, q. 68, a. 3 ad. 2.

⁴⁵ Similar to his account of the gifts as an instrumental cause, Aquinas will also describe the baptized animated by the Spirit as an *organum Dei*: "As regards the infusion of the gifts, the art is on the part of the Holy Spirit, Who is the principal mover (*principaliter movens*), and not on the part of men, who are His organs (*organa*) when He moves them" (ST I q. 68 a. 4 ad 1). Peter Kwasniewski points out the curious use of the term *organa* in this context. Throughout his treatment of the gifts, Aquinas underscores that the instrumental causality of the gifts does not render the believer an inert instrument, but makes him an instrument that retains free will. However, the term *organa dei* seems to have its origins in pagan Greek oracular traditions in which the seer, wholly enraptured in a trance-like state, has his intellectual and volitional powers requested by a spiritual force. But this is not the case with those animated by the gifts of the Spirit. Their powers are not overtaken, but perfected (*gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit* [ST I q. 1 a. 8 ad 2, *hic et ubique*]). See Peter Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Emmaus Academic, 2021), 27–28. Even prophets whose prophesy operates according to instrumental causality, do not prophesy *quasi amentes* (ST II-II, q. 171 a. 1 ad 3)—an error Aquinas associates with Philo and the Montanists. See ST II-II, q. 173 a. 3; DV 12.9, sc 3; Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love*, 27–28. In his *Commentary on Hebrews*, Aquinas writes, "The Holy Spirit moves the mind of a prophet as a principal agent moves its instrument." As such, the prophet comes to see, speak, and act under God's agency. But such instrumental causality does not render the prophet a lifeless or inert instrument. Indeed, a true prophet is one who knows (*cognoscat*) "what he sees or says or does." The prophet's own intellectual and volitional powers are taken up as divine instruments in his prophetic activity. Aquinas concludes, "But the movement of the Holy Spirit is called an instinct (*instinctus*) by Augustine." *Super Heb.* 11, lec 7, Marietti, no. 631.

⁴⁶ *Super Heb.* 9, lec 3, Marietti, no. 444.

⁴⁷ ST III q. 7 a. 1 rep. obj. 3. While the instrumental causality of the gifts in no way short-circuits the rational powers of the soul, it remains the case that action carried out by the believer according to the movement of the *divinus instinctus* is to be attributed principally to God rather than to a human agent. See *Super Rom.* 9, lec 3, Marietti, no. 777: "An action is attributed more to the principal agent than to the secondary, as when we say that the hammer does not make the box but the carpenter by using the hammer. But man's will is moved to good by God, as it says above: *all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God* (Rom 8:14); therefore, an inward action of man is not to be attributed principally to man but to God: *it is God who of his good pleasure works in you both the will and the performance* (Phil 2:13)."

Christ's humanity serves as an exemplar of the instrumental causality that belongs to gift movement. The supernatural activity carried out perfectly by Christ (and in limited ways by the believer) requires a corresponding supernatural habit that renders the soul a fit instrument for divine works. Dominic Legge explains:

Through the gifts, Christ acts in a higher mode, the mode of God's own action. This is a critical ingredient for Christ's action; to act as the Word's instrument in the fullest sense, Christ's humanity must not only be moved by the divinity, but it must also be put, *as human* (according to its "proper form" as human) in perfect harmony with God, perfectly prepared to be the proper and conjoined instrument of the Word, which instrument acts *as man* according to the divine mode of the Word's own action. This is precisely what the gifts of the Holy Spirit bring about.⁴⁸

By the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Christ is moved *ut instrumentum*, that is to say, his human action is taken up by divine power. Just as an instrument shares in operation of the primary agent, so too Christ's human nature shares in the operation of the divine nature.⁴⁹ But this is not the instrumentality of an ax or a saw, but what Aquinas calls a "living instrument":

It is proper to an instrument to be moved by the principal agent, yet diversely, according to the property of its nature. For an inanimate instrument, as an axe or a saw, is moved by the craftsman with only a corporeal movement; but an instrument animated by a sensitive soul is moved by the sensitive appetite, as a horse by its rider; and an instrument animated with a rational soul is moved by its will, as by the command of his lord the servant is moved to act, the servant being like an animate instrument, as the Philosopher says (*Polit.* i, 2, 4; *Ethic.* viii, 11). And hence it was in this manner that the human nature of Christ was the instrument of the Godhead, and was moved by its own will.

Aquinas distinguishes between three different types of instrumental causality. In each case the principal agent is the primary cause of the movement, but his agency expresses itself distinctly according to the nature of the instrument. The inanimate instrument, like the axe or the saw, is simply moved. The movement of the craftsman accounts for the entirety of the movement. Animate instruments, by contrast, move themselves. Aquinas's example is compelling: an expert equestrian knows how to harness the sense appetites of his horse so that it responds with prompt docility to his direction. Creatures endowed with will—what Aquinas calls rational appetite—are the most exalted instruments. The horse is moved to move, by contrast, just as the knowing and loving of the believer is taken up in its moved movement. Thus, in Aquinas's example, the servant who carries out his master's will comes to make his master's will his own. We might say the servant's knowing and loving corresponds to the end his master intends.

⁴⁸ Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 198.

⁴⁹ Cf. Theophil Tschipke, *L'Humanité du Christ comme Instrument de Salut de la Divinité* (Academic Press, 2003), 169 (as quoted by Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 199): "In its instrumental activity, the human action is implicated in the divine act. That is why the instrumental activity of Christ's humanity belongs more to God than to itself. God is its principal agent."

This most exalted form of instrumental causality is one in which human action has the source of its movement in God and yet remains expressive of truly free voluntary action. The instrumental causality proper to the gifts entails that the believer is moved by the divine *instinctus* “from without,” and yet it remains that they are *the believer’s* rational faculties that are moved.⁵⁰

In sum, the divine *instinctus* that moves the believer disposed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to a divine motion is not inimical to human free will. Quite the contrary. First, such movement is not “violent” but congruent with human reason, that is to say, gift movement perfects our rational appetites (i.e. free will). Second, passion movement provides a fruitful analogue for understanding how a person “moved” externally can, nevertheless, be moved in a way that accords with his rational nature (and, therefore, accords with his free will). Finally, the humanity of Christ, moved as an instrumental cause, illustrates in a superlative way how gift movement elevates our intellectual and volitional powers, allowing them to be taken up by a divine *instinctus* that perfects rather than destroys those powers. This non-competitive account of the *instinctus divinus* and human freedom is perfectly encapsulated in Aquinas’s commentary on St. Paul’s discussion of the freedom of the Spirit (Romans 8):

But because one who is led (*ducitur*) does not act on his own (*ex seipso non operator*), whereas the spiritual man is not only instructed by the Holy Spirit regarding what he ought to do, but his heart is also moved (*movetur*) by the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to get a better understanding of what is meant by *whosoever are led by the Spirit of God*. For those are led who are moved by a higher instinct (*superiori instinctu moventur*). Hence we say that animals do not act but are led, because they are moved to perform their actions by nature and not from their own impulse (*non ex proprio motu*). Similarly, the spiritual man is inclined (*inclinatur*) to do something not as though by a movement of his own will (*non quasi ex motu propriae voluntatis*) chiefly, but by the instinct of the Holy Spirit (*ex instinctu Spiritus Sancti*), as it says in Isaiah: *he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives* (Isa 59:19); and in Luke: *Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness* (Luke 4:1). However, this does not mean that spiritual men do not act through will and free choice (*voluntatem et liberum arbitrium*), because the Holy Spirit causes the very movement of the will and of free choice in them, as it says in Philippians: *God is at work in you both to will and to work* (Phil 2:13).⁵¹

This remarkable text allows us to enter with more precision into the question of how the divine instinct proper to the gifts moves the human person according to a “higher instinct”—not primarily through our own will (*ex motu propriae voluntatis*) as directed by reason, but according to the divine will as directed by the Holy Spirit. Commenting on the above quotation from the *Commentary on Romans*, Gilles Emery observes that

⁵⁰ William Mattison puts this well: “Rational human powers can be moved movers, the interior principles of their actions, even as they are moved from the outside, assuming that exterior mover is God. ... Though a person moved by Divine *instinctus* is a moved mover, that Divine *instinctus* is not constitutive of the person. ... Divine *instinctus* can move human action (including human rational powers) even in a cooperative manner, yet not be constitutive of human action, lest the action cease to be gratuitous as grace always is.” Mattison, *Growing in Virtue*, 138–39.

⁵¹ *Super Rom 8*, lec 3, Marietti no. 635 (translation modified).

Aquinas's commitment to the term *instinctus* is predicated on his distinction between the virtues and the gifts:

Although, in the simple human performance of virtues, man inclines himself to action as a sovereign master who disposes of his faculties of action as he wishes (which he puts to work when it seems good to him), the gifts of the Holy Spirit produce a superior mode of action. In this case, the human being (the "spiritual" man, that is to say, one moved by the Holy Spirit) acts in virtue of a superior principle of action that is the "instinct" of the Spirit.⁵²

Aquinas thinks quite literally of the action of the verb "to lead" which occasions his commentary on this verse: "For all who are led (*agi*) by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Roman 8:14). The *motio* that belongs to the gifts enables one to be "led" (*agi*) in the same way that "Christ was led by the Spirit into the desert" (Luke 4:1). Of course, what comes to mind most readily with the verb "to lead" is the harnessing of an animal, whereby it is led according to the movements of its master. In this respect, Aquinas does not shy away from what seems to embarrass some of his commentators and translators: that under the impulse of the gifts humans operate analogously to a sub-rational animal's movement according to instinct.⁵³ An animal makes judgments from natural instinct rather than from reason.⁵⁴ Analogously, the person animated by the gifts proceeds no longer according to the "movement of his own will" (*ex motu propriae voluntatis*), but by "the instinct of the Holy Spirit" (*ex instinctu Spiritus Sancti*).⁵⁵

Despite human agency under the direction of the Holy Spirit being likened to the instinctive behavior of animals, Aquinas affirms a critical difference, namely, that free will (*liberum arbitrium*) remains. Indeed, for Aquinas, we become *more free* when so "led." This introduces a critical feature of Aquinas' doctrine of the *divinus instinctus* that is absent in Aristotle. Such "moved freedom"⁵⁶ is a heightened example of Aquinas's fundamental conception regarding the non-competitive nature of grace and free will. Emery remarks, "Here, St. Thomas shows that the full recognition of human freedom does not undermine

⁵² Gilles Emery, "The Holy Spirit in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans," in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 147. See also Anton ten Klooster, "Led by God in Freedom: Lessons on Prudence and Moral Transformation from Aquinas's Commentary on Romans," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36 (2023): 311-22.

⁵³ John Berkman expresses this well: "Contrary to those who think the language of 'instinct' is inappropriate for understanding how the Holy Spirit works in us, Aquinas's point is precisely to make the connection between animal instinct and spiritual instinct. Spiritual instinct is the supernatural analogate to natural instinct. God providentially gives other animals instincts to perfect them according to their specific nature. So too God equips wayfarers with the necessary instincts to fully perfect them. It is this instinct which enables wayfarers to act according to the divine nature, and to thus be led safely and securely to their appropriate end, that of perfect beatitude." Berkman, "Aquinas's Ethics," 61.

⁵⁴ ST I, q. 83, a. 1: "The sheep, seeing the wolf, judges it a thing to be shunned, from a natural and not a free judgment, because it judges, not from reason, but from natural instinct (*ex naturali instinctu*)."

⁵⁵ Dominic Legge expresses this well: "A beast who acts by instinct acts purposefully, directed by God towards an end, but according to a plan that is above its capacity to know. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are analogous: while the spiritual man certainly understands more of what he does and why, he still does not have a perfect comprehension of the divine plan—a plan as infinite as Divine Providence itself—and so he is given an *instinctus* from God that inclines him to act according to God's plan, by a movement that is free and operates through his powers, virtues, and gifts, but that has a mode and direction surpassing his nature. This *instinctus* does not originate in his intellect's apprehension of a desirable good, but in a divinely given impulse." Legge, *Trinitarian Christology*, 196-97.

⁵⁶ Romanus Cessario, *Introduction to Moral Theology* (Catholic University of America, 2001), 212.

the absolute priority of God (the Holy Spirit) who acts as first and transcendent cause, and who is precisely the cause of the free mode of the holy actions accomplished by the children of God."⁵⁷ Precisely because God's causality is not on the same plane as human causality (i.e., conditioned by time and space), they cannot be construed competitively. Grace—in this case the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit—far from slighting authentic human operation, allows for its fullness and flourishing. At the conclusion of his careful study on the *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* in Aquinas, J.H. Walgrave remarks:

The instinct (of the Holy Spirit) comes from the outside but works from the inside: it is *exterior* by its origin, but *interior* by its way of working within us. The more perfect its work, the more interiorized it becomes; and our will and the Holy Spirit work together as if they were forming a unique principle. The growth of the motion received by our spirit does not diminish the very motion of freedom. Indeed, under the New Law, the instinct of the Holy Spirit becomes in us our own instinct. The instinct of the Holy Spirit builds up the very movement of the free will.⁵⁸

The gifts do not diminish, but exalt human freedom. In this respect, Aquinas departs markedly from Aristotle. The divine instinct by which the gifts operate is not some exterior "unreasoning drive" (*hormē*) lying beyond the precincts of reason and opposed to free will. The gifts are not an alien force imposing itself from the outside like the computer hacker's hostile takeover of an operating system. Rather, the gifts become a connatural principle of the creature's new spiritual freedom. Although the gifts come from above—every good and perfect gift "comes from above" (James 1:17)—they come to be possessed as interior principles of the human spirit, expressive of *our own* deepest identities; they become connatural to human faculties of loving and knowing.⁵⁹

For the things of God to become connatural to human beings, we need a supernatural gift—a divine *habitus*—that infinitely elevates our native powers of loving and knowing, rendering them proportionate to God's own knowing and loving. In this respect, the same text from the Apostle Paul (Romans 8:14) also plays a decisive role in Aquinas's theology of the gifts articulated in *ST* I-II q. 68:

In matters directed to the supernatural end, to which man's reason moves him, according as it is, in a manner, and imperfectly (*aliqua liter et imperfecte*) informed by the theological virtues, the motion of reason does not suffice, unless it receive in addition the instinct and motion of the Holy Spirit (*instinctus et motio spiritus sancti*), according to Rm. 8:14,17: *Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God ... and if sons, heirs also*: and Ps. 142:10: *Thy good Spirit shall lead me into the right land*, because, to wit, none can receive the inheritance of that land of the Blessed, except he be moved and led thither by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Emery, "The Holy Spirit in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans," 149.

⁵⁸ J.H. Walgrave, "*Instinctus Spiritus Sancti*: Een proeve tot Thomas-interpretatie," *Ephemerides Theologiae Lovanienses* 5 (1969): 430. As quoted by Servais Pinckaers, "Morality and Movement of the Holy Spirit," in *The Pinckaers Reader*, edited by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 386.

⁵⁹ As Matthew Levering puts it, "The gifts of the Holy Spirit conform the believer to Christ by connaturalizing the believer to God's ways." "Wisdom and the Viability of Thomistic Trinitarian Theology," *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 599.

⁶⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2 (translation modified).

The gifts proportion the baptized beyond their natural mode of operation, that is, beyond the “motion of reason” to the things of God. The gifts, their operation, and their reward are under the primary movement of the Holy Spirit. And yet, nothing could be more human, that is to say, more congruent and perfective of our nature. The divine action of the gifts, far from doing violence to the freedom of human nature—as we might be led to believe from the initial presentation of a “divine instinct” drawn from the Aristotelian *De Bona Fortuna*—is the very condition according to which it is made truly free. Servais Pinckaers wonderfully articulates this vital, non-competitive account of Aquinas’s theology of the gifts:

Like any inspiration, the gifts define a motion coming from above, from outside, namely from God who takes the initiative, whereas virtue, in the literal meaning of the word, enables us to act from ourselves. More precisely, the gift is a disposition to receive the action of the Holy Spirit, which penetrates to the very heart of our spirit, our freedom, and our virtues, in order to give us a superior impulse in the form of inspiration. In that way we can achieve this unique conjunction between God’s action and ours. ... This is the peculiar effect of inspiration or of the gifts: to achieve the unity of action between the superior principle, which is God’s Spirit, and the interior principles which are the virtues, at the level of our free and reasonable will, at the source of our actions.⁶¹

This “unique conjunction,” namely, that human loving and knowing are “led” and “moved” by the loving and knowing of God, expresses the connaturality that defines Aquinas’s theology of the gifts. The operations of the believer animated by the gifts are, properly speaking, God’s operation in the believer. As such, they are not performed out of obligation—“under the law,” to use St. Paul’s lexicon. Rather, such spiritual acts are carried out “under the Spirit,” and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Aquinas writes,

The works of a man, who is led (*agitur*) by the Holy Spirit, are the works of the Holy Spirit rather than his own. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is not under the law, as neither is the Son, as stated above (A4, ad 2); it follows that such works, insofar as they are of the Holy Spirit, are not under the law. The Apostle witnesses to this when he says (2 Cor 3:17): “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”⁶²

The model of such “led freedom” is the sacred humanity of Christ, who, as God, is not “under the law.” Those who by grace come to share in Christ’s divine filiation are, likewise, led by the Spirit and operate not “under the law,” but from the “glorious liberty of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:21).

The Aristotelian notion of “divine instinct” as articulated in *De Bona Fortuna* provides Aquinas with a decisive and distinct way to affirm the primacy of the divine *auxilium* for all supernatural life. To take Aristotle straight, however, would have warped Aquinas’s theology of the gifts. It would render the divine *motio* violent, akin to the pagan sense of divine possession whereby one’s native rational faculties and free will

⁶¹ Pinckaers, “Morality and Movement of the Holy Spirit,” 389.

⁶² ST I-II, q. 93, a. 6 ad 1.

are usurped. Instead, Aquinas substantially transforms Aristotle's *instinctus*—Aquinas's “divine instinct” does not override human freedom but enables human freedom.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.