

The Gift of Illumination

THE *PRINCIPIUM* OF LIGHT

In the late spring of 1256, a young Dominican priest stepped in front of his colleagues at the University of Paris to give his inaugural lecture, *Rigans Montes*, as a Master in Theology. While his intellectual talents were already well known and some of his work had already been made available to his contemporaries, as the young Thomas Aquinas stepped to the lectern he was formally embarking upon a public career that would shape the theology of the church for the next eight centuries. In this first public lecture Aquinas would describe an understanding of theology and the task of the teacher—what we might think of as his “teaching philosophy”—that he followed for the rest of his career, so that “in this exposition we can see luminously the ideal he is setting himself for his life’s work.”¹ One of the key themes of his talk, and a theme he would develop for the rest of his career, was that of light and divine illumination. The purpose of this book is to follow that theme and attempt to understand the theology of Thomas Aquinas with regard to the light language he deploys throughout his work.

One of the key features of Aquinas’s work that quickly becomes evident is how important beginnings are to him. Most of his works have substantial prologues in which he details either what he is doing, with regard to his original works, or what he thinks another author is doing with regard to his scriptural and philosophical commentaries. One ignores Aquinas’s introductory comments and his division of the text of a work at the risk of misunderstanding what follows as he expounds on his introduction.² Further, with regard to how one comes to deep knowledge (*scientia*) of a subject, Aquinas thinks one must work toward an understanding of the key principles from which one begins.

1. Simon Tugwell, *Albert & Thomas: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1988), 270.

2. John F. Boyle, “St. Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture,” *Pro Ecclesia* 4, no. 1 (1995): 100–101.

Principles are a kind of intellectual beginning or starting place in the “order of teaching”³ for Aquinas, even if he acknowledges that we often have to work backward to get to them.

It is worth noting, then, that the technical name for Aquinas’s inaugural lecture was *principium*, a word with a variety of implications for Aquinas. In his Trinitarian discussion of whether it is adequate to call the Father the *principium*, Aquinas pithily suggests that “anything from which something proceeds in any way is said to be a *principium*.”⁴ In a more extended discussion of the term, fittingly found at the beginning (*principium*) of his commentary on the Gospel of John, Aquinas notes five possible meanings for *principium*, but all of them imply “an order of one thing to another,”⁵ and so can be found in ordered things such as quantity, time, teaching, and the production of things, and in the mind of those who generate things. The key *principium* here is the third one, of teaching. For Aquinas our very ability to learn is Christological, proceeding from both Christ’s divinity and his humanity. With respect to Christ’s divinity, “the beginning and principle of our wisdom with respect to our nature is Christ,” since our natures are formed by the “Wisdom and Word of God”; with respect to Christ’s humanity, Christ is our *principium* of teaching through his incarnation.⁶ Any learning that we have finds its beginning in Christ’s divinity, through our created natures, and through his humanity, that is, through his teaching of us in the flesh. With respect to teaching, the principles from which Aquinas starts are decidedly Christological. Indeed, as Aquinas tells us in *Rigans Montes*, Christ is “the teacher of teachers.”⁷

One of my key theses is that Aquinas’s understanding of illumination is not just broadly theistic, but primarily Christological. Philosophers and theologians have for too long focused on Aquinas’s discussions of illumination in his

3. ST prologue.

4. ST I 33.1: “[T]he word ‘principle’ (*principium*) signifies only that from which another proceeds: since anything from which something proceeds in any way, we call a principle; and conversely.”

5. In *Ioh.* I.1, §34: “Since the word *principium* implies a certain order of one thing to another, one can find a *principium* in all those things which have an order.”

6. Ibid.: “Third, order is found in learning; and this in two ways: as to nature, and as to ourselves, and in both cases we can speak of a ‘beginning’: ‘By this time you ought to be teachers’ (Heb 5:12). As to nature, in Christian doctrine the beginning and principle of our wisdom is Christ, inasmuch as he is the Wisdom and Word of God, i.e., in his divinity. But as to ourselves, the beginning is Christ himself inasmuch as the Word has become flesh, i.e., by his incarnation.” Cf. In *Ioh.* VIII.3, §1183.

7. *Rigans Montes*. Cf. ScG IV.13, “Necessarily, then, it is by the Word of God, which is the knowledge of the divine intellect, that every intellectual cognition is caused. Accordingly, we read in John (1:4): ‘The life was the light of men,’ that is, because the Word Himself who is life and in whom all things are life does, as a kind of light, make the truth manifest to the minds of men.”

theological syntheses and disputed questions, without paying much, if any, attention to the Christological elements of illumination found in his commentaries on scripture, especially on the Gospel of John. Likewise, even in a work like the *Summa Theologiae*, writers seldom seem to get much further than the *Prima Pars* in their study of illumination, and they neglect key elements like the light of faith.⁸ Yet to neglect Aquinas's commentary on scripture and his Christological focus is to ignore the fact that Aquinas consistently points to scripture as the starting point for theological reflection, as well as the priority of revelation over natural reason; by ignoring scripture we do violence to Aquinas's own understanding of what the theological enterprise entails. This is not to say that anything that has been said about Aquinas's understanding of illumination from the broadly theistic or philosophical view is incorrect, but only that it is incomplete. Nor is it to pit faith against reason, a position that Aquinas would reject. Aquinas's theory of illumination is, however, thoroughly Christological, as he suggests by saying that the effect of grace that derives from the invisible mission of the Son is the "illumination of the intellect."⁹ This follows on a previous response, which connects the mission of the Son to the instruction of the intellect.¹⁰ In both cases, the purpose of the illumination and instruction provided by the Son is to inflame our hearts with affection for God, which is the effect of grace given by the Holy Spirit. The temporal expression of divine light, and thus the primary human experience of illumination, reaches its perfection in the person of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, for Aquinas, one cannot love what one does not know, and the more one knows about a good worth loving, the more one can love that good. Aquinas's theological work can sometimes appear sterile or emotionally remote for those who are put off by the scholastic method or the questions that interested him, but for Aquinas the connection between knowledge and love is so intimate—rooted in the divine relations of the persons of the triune God and their temporal missions in the world—that his quest for deeper understanding of

8. See, for instance, Matthew Cuddeback, "Light and Form in St. Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Knower" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1998). This is an excellent and helpful dissertation on the metaphysical elements of Thomas's understanding of light, but intentionally focuses upon questions 44–119 of the *Prima Pars*. Cuddeback summarizes and extends his argument in "Thomas Aquinas on Divine Illumination and the Authority of the First Truth," *Nova et Vetera (English Edition)* 7 (2009): 579–602.

9. ST I 43.5 ad 3: "If we consider mission as regards the effect of grace, in this sense the two missions are united in the root which is grace, but are distinguished in the effects of grace, which consist in the illumination of the intellect and the kindling of the affection."

10. ST I 43.5 ad 2: "Thus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love."

God is best understood as a Christologically centered act of profound love and a love that continued to grow as he learned more. If “love follows knowledge,”¹¹ then Aquinas was a man deeply and profoundly in love with God, a love that was made possible through the illumination and teaching provided by Christ.

So while there is always a risk in reading too much into the different meanings of Latin terms, the multiple meanings of *principium* might lead us to reflect that this lecture was not just a beginning in the sense of an inauguration, but that it also spelled out many of the basic principles that would shape the rest of Aquinas’s career as a teacher. In this beginning, we can see two key elements of Aquinas’s thought that are relevant to his understanding of light. First, Aquinas shapes his *Rigans Montes* lecture in conversation with the three main theological sources that shape his theology of light—scripture, Augustine, and Pseudo-Dionysius. Second, Aquinas in several places suggests that theology itself is a function of God sharing his divine light with those who seek to do theology, so that sacred doctrine is a process of illumination from God to humans and humans to each other; as just suggested, this is accomplished through the teaching of Christ.

THEOLOGICAL SOURCES: SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Aquinas’s use of light language in his theology is by no means unique; rather his work is the continuation of a long Christian tradition of speaking about God in terms of light. Scripturally, the account of creation at the beginning of Genesis had long been a topic of interest to theologians, with a particular concern being how to understand the creation of light on the first day and the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. The adoption of the psalmody as the basis of the daily office among monastic and other religious communities provided opportunities for theologians to reflect routinely on key verses such as Ps. 35:10,¹² “in your light we see light,” and Ps. 4:7, “Let the light of your face shine on us, Lord.”¹³ The opening verses to the Gospel of John provided the basis for a Christological link between God and light, and the declaration in 1 John 1:5 that “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” further warranted a close link between God and light in the tradition that Aquinas

11. *Lectura romana* 17.1.1: “Love follows knowledge, since nothing is loved except it is known.”

Aquinas picks up this idea from Augustine (*De Trinitate* X.1.2), who he quotes to this effect several times in the *Summa Theologiae*. Cf. ST I 60.1 sc, I 60.2 ob 2.

12. Psalm 35:10. I will follow the Vulgate numbering of the Psalms.

13. Psalm 4:7.

inherited. These are just a few key citations, but scripture is rife with light language that Christian theologians had long explored before Aquinas arrived on the scene.¹⁴

It was not, however, just the contents of scripture that served as the basis for the light language that Aquinas would employ in his work, but the very nature of scripture itself that served to support the light language. For Aquinas, following Pseudo-Dionysius, scripture serves as “the ray of divine revelation”¹⁵ by which God makes God’s own knowledge of himself available to humans, who are restricted in their ability to know God due to their dependence on their senses and because of the obstacles caused by sin. The title of his compilation of Patristic commentary on the Gospels, *Catena Aurea (The Golden Chain)*, bears with it the imagery of a golden ray of light that pulls one up toward an understanding of an incomprehensible God. For Aquinas and those who came before him, scripture by its very nature and content brings light into human darkness.

Prior to Aquinas, the Christian tradition had produced a number of theologians whose work prominently featured light. The Cappadocians used light imagery extensively, with Basil’s *Hexaemeron* being one of the key texts for future reflection on the question of the origin of light on the first and fourth days of creation. Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Fifth Theological Oration* and *Homilies on Epiphany* powerfully exploited the relationship between God and light. Anselm, who was at the forefront of a twelfth-century renaissance that expressed itself both theologically and aesthetically, would contemplate in his *Proslogion* what it meant for God to “dwell in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16).¹⁶ Aquinas’s contemporaries, Robert Grosseteste¹⁷ and Bonaventure, would both reflect on the theological nature of light and deploy light language in their theology, but no theologians would have greater influence on Aquinas’s

14. For a more substantial exposition of scriptural uses of light imagery, see Gerald O’Collins’s essay in Gerald O’Collins, S.J. and Mary Ann Meyers, eds., *Light from Light: Scientists and Theologians in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 103–21.

15. ST I 1.9 ad 2.

16. *Proslogion* 1 in Anselm, *Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 6 vols., vol. I (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946–61), 98. See Giles E. M. Gasper, “Towards a Theology of Light in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance,” in *Outside Archeology: Material Culture and Poetic Imagination*, ed. Christine Finn and Martin Henig, *BAR International Series 999* (Oxford: Archeopress, 2001).

17. For a translation of Grosseteste’s *De Luce* and a theological exploration of the theme of light, see Iain M. MacKenzie, *The Obscurism of Light: A Theological Study into the Nature of Light* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury, 1996).

theology of light than St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, both of whom influenced the shape of this inaugural lecture.

In discussing Aquinas's inaugural lecture, *Rigans Montes*, Torrell claims that "the discourse is clearly inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius,"¹⁸ and the Dionysian aspects of *Rigans Montes* are obvious from the opening lines of the lecture when Aquinas quotes the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: "It is a most sacred law of the divinity that through first things, middle things are to be led to his most divine light."¹⁹ We can note two things here, the first being that the goal of human life, its final cause, is the divine light. Aquinas begins his public career with reference to light. Second, it is through the outworking of divine providence that God achieves this goal. The universe is ordered so that God's (created) light of divine wisdom works through creatures to lead them back to the (uncreated) divine light.

Torrell sees this Dionysian principle as being the foundation for the whole lecture, where Aquinas explores the nature of the teaching of theology based on its exalted status, the standing of those who teach it, the position of those who would learn it, and the manner by which it is communicated. This claim by Torrell, however, is an overstatement, since it ignores the importance that Augustine had on both the theme and content of the lecture. As Peter Brown identified, light and mountains were an important influence on Augustine's theology:

Mountains appear more often in his works: the light of the rising sun slipping down into the valleys; the sudden view of a distant town from the wooded slopes of a pass. Above all, he was surrounded by light. The African sunlight was the "Queen of all Colours pouring down over everything." He was acutely alive to the effects of light. His only poem is in praise of the warm glow of the Easter Candle.²⁰

Biographical accounts of Aquinas's life tell us that prior to his inaugural lecture Aquinas was visited in a dream by a "venerable looking Dominican friar" who suggested the passage "From your lofty abode you water the mountains;

18. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1, The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, revised ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 51.

19. *Rigans Montes*, proemium.

20. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, a New Edition with an Epilogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 23. One place where Augustine exploits the language of light most effectively is in his Easter homilies.

the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work” as the foundational scripture of his lecture.²¹ Whatever may be the reason that Aquinas chose Ps. 103:13 as the text upon which to base his lecture, the overarching theme of the lecture—that the “light of divine wisdom”²² flows down to teachers (mountains) who then share that wisdom with their students—is as equally inspired by Augustine as it is by Pseudo-Dionysius. The first connection can be made through Augustine’s *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, which Aquinas knew well,²³ and which begin with a discussion of how the apostolic author was able to speak of things that are beyond our understanding only because he was first illumined from above. Augustine describes how John was a mountain:

Mountains are lofty souls; hills are ordinary souls. But then the mountains receive peace so that the hills might receive justice. . . . Lesser souls, however, would not receive faith unless greater souls—called mountains—were illumined by Wisdom herself, so that they might pass on to ordinary souls what these ordinary souls can grasp, and thus live from faith as hills because the mountains receive peace.²⁴

Augustine expands on this theme with regard to scripture in general:

When we lift up our eyes to the scriptures, because the scriptures have been provided by human beings, we are lifting up our eyes to the mountains from where help will come to us. Even so, because those who wrote the scriptures were human beings, they were not shining on their own, but he *was the true light who illumines everyone coming into this world* (John 1:9).²⁵

A second connection can be made through Aquinas’s citation of Ps. 75:5 in the *principium*: “You shine wonderfully from the everlasting mountains.” Tugwell suggests that Aquinas is following a gloss by the Lombard in this interpretation,²⁶ but that gloss itself points to Augustine, among others, as its

21. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume 1, The Person and His Work*, 51.

22. *Rigans Montes*, prooemium.

23. Most of his lectures on the Gospel of John are in conversation with Augustine’s homilies on John.

24. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. O. P. Edmund Hill, vol. 12 of Part III, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York: New City Press, 2009), I.2, 40.

25. *Ibid.*, I.6, 43.

source,²⁷ so a more complete explanation would be that Aquinas was following Augustine's lead in his exposition of Ps. 75:5 in Augustine's *Enarrations on the Psalms*:

Who are these eternal mountains? They are the people whom God has made to last forever; they are the lofty mountains who are preachers of the truth. You send your light, your own light, but you send it from the everlasting mountains, because those mighty mountains are the first to receive your light, and afterwards the earth is clothed in that brilliance which the mountains were the first to receive. Those great mountains, the apostles, caught it; the apostles intercepted the first glimmers of your rising light. . . . Listen, everyone: the light comes to you through the mountains, certainly, but it is God who illumines you, not the mountains.²⁸

These Augustinian ideas about God, light, and mountains, whether received directly or indirectly, seem to be just as influential, if unstated, as the Dionysian influence upon Aquinas's lecture. The fact that the Lombard's gloss on Ps. 75:5 claims the eternal mountains are the apostles and other writers of scripture points to how pervasive these particular ideas of Augustine had become by the time Aquinas gave this lecture. This is not, however, to diminish the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on the work, but rather to show how Aquinas could combine the ideas of these two authors into a coherent framework connected by ideas of light. Servais Pinckaers summarizes Aquinas's integration of the light of both scripture and tradition this way:

In writing the *Summa*, Thomas is aware that he is listening to the Lord teaching on the mountain, in the company of the Fathers and the holy Doctors of the Church, in the same fellowship with all those, philosophers and others, who, without having been able to hear this voice directly, had nonetheless known how to welcome, even if imperfectly, the light of truth shining at the summit of their souls. For him, it is not merely a beautiful picture or ideal, but a living communion in the light of the truth poured into their hearts by the

26. Tugwell, *Albert & Thomas: Selected Writings*, 357, fn. 6.

27. PL 191:706CD.

28. Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms 73-98*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Bolding, vol. 18 of Part III, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New York: New City Press, 2002), 76.7, 59-60 (note that this text does not use the Vulgate numbering of the Psalms).

Spirit, who had already hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation.²⁹

THEOLOGY AS ILLUMINATION

Having looked at how scripture and tradition mediated ideas of illumination in this inaugural lecture, we can now look at the second element of this lecture, which is how theology is itself an illuminating enterprise. Much recent discussion in Thomistic circles has revolved around the question of whether or not holy teaching (*sacra doctrina*)³⁰ qualifies as an Aristotelian science (*scientia*) and whether Aquinas has sufficiently made the case that it is such. Lost in the discussion is the idea, as Aquinas suggests in *Rigans Montes*, that the work of holy teaching both requires and provides illumination. Perhaps the neglect is the result of a peculiar modern theological aversion to talking about enlightenment and illumination in any kind of realistic manner, especially in the wake of Kant's argument against the darkness of church thinkers and his demand that we dare to think for ourselves. Also important is the priority that scientific knowledge, though understood in the modern rather than the Aristotelian sense, bears in contemporary thought.³¹ To suggest that our knowledge of God requires anything other than our own intellectual resources or personal intuitions is a kind of heresy to the modern secular mind.

Yet illumination is at the heart of Aquinas's conception of holy teaching, and to understand both what he is up to in general, and the "scientific" nature of holy teaching, we must attend to the illuminating effect of this teaching. Theology as illumination and theology as *scientia* are not concepts opposed to each other, but rather concepts that understood together can increase our understanding of Aquinas's project.

29. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus, trans. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. et al. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 23.

30. "Holy teaching" is a better rendering of *sacra doctrina* than the usual "sacred doctrine" because it gets to the heart of the pedagogical task that is the emphasis of the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as the rest of Aquinas's works. The holiness of *sacra doctrina* points both to its source in the knowledge of God and the saints and to its function of making us holy. "Doctrine" tends to have, from a modern perspective, more rigid connotations that leave less room for dispute than was the norm in medieval scholasticism.

31. See Kant's essay, "What Is Enlightenment?" in James Schmidt, *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, Philosophical Traditions, 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58–64.

As John Jenkins has pointed out, given Aquinas's understanding of the Aristotelian notion of *scientia* found in the *Posterior Analytics*, in any *scientia* there is a considerable amount of intellectual preparation that must take place prior to grasping the demonstrations that provide the deep knowledge that constitutes *scientia*.³² In order to achieve this knowledge, one must serve an apprenticeship under an experienced teacher, one who knows the principles from which all knowledge of a field flows.³³ But the very act of teaching is, for Aquinas, an act of illuminating others, and the act of learning is an act of being illumined, where one "can truly be called a true teacher inasmuch as he teaches the truth and illumines the mind."³⁴ Our modern description of this intuition is found when we describe light bulbs going on over our students' heads when they finally understand something, or grasp an illuminating example.

THE THREE LIGHTS OF NATURE, GRACE, AND GLORY

Aquinas was aware of the need for illumination not on a purely theoretical level, but as a reality that he lived in his daily work. In his prayer, *Ante Studium*, which Aquinas was said to have regularly prayed before working, he explicitly asks for God "to infuse into my darkened intellect the rays of your brightness and remove from me the twofold darkness of sin and ignorance into which I was born."³⁵

This prayer gives us insight into the two problems that any theologian faces in the task of doing theology, which are two kinds of darkness that obscure the light of God. The darkness of ignorance is the consequence of the fact that human beings by nature are unable to know God as God is.³⁶ Our cognitive capacities are limited by both our distance from God and by the requirement that we must do all of our learning through our senses, which is a rather severe

32. John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 46.

33. *Ibid.*, 68.

34. DV 11.1 ad 9. See also ST I 113.5 ad 2, where Aquinas describes the role of guardian angels "to illumine by teaching" (*ad illuminationem doctrinae*).

35. Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula Theologica*, ed. Raymundi Spiazzi, vol. II (Rome: Marietti, 1954), 285–86. My translation of "infundere digneris super intellectus mei tenebras tuae radium claritatis duplices in quibus natus sum, a me removens tenebras, peccatum scilicet, et ignorantiam."

36. Though God created humans in a state of grace that allowed them to know God. Through sin they lost this grace and so by nature are no longer able to know God. See ST I 94.1. For a full description of the metaphysical assumptions here, see A. C. Pegis, "In Umbria Intelligentiae," *New Scholasticism* 14 (1940): 146–80.

limitation for anyone thinking about a being, God, who is not directly available to our senses. The darkness of sin puts an additional obstacle between us and the source of divine light in the same way that the moon blocks the light of the sun during a solar eclipse, so without the light of grace removing the obstacle of sin, our ability to think correctly about God is limited. There is a direct link between the holiness of the theologian and his ability to do theology well, as Aquinas mentions in his *principium*.³⁷ There is a third darkness that Aquinas mentions elsewhere, the darkness of condemnation, but because of its eschatological character it is less relevant to the actual task of theology except, of course, as something to be avoided. All of these darkneses, these obstacles and limitations that obscure our ability to know God, cause humans to be unable to apprehend God as their final end. Under our own power it does not matter if holy teaching is a *scientia* or not, as we are unable to get any kind of theological project very far off the ground at all. On our own, we are lost.³⁸

The counter to the three darkneses of sin, natural ignorance, and condemnation with respect to God is found in what we might think of as Aquinas's three light theory of theology. Aquinas sees three lights, "the light of nature, grace, or glory,"³⁹ as being crucial to the theological enterprise. First, we use the natural light of our intellect for two things—to understand something of God through his effects in the world and to understand the principles of theology revealed to us in scripture. This light is not an autonomous light, but one implanted in us by God and thus a participation in God's light, yet it also operates under the power of our will; to capture this dependence and independence, we might think of this natural light and its activity as flowing from a "created autonomy."⁴⁰ Second, theology proceeds by the light of grace or the divine light, which both removes the cognitive effects of our sin and elevates our intellects beyond their natural abilities for the purpose of overcoming our ignorance. Third, theology is ultimately aimed at participating in the light of glory found in the beatific vision, in which the discursive nature of theology will be replaced by the perfect and unmediated vision of the incomprehensible

37. *Rigans Montes*: "So all the teachers of sacred scripture ought to be high because of the high quality of their lives, so that they will be capable of preaching effectively . . . hearts cannot be goaded on or fixed in the fear of God unless they are fixed in an elevated way of life."

38. This is why the very first article of the *Summa Theologiae* deals with the necessity of holy teaching, not its status as a *scientia*. ST I 1.1: "But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation."

39. ST I 106.1 ad 2.

40. We will explore this natural light in chapter 5.

God. At the same time, the basis for holy teaching is God's own knowledge and that of the blessed which is experienced in the beatific vision—when this light is shared with us we come to know things about God we could not know in any other way.⁴¹

These three lights all come together in Aquinas's description of the *imago Dei*, based upon the aforementioned Ps. 4:7:

Wherefore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory. Wherefore on the words, "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us" the gloss distinguishes a threefold image of "creation," of "re-creation," and of "likeness." The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed.⁴²

Holy teaching, inasmuch as it involves humans, must involve our light as created, as re-created, and ultimately as full participation in God's light.

It would, however, be a mistake to consider these as three separate lights and set them off against each other. For Aquinas only God has light by essence and thus any illumination we experience is a participation in God's light.⁴³ While there is but one source of light, however, that light has multiple effects that are partially determined by how receptive we are to them. Just as the sun may have the multiple effects of causing some things to grow, some to decompose, and some to change, so God's divine light, which he has by essence, has multiple effects in our world. Thus the three light theory I am suggesting is perhaps better thought of as the three effects of divine light theory or as Aquinas's theory of divine illuminations. We can look at each in turn as it applies to the task of holy teaching.

41. ST I 1.2: "So it is that sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely the science of God and the blessed."

42. ST I 93.4. The gloss is from Cassiodorus and can be found in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, PL 133:849D.

43. *De Trin.* 1.1 ad 6: "God is always the cause of the soul's natural light."