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## Sacred Scripture Consists More in Grace than in Letter

**Abstract.** This article intends to demonstrate that St. Thomas affirmed that Sacred Scripture, understood in analogy with *Sacra Doctrina*, —that is, as the act by which God teaches us through Sacred Scripture— consists more in the infusion of the grace of the Holy Spirit rather than the text itself. After establishing that Aquinas conceptualized it in this manner, we provide insights into the implications of this principle for the biblical hermeneutics of St. Thomas Aquinas.

**Keywords:** Aquinas, biblical hermeneutics, inspiration, Biblical Thomism.

The statement that serves as the paper’s title is not, strictly speaking, present in the text of St. Thomas. Nevertheless, it is my contention that it aligns with the tenets of Aquinas, and it is my intention to demonstrate this in the present paper. This approach will facilitate a deeper comprehension of the primacy of grace in St. Thomas Aquinas’ biblical hermeneutics.

In this context, the term “Sacred Scripture” is employed in a manner analogous to that of “*Sacra Doctrina*,” as espoused by St. Thomas. The term “Sacred Scripture” denotes not merely the text, or the doctrine contained therein, but rather the act by which God provides divine instruction through the medium of Scripture. The assertion, therefore, is that according to St. Thomas, God teaches us through Sacred Scripture not only by providing us with a text but also with an interior grace. This grace is of greater importance than the text for the communication of knowledge, as it is what makes such communication possible.

This article seeks to substantiate the veracity of the aforementioned assertion within the doctrine of St. Thomas and proffer insights that may elucidate the nature of this relationship between the text and grace. We will begin by demonstrating the existence of the assertion in question (1), and subsequently provide an elaboration of its content (2).

## 1. The existence of the assertion in Aquinas' doctrine

St. Thomas explicitly affirms this doctrine in his discussion of the New Law in *Summa Theologiae* I.II, q. 106. Nevertheless, an objection arises concerning this text. This objection will be addressed by examining the biblical sources that form the basis of Aquinas' doctrine of the New Law. In this way, while responding to the objection, we will gain a deeper comprehension of the manner in which this doctrine of St. Thomas is founded in Sacred Scripture.

### 1.1. *Summa Theologiae* I.II, q. 106

We shall commence our examination by considering the text on the New Law in the *Summa Theologiae*.

Aquinas situates the New Law within the framework of the great treatise on the Law (I.II, q. 90–108). He understands this to be the means by which God instructs man in his way towards beatitude, whereas grace is that by which He helps him in his way towards it<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, St. Thomas distinguishes the New Law from the natural law, from the human law, and from the Old Law<sup>2</sup>. He considers it the perfect law, which truly guides humanity towards beatitude.<sup>3</sup>

In the first article of question 106, St. Thomas contemplates the nature of the New Law, specifically whether it is a written law (*scripta*) or one that is introduced by God into the interior of man (*indita*). It is crucial to acknowledge that St. Thomas is considering the intrinsic function of the Law, which is to reveal to men the actions they must undertake to achieve beatitude.

In his time, the prevailing view was that the New Law was the text of the Gospel or the New Testament. This was accompanied by grace in order to fulfill its commandments. One author whose research into the subject has been particularly extensive has stated:

The general opinion in the scholastic tradition was that in the New Law the help of suitable and sufficient divine grace was given to fulfill the commandments; but that the New Law was properly a *lex indita*, an interior law, is not stated in Peter

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 90, pr.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 91, a. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 91, a. 5.

Lombard, nor in the Franciscans, nor in Albertus Magnus, and it is not even found in the Commentary on the Sentences of St. Thomas.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, St. Thomas asserts in the *Summa Theologiae* that the New Law is primarily a law implanted within the human interior (*indita*), as it is the grace of the Holy Spirit which is bestowed upon humanity through faith in Christ and it contains all its efficacy:

Now that which is preponderant in the law of the New Testament, and whereon all its efficacy is based, is the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given through faith in Christ. Consequently, the New Law is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Spirit, which is given to those who believe in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The primacy of grace in the New Law does not preclude the recognition of the other element that is an integral part of the New Law, albeit a secondary one. This element is the Gospel text:

Nevertheless the New Law contains certain things that dispose us to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and pertaining to the use of that grace: such things are of secondary importance, so to speak, in the New Law; and the faithful need to be instructed concerning them, both by word and writing, both as to what they should believe and as to what they should do. Consequently, we must say that the New Law is in the first place a law that is inscribed on our hearts, but that secondarily it is a written law.<sup>6</sup>

In his response to the first objection, St. Thomas provides a more detailed explanation of the secondary element of the New Law. He states that in the written Gospel, which was regarded by many as the new or evangelical Law, there is contained what refers to the grace of the Holy Spirit. However, he notes that this is only in a dispositive way in regard to acquiring grace and instrumental in its use. According to St. Thomas, the text of the Gospel disposes us for grace in regard to the understanding because it arouses in us the faith by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is given to us. This is achieved by presenting to us the divinity and humanity of Christ. In regard to affection, the text of the Gospel

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<sup>4</sup> Kuhn 1965, 194.

<sup>5</sup> *ST* I.II, q. 106, a. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *ST* I.II, q. 106, a. 1.

arouses the contempt of the world, which makes humanity capable of receiving grace. Conversely, the Gospel text is instrumental for the use of grace insofar as it encourages individuals to engage in virtuous actions, through which grace is developed in them.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, in the texts to which we have just referred, St. Thomas presents the function of each of these elements, namely grace and the Gospel text, through which God reveals to humanity the path towards attaining beatitude. For Aquinas, grace brings the virtuality to the act of knowledge, while the text, with its content, disposes for it by arousing faith in the humanity and divinity of Christ, and contempt for the world, and teaching the virtue according to which grace operates through faith vivified by charity. In this sense, it is evident that the two elements, the exterior and the interior, are indispensable, yet it is only through grace that man can receive what the Gospel text tells him to do.

Based on the aforementioned evidence, it can be posited that, according to St. Thomas Sacred Scripture, as God teaching us through it, is primarily the interior grace rather than the exterior text.

Nevertheless, an objection arises when considering these texts. In this context, the term “Scripture” is employed to signify the New Law, which constitutes a corpus of teachings that provides guidance on how to achieve beatitude. However, Scripture is not solely a source of practical knowledge, that is a law; but it is also a source of contemplation. Does the aforementioned principle of the New Law also apply to this aspect of Scripture?

In order to respond to this objection, it seems useful to me to delve more deeply into Aquinas’ biblical sources, which form the basis of his doctrine of the New Law. This will facilitate a response to the objection while elucidating how he has based this doctrine, which we are expounding, in Scripture.

In the cited article of the *Summa*, St. Thomas explicitly refers to four biblical texts: Jeremiah 31:31–33, Hebrews 8:8–11<sup>8</sup>, Romans 3:27 and Romans 8:2<sup>9</sup>. These texts serve to establish the interior character of the New Law and that it is the Holy Spirit. These biblical sources are interpreted in the light of the teachings of St. Augustine, particularly in his work *De spiritu et letra*, which, in fact, is interwoven with the commentary on the aforementioned biblical texts<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 106, a. 1 ad 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 106, SC.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 106, a. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 106, a. 1.

### 1.2. *Jer 31:31–33 and Heb 8:8–13*

The first two texts, *Jer 31:31–33* and *Heb 8:8–13*, St. Thomas quotes them in the SC of the article of the *Summa* we are commenting on<sup>11</sup>. As is well known, it is within the SC that Aquinas presents the theological authorities, typically drawn from Sacred Scripture or the Fathers, on which he bases his theological position. It is therefore evident that these two texts are of significance importance. In this instance, rather than two discrete texts, it is the citation of *Heb 8:8–11*, which in turn quotes *Jer 31:31–33*, that serves to proclaim the fulfillment of the New Covenant as foretold in Jeremiah with the advent of the New Testament. With the content of these two texts, he justifies the assertion that the new law is an interior law.

In order to elucidate the understanding of St. Thomas on these texts, we proceed to examine the direct commentary that he made on them. St. Thomas provided a cursory commentary on Jeremiah in his early years in Paris, between the years 1251–1252 or 1252–1253<sup>12</sup>. In his commentary on *Jer 31:31–33*, St. Thomas interprets the prophet's words as a reference to the promise of a New Covenant, which he identifies with the Gospel. This new covenant will be introduced into the heart of the faithful. However, when he specifies Jeremiah's affirmation regarding one of its effects, namely, that of being taught without the need of another neighbor ("*et non docebit ultra vir proximum suum*"), Aquinas states that in this life "we have come to divine truth not by the reasons of the prophecy, nor by human inventions, nor even by Jewish traditions"<sup>13</sup>. To provide further clarification he cites *Mt 23*: "*Nolite vocari Rabbi: unus est enim magister vester*", which alludes to the immediate teaching of Jesus as sole source of wisdom conveyed by the Gospel. Consequently, in his commentary on Jeremiah, St. Thomas does not perceive the New Law as an interior principle of teaching.

On the other hand, St. Thomas provided an additional commentary on this text of *Jer*, when he interpreted the text of *Heb 8:8–11*<sup>14</sup>. The commentary on

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<sup>11</sup> *ST I.II*, q. 106, SC.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Torrell 2015, 593.

<sup>13</sup> *In Ier.* ch. 31, lect. 10, n. 167.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the commentary on *Heb 8:10*, St. Thomas uses this text from *Jer 31:33* in four other places in his work. One of them is the one we have seen in *ST I.II*, q. 106, a. 1 SC. The others are in the commentary on *2 Cor 3:6*: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life", *Rom 2:14*: "Having no law, they are a law unto themselves" and *Rom 8:2*: "The law of the Spirit

Heb was likely composed by Aquinas during his stay in Orvieto (1261–1265) and has come down to us mainly through a *reportatio* of Reginald of Piperno<sup>15</sup>. It is thus a commentary composed during the middle period of his life as a teacher. St. Thomas posits that the author of Heb is demonstrating the superiority of Christ's priesthood on the basis of his superior ministry than that of the Old Testament<sup>16</sup>. The text of Jeremiah serves as an authority for demonstrating the insufficiency of the Old Testament that the New Testament comes to remedy<sup>17</sup>. Among other things, St. Thomas comments on the expression of Jer: "*dabo leges meas in mentem eorum, et in corde eorum superscribam eas*" saying:

The manner in which it was given is twofold: in one way by externals, by proposing words suited to their understanding. This man can do; and that is the way the Old Testament was given. In another way by acting inwardly, and this is peculiar to God: *the inspiration of the Almighty gives understanding* (Job 32:8). This is the way the New Testament was given, because it consists in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who instructs inwardly. But it is not enough to know, for one must act. Therefore, he first enlightens the intellect to understand; hence, he says, *I will give my laws into their mind*. He uses the plural, because there are various precepts and counsels. This the Holy Spirit does: *his unction teaches you* (1 John 2:27); *he will teach you all things* (John 14:26). Furthermore, he inclines the will to act well; hence, it is impressed on their heart.<sup>18</sup>

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has set me free from the law of sin and death". In the first of these quotations (2 Cor 3:6), St. Thomas uses the text of Heb 8:10 to justify that the New Testament is interior and consists of charity infused by the Holy Spirit, while the Old Testament is exterior. However, the function attributed to this interior grace is not that of knowing, but that of making it possible to do good. Thus it does not serve to clarify our objection. Nor does it do so the second time he quotes the text, when commenting on Rom 2:14, since he uses it curiously to refer to the interior law of the Gentiles who are a law unto themselves (Rom 2:14). On the other hand, the third time he quotes the text, when commenting on Rom 8:2: "the law of the Spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death", St. Thomas uses Jer 31:33 to give a reason for the nature of the law of the Spirit infused in our hearts. In this case the interior action of the Spirit is described in terms that are important for our purpose and that we will see when we explain St. Thomas' commentary on Rom 8:2 in the following section.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Torrell 2015, 598–9.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *In Heb.* ch. 8, lect. 2, n. 390, 393.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *In Heb.* ch. 8, lect. 2, n. 394.

<sup>18</sup> *In Heb.* ch. 8, lect. 2, n. 404.

With this explanation, St. Thomas provides a rationale for the interior character of the New Law in order to make it known and to make one act righteously. Firstly, he makes a general statement regarding the interior instruction of the Holy Spirit as distinctive feature of the New Testament, in contrast to the Old Testament. Then, he dwells on the fact that this instruction makes one know and act. If we merely focus on the acquisition of knowledge, he will justify that this knowledge is the work of the Holy Spirit by citing two fundamental texts: 1 Jn 2:27: “*Unctio eius docet vos*” and Jn 14:26: “*Ille (Spiritus) docet vos omnia*”.

As can be observed, the commentary to Hebrews presents a doctrine that is in alignment with that of the *Summa*. However, as with the *Summa*, it does not elucidate whether the knowledge derived from the interior action of the Holy Spirit is solely practical or also speculative. Nevertheless, in this text St. Thomas has provided two biblical passages that will elucidate Aquinas’ thought on this subject.

First of all, 1 Jn 2:27: “*Unctio eius docet vos*”. St. Thomas does not offer a commentary on 1 Jn, although he does cite this text 15 times throughout his work. A close examination of the use of this text reveals that St. Thomas employs it to justify the existence of supernatural knowledge in the faithful in grace (*III Sent.* d. 35, q. 2, a. 1 qa. 1; *De Ver.* q. 6, a. 5, arg. 1 and ad 1; q. 10, a. 10, arg. 7 and ad 7; *In Io.* cap. 16, lect. 6, n. 2138; *In II Tim.* Ch. 2 lect. 1, n. 47; *In Rom.* ch. 8, lect. 1, n. 603; *In Symb.* a. 8; *De Dec. Praec.* pr), even in some very high (*Super Io.* ch. 16, lect. 3, n. 2102), of the gift of wisdom (*ST II–II*, q. 45, a. 5), of the gift of understanding (*ST II–II*, q. 8, a. 4 ad 1), as well as of infused prudence (*ST II–II*, q. 47, a. 14 ad 1; *De Virt.* q. 3, a. 1; *De Virt.* q. 5, a. 2 ad 3). A review of the meaning ascribed to the text of 1 Jn 2:27 reveals that St. Thomas conceives of the knowledge produced by the anointing of the Spirit as a form of supernatural knowledge, encompassing both speculative and practical dimensions.

Secondly, Jn 14:26: “*Haec locutus sum vobis, apud vos manens. Paraclitus autem Spiritus sanctus quem mittet Pater in nomine meo, ille vos docebit omnia, et suggeret vobis omnia quaecumque dixerō vobis*”. St. Thomas provided a commentary on the text of the Gospel of St. John during his second stay in Paris, likely between 1270 and 1272<sup>19</sup>. It is, therefore, a work of maturity. In his commentary on Jn 14:26 St. Thomas understands that the Lord is consoling the apostles for their departure by making known to them the gifts they will receive from the Holy Spirit whom

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Torrell 2015, 597.

he will send them. In this case, the Lord tells them that the Holy Spirit will make them understand and remember his words. And he comments:

He says, *he will teach you all things*, because no matter what a person may teach by his exterior actions, he will have no effect unless the Holy Spirit gives an understanding from within. For unless the Spirit is present to the heart of the listener, the words of the teacher will be useless: *the breath of the Almighty makes him understand* (Job 32:8). This is true even to the extent that the Son himself, speaking by means of his human nature, is not successful unless he works from within by the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

As evidenced by this text of St. Thomas, the interior action of the Holy Spirit is seen as a necessary condition for supernatural human understanding, even of the words of Christ. This is the same doctrine of the New Law as applied in its entirety to the entirety of Christ's teachings, both those pertaining to theoretical understanding and those pertaining to practical application.

A similar conclusion can be drawn when considering the quotations from Jn 14:26 that St. Thomas makes in the remainder of his oeuvre. In numerous instances of the ten occasions in which St. Thomas employs this text, he argues that the Holy Spirit enables the knowledge of the mystery of Christ through his action within man (*In I Cor.* ch. 2, lect. 2, n. 100; *In Heb.* ch. 8, lect. 2, n. 404; *In Rom.* ch. 8, lect. 1, n. 602; *In Symb.* a. 8 co).

Consequently, the commentary of St. Thomas on the texts of the prophet Jeremiah and Hebrews has permitted an insight on the evolution of the master's doctrine regarding the role of interior grace for knowledge in the New Law. Nevertheless, it is only through an examination of the commentaries on 1 Jn 2:27 and Jn 14:26 that the issue in question can be adequately addressed.

### 1.3. *Rm 3,27 and Rm 8,2*

The second texts that St. Thomas cites in *Summa Theologiae* I.II, q. 106, a. 1 to support his affirmation of the New Law as an interior law are Rom 3:27 and Rom 8:2<sup>21</sup>. St. Thomas employs these two texts to substantiates the assertion that the New Law is the same grace of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, he highlights that that the second text presents this idea in a more explicit manner.

<sup>20</sup> *In Io* cap. 14, lect. 6, n. 1958.

<sup>21</sup> *ST* I.II, q. 106, a. 1.



1.3.1. *Rm* 3,27

St. Thomas provided a commentary on the Letter to the Romans during his sojourn in Orvieto (1261–1265). Moreover, he undertook a revision of the initial 13 chapters during his time in Naples at the end of his life, between spring 1272 and December 1273<sup>22</sup>. It represents one of the most significant works of Aquinas's corpus. In his commentary on *Rm* 3:27: "*Ubi est ergo gloriatio tua? Exclusa est. Per quam legem? Factorum? Non sed per legem fidei*", St. Thomas situates this text at the pivotal moment of the first part of the Letter to the Romans. After demonstrating that the status of righteousness and guilt is identical for both Gentiles and Jews, the Apostle concludes in *Rm* 3:27 by excluding the reason for glory of the Jew over the Gentile. This exclusion is not attributed to the existence of a superior law of works, but of faith<sup>23</sup>. However, Aquinas himself raises a doubt about the truth of contrasting the Old and the New Testaments as a law of works and a law of faith, given that the Old Testament was also a law of faith, and the New Testament also requires moral and sacramental works. In response to the objection raised, St. Thomas presents the Old Law as a law of works insofar as it prescribes exterior works, and the New Law as an interior law insofar as it prescribes interior works. Therefore, it can be seen that St. Thomas does not address the fundamental issue of the origin of the motion that leads to action, which can be either exterior or interior. Instead, he focuses on the exterior or interior nature of the works prescribed according to each law<sup>24</sup>.

It is also noteworthy that when St. Thomas employs this text of *Rm* 3:27 in his work<sup>25</sup>, he offers two distinct interpretations. Each interpretation according to one of the aforementioned aspects of the law. The aspects are as follows: as exterior and interior actions, or as a merely exterior or also interior principle of action. In the initial interpretation, as presented in the *Summa Theologiae* I.II, q. 107, a. 1, arg 3, St. Thomas reiterates the same objection as in the commentary. He responds by distinguishing the law of works as referring to exterior actions and the law of faith as referring to interior actions<sup>26</sup>. Conversely, in the commentary

<sup>22</sup> Torrell 2015, 598–9.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *In Rm*. ch. 3, lect. 4, n. 313.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *In Rom*. ch. 3, lect. 4, n. 316.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to the commentary on *Rm* 3:27, St. Thomas quotes this text on five occasions: *ST* I–II, q. 106, a. 1; *ST* I.II, q. 107, a. 1 arg 3; *ST* II–II, q. 16, a. 1 s.c.; *In Eph*. ch. 2, lect. 5, n. 115; *In Eph*. ch. 4, lect. 2, n. 199.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ST* I.II, q. 107, a. 1 ad 3.

on Eph 2:15, “*Legem mandatorum decretis evacuens*,” the law of mandates is understood as a law of works according to Rom 3:27. And it is explained as a law that only teaches externally, without imparting interior grace to act<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless, in both instances the law in question does not impart instruction from within.

### 1.3.2. *Rm* 8,2

The ambiguity present in both the commentary and the text of the referred text of the *Summa* may be precisely why St. Thomas refers to Rom 8:2 as a place where the New Law is revealed to be interior and to be the Holy Spirit in a more explicit way. Aquinas understands that St. Paul, after having taught that by the grace of Christ we have been freed from sin and the Law, in chapter 8 goes on to demonstrate that “by the same grace we are freed from condemnation”<sup>28</sup>. The Apostle elucidates the cause of liberation from condemnation in Rom 8:2, where it is stated that: “*Lex spiritus vitae in Christo Iesu liberavit me a lege peccati et mortis*”. In his commentary on this text, St. Thomas provides a detailed explanation of the meaning of the expression “*lex Spiritus*”. He provides an elucidation of the dual interpretation of the expression, delineating its potential references to the Holy Spirit or to the faith that works through charity. In both interpretations there is an internal motion to know and to act, which is in contrast to the merely external teachings of the human law. Accordingly, upon interpreting it as the Holy Spirit, he states:

In one way this law can be the Holy Spirit, so that the *law of the spirit* means the law which is the Spirit. For a law is given in order that through it men may be led to the good; [...]. Human law does this by merely indicating what ought to be done; but the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the intellect but also inclines the affection to act aright: *but the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, as to the first, and suggest to you all things, as to the second, all that I have said to you* (John 14:26).<sup>29</sup>

In interpreting of the effects proper to the Holy Spirit, which are faith working through charity, St. Thomas states:

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *In Eph.* chap. 2, lect. 5, n. 115.

<sup>28</sup> *In Rom.* ch. 8, lect. 1, n. 595.

<sup>29</sup> *In Rom.* ch. 8, l. 1, n. 602.

In another way *the law of the spirit* can be the proper effect of the Holy Spirit, namely, faith working through love. This faith teaches what is to be done: *his anointing teaches you about everything* (1 John 2:27) and inclines the affections to act: *the love of Christ controls us* (2 Cor 5:14).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, he concludes by affirming that this law of the Spirit is the New Law promised by Jer 31:31–33:

And this *law of the spirit* is called the new law, which is the Holy Spirit himself or something that the Holy Spirit produces in our hearts: *I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts* (Jer 31:33).<sup>31</sup>

In the light of St. Thomas' commentary, it becomes evident that he understands the Law of the Spirit, that is, the New Law, as opposed to that of the Old Testament. Furthermore, he understands it as an interior law insofar as the Holy Spirit acts interiorly through faith and charity to instill knowledge of what man must do and carry it out, in addition to what the law does externally. Nevertheless, it is not possible to respond to the objection that has been raised using the aforementioned content. It appears that the knowledge derived from the interior action of the Holy Spirit is a practical knowledge, and the text does not explicitly address the question of whether this knowledge is also speculative. However, a solution to this difficulty is available. In addition to citing Jer 31:31–33, St. Thomas' commentary also references Jn 14:27: "*Paracletus autem spiritus sanctus, quem mittet Pater in nomine meo, ille vos docebit omnibus*" and 1 Jn 2:27: "*Unctio docebit vos de omnibus*". These are the texts that have previously permitted us to elucidate the aforementioned difficulty.

The first objective of this article was to demonstrate that St. Thomas asserts that Sacred Scripture, understood as the act by which God communicates himself to humanity through Scripture, is primarily constituted by interior grace rather than by the exterior letter. I believe that this objective has been met. Although the most explicit formulation of the principle by St. Thomas is found in *Summa Theologiae* I.II, q. 106, a. 1 when discussing of the New Law, its character as Law could nevertheless be perceived as reducing it to practical knowledge. In order to demonstrate that this principle is also applicable to the speculative or con-

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<sup>30</sup> In Rm. cap. 8, l. 1, n. 603.

<sup>31</sup> In Rm. cap. 8, l. 1, n. 603.

templative realm, we have elected to conduct a more thorough examination of Aquinas' thought through the biblical sources on which he bases his doctrine. Nevertheless, the initial texts of Jer 31:31–33, Heb 8:8–13, Rom 3:27 and Rom 8:2 did not provide a definitive resolution to the issue at hand. In order to gain further insight, it was necessary to examine the biblical sources that St. Thomas cites in these texts and that provide support for his interpretation. The relevant passages are 1 Jn 2:27 and Jn 14:26. In his interpretation of these texts, it is evident that Aquinas extends the principle of the primacy of the interior action of the Holy Spirit to both practical knowledge and speculative or contemplative knowledge.

## 2. The content of the statement

We must now proceed to the second part of our article in order to elucidate the substance of this affirmation put forth by St. Thomas. At this juncture, it is only feasible to offer a concise overview of the comprehensive doctrine of Aquinas encapsulated in this assertion.<sup>32</sup>

It is evident that the notion that God has bestowed upon humanity not only a written text but also an interior grace that enables the comprehension of its meaning is a profoundly inspiring notion for all those who read or study the Bible. Nevertheless, when one attempts to operationalize this act of reading Scripture, one may find themselves perplexed by the specifics of what this notion entails. To elucidate this point, it is essential to delineate the content of this assertion in a manner that aligns with the conceptual framework put forth by Aquinas.

We shall commence with the spiritual current that illuminates St. Thomas in his formulation of the doctrine of the New Law. As S. Pinckaers has emphasized, the formulation of the New Law represents the doctrinal formulation of the evangelical movement initiated by St. Francis and St. Dominic in which Aquinas is spiritually inscribed. In response to the Joachimism, heir to Origen in its attitude of overcoming the Christological order, and the advent of a naturalistic rationalism that made its entrance in the Middle Ages associated with Aristotle, St. Thomas put forth a synthesis drawn from the doctrine of the New Testament that prioritized the Spirit while also upholding the necessity of the letter. This

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<sup>32</sup> I have further developed the content of this statement in: Manresa 2018.

synthesis balanced the Pneumatic order with the Christological order of the incarnation in the economy of salvation.<sup>33</sup>

This principle is applied by St. Thomas to the intelligence of the revelation transmitted in Sacred Scripture, which responds to the nature of the biblical text. In this regard, the biblical text is considered to be a true human text elevated by the action of the Holy Spirit.

In this sense, St. Thomas provides a rationale for the necessity of attending to the text in the economy of the incarnation. In his analysis of the content of the New Law in question 108 of the *Summa*, he presents a particularly noteworthy passage. The question's objective is to ascertain whether the New Law encompasses external or solely internal works. However, the argumentation presented provides rationale for the necessity of the sensible due to Incarnation:

As stated above (q. 106, a. 1. 2), the New Law consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is shown forth by faith that worketh through love. Now men become receivers of this grace through God's Son made man, whose humanity grace filled first, and thence flowed forth to us. Hence it is written (John 1:14): *The Word was made flesh*, and afterwards: *full of grace and truth*; and further on: *Of His fullness we all have received, and grace for grace*. Hence it is added that *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*. Consequently, it was becoming that the grace which flows from the incarnate Word should be given to us by means of certain external sensible objects; and that from this inward grace, whereby the flesh is subjected to the Spirit, certain external works should ensue.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, in order to grasp the meaning conveyed through these sensible realities, an illumination of the Holy Spirit is indispensable, given that the biblical text is written in the grace of the Holy Spirit. In *Quodlibetal* XII in article 17 St. Thomas poses a question regarding the office of those who interpret the Scripture. He specifically inquires about the extent to which the teachings of the Holy Fathers can be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Paschasius Radbertus and, in particular, Abelard highlighted the discrepancies between the interpretations of the Fathers, with the objective of undermining their interpretative authority. In response to this question, St. Thomas offers the following:

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pinckaers 2007, 221. For the new law as a response to Joachimism: cf. (Grosse 2018, 159–73).

<sup>34</sup> *ST* I.II, q. 108, a. 1.

It must be said that the Scriptures are expounded by the same Spirit by whom they were written. Hence it is said in 1 Corinthians 2:14: “The animal man does not perceive the things that are of God, yet spiritual, etc” and especially those things that are of faith, because faith is a gift of God. And for this reason, the interpretation of speeches is numbered among the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor 12:10.<sup>35</sup>

St. Thomas begins with a premise derived from St. Jerome, namely, that “Scripture must be interpreted by the same Spirit by which it was written.” From this, he concludes that in order to understand Scripture, particularly with regard to matters of faith, man must be elevated by the Holy Spirit. Although St. Thomas applies the principle to the charism of interpretation as grace *gratis datae*, it is necessary to extend the principle to encompass all forms of interpretation, particularly in regard to matters pertaining to faith.

The necessity of the grace of the Holy Spirit for interpretation gives rise to an examination of the challenges that interpreters must overcome in order to grasp the meaning of Scripture. St. Thomas gathers them in two texts. In *Summa Theologiae* II.II, q. 1, a. 9 ad 1, when he seeks to provide a rationale for the necessity of the Symbol, he states that “the truth of faith is contained in Holy Writ, diffusely, under various modes of expression, and sometimes obscurely.” Conversely, in *Summa Theologiae* II.II, q. 176, a. 2 ad 4, he provides further rationale for the necessity of the charism of interpretation. In addition to the aforementioned obstacles, he identifies “the obscurities of speech arising either from a difficulty in the things signified, or from the words uttered being unknown, or from the figures of speech employed”.

In the mind of St. Thomas, Sacred Scripture is ordered to the salvation of men. However, not all of the content of Sacred Scripture is ordered directly to this end. Rather, some of the things are said by reason of others, which are those that properly order to eternal life. Accordingly, the interpreter is confronted with the challenge of elucidating a teaching that must be attained through a process of traversing from one truth to the next and integrating these insights into a cohesive doctrine that which properly orders to eternal life. Moreover, these salvific truths possess a profound spiritual elevation, which presents a significant challenge for the interpreter in their comprehension. Moreover, in the absence of an understanding of these salvific truths, figurative language remains opaque to those seeking to comprehend its meaning. In light of these considerations,

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<sup>35</sup> *Quodlibet* XII, a. 17 (translation of the author).

St. Thomas provides justifications for the necessity of the Holy Spirit's role in interpreting Sacred Scripture. In this way, St. Thomas offers a commentary on 2 Tim 2:7: "*Intellige quae dico: dabit enim tibi Dominus in omnibus intellectum*" says:

Then when he says, *understand*, he explains what he had said, following Christ's method of explaining his parable: *he that has ears to hear let him hear* (Mat 13:9). As if to say: reduce these to a spiritual meaning. [...] But you will be able to understand this, *for the Lord will give you in all things understanding: let his unction teach you of all things* (1 Jn 2:27).<sup>36</sup>

The anointing of the Spirit is what enables us to comprehend the words of the Apostle not literally, but spiritually, in the same way as it enables us to understand the parables of Jesus. This is precisely what St. Thomas asserts that the Apostles were able to do when they became spiritual men. In his commentary on Jn 16:25, Aquinas states:

There is a difference between one who is spiritual and one who is sensual: a sensual person understands spiritual words as proverbs, not because they were spoken as proverbs, but because the mind of such a person cannot rise above material things, and spiritual things are hidden, *but the sensual man does not perceive these things that are of the Spirit of God* (1 Cor 2:14). But one who is spiritual understands spiritual words as spiritual. At the beginning, the disciples themselves were sensual, and what was told them they found obscure, and took as proverbs. But after they were made spiritual by Christ and had been taught by the Holy Spirit, they clearly understood spiritual words as spiritual.<sup>37</sup>

The aforementioned principle is similarly applicable to the interpretation of Scripture within the context of the Church. Aquinas acknowledges the existence of a diversity of charisms and offices within the Church. Among these is the charism of interpretation, which the Fathers were eminently endowed with, as was the Magisterium or theology. In the aforementioned *quodlibetal*, St. Thomas responds to Abelard's objection by distinguishing between what the Fathers spoke moved by the Holy Spirit as witnesses to the faith and what they spoke as particular authors. From this interpretation of the Holy Spirit given by the Fathers, the interpreter may derive guidance for his reading of Scripture. In this

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<sup>36</sup> *In 2 Tim.* ch. 2, lect. 1, n. 47.

<sup>37</sup> *In Io* cap. 16, lec. 7, n. 2152.

regard, Aquinas likens this guidance to that of elder brothers (*maiores*), who assist the interpreter in discerning the true meaning of the text.

I hope that through these brushstrokes, we have been able to grasp the profound richness that this principle holds for biblical hermeneutics according to the mind of St. Thomas. There is a great deal more to consider, including the role of prophecy, the primacy of the literal sense, the influence of faith on the acceptance of supernatural truth and its impact on interpretation, the necessity of the supernatural ordering of affection and its influence on the understanding of the realities transmitted in Scripture<sup>38</sup>, and the various ways of interpreting, whether by study or by connaturality according to the gifts of intelligence, wisdom or science, etc. A comprehensive examination of this principle, as espoused by St. Thomas, would reveal its inherent richness and its role as a unifying element in the multifaceted domain of interpretation.

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<sup>38</sup> *In Io* cap. 14, lect. 6, n. 1959.