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Aquinas and Bonaventure On Christ and Human Flourishing

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Theologians in the high medieval West were convinced of the close link between Christ and human flourishing; it is highly likely that they would have approved of this consultation. In the telling of the theologians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to live authentically as human and to reach the goal set for humans by God, doing so in the company of others called to God as end and in solidarity with them as led by God—all of this requires the indispensable, manifold contribution of Christ. The Christological dimension of human flourishing in high medieval theology is, it is true, only occasionally acknowledged in the scholarship; and some scholars may in fact doubt the universality of the claim. Might Christ, in at least some medieval theologies, be an afterthought or marginal, with the main points of a theological anthropology attained and advanced without attending to Christ? The claim, however, still holds. In a theologian such as Bonaventure, Christ is front and center in the depiction of the good life, and the link between human flourishing and Christ is incessantly, repeatedly, observed. In Aquinas, the centrality of Christ in human flourishing may be less obvious. But, Aquinas is no less convinced of the importance of Christ, and the case for that importance is made very nicely in his greatest writing, the *Summa theologiae*. In this paper, I will look at how Christ figures in the account of human flourishing offered by these two great theologians, here taken as representative of the high medieval consensus about Christ and human flourishing.

I approach our topic as a scholar of medieval Christology (I am not an historian of moral theology, although I have written on particular issues that should be of interest to
moral theologians, such as grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit). A few comments about medieval Christologies are in order, to set the stage. Medieval scholastic Christologies, including those of Aquinas and Bonaventure, are unfailingly incarnational. An incarnational Christology affirms an act: the Word was made flesh. That act informs the account of the incarnate one. To employ the language of person and nature: from eternity, the Word is the second person of God. The Word is a distinct person in the Godhead. The Word is also fully God; and whatever is true of God, is true of this divine person (and true of the other divine persons). In the act of incarnation, the Word does not cease to be the fully divine second person. In the act, the fully divine Word takes up a second nature—human nature—construed as a potential for a human form of existence, and comes to express it as well. A second nature is joined to the first (the divine nature, what is true of someone as God), in the person or hypostasis of the Word. By incarnation, the fully divine Word is also truly human; the Word is the subject of the humanity in the case of Jesus. The person of Jesus is the Word; that person is from eternity fully divine, truly God; by incarnation, that person is now also human, truly human, capable of human activities. Thirteenth-century theologians strive mightily to adhere to a one person, two natures Christology. And, in their renderings of the Word, and of Jesus, they will attempt to attend to the different aspects of the Word who is incarnate. With greater or lesser success, a one person, two natures Christology in the thirteenth century will also attempt to do justice to the three sorts of statements that have been made of the Word. Some statements are made of the Word as that particular divine person. Such statements are exclusive to the Word, not made of the other divine persons, and are true from eternity. Some statements are made of the Word as God; such statements are true, and equally and
eternally, of the other divine persons. And, some statements are made of the Word as incarnate, as truly human. These last statements attend to the fact of incarnation, and why it matters that this fully divine person has without loss to itself become human, is human, and acts as human.

In their investigation of Christ and human flourishing, Aquinas and Bonaventure agree that Christ’s personal holiness, his acting and concomitant flourishing, is pertinent to the analysis; and as it happens the two theologians consider that holiness with reference to the third type of predication. Both theologians insist that statements about the moral and spiritual goodness of Jesus are examples in the final category, having to do, not with the Word as Word or the Word as God, but with the (incarnate) Word as human. For both Aquinas and Bonaventure, what accounts for the moral or spiritual success of any human is grace and the virtues attendant on grace, the stable dispositions that ennoble their possessor and make possible actions pleasing to God. This is true of this human as well: Jesus did and could do what he did because he had grace and the virtues. Indeed, as scripture informs us (e.g., John 1:14), he had the fullness of grace; and by that fullness, his moral and supernatural acts were unfailingly good, and fully pleasing to God. Hence, for both of our theologians, Jesus is the model for authentic human behavior, showing what is possible for those who are in correct relationship to God and how they might act as they move toward God as their end. (Of course, for these two theologians, Christ is more than model; he is savior, and his saving work is not to be reduced to his moral exemplarity. But, he is nonetheless the moral exemplar.)

While thirteenth-century Christologies are incarnational, affirming a single subject, double account, Christology, differences do emerge among different
theologies—in the way that scripture is used in a particular Christology; the extent to which a theologian knows and makes use of the preceding theological and ecclesial traditions (Aquinas, in particular, is quite exceptional for his knowledge of the early Greek councils, with their supporting documentation); where the accent is placed in terms of the different aspects of Christ; the skill with which the triple predication is deployed by individual theologians. In terms of our two theologians, a substantial difference emerges in their accounts of the causality of the humanity taken up and expressed by the Word. Bonaventure and Aquinas agree that when it comes to ‘spiritual goods’—grace, the glory of heaven—God is the principal cause. Only one who essentially has something, can share that with others. If grace is a ‘participation in the divine nature’ (an echoing of 2 Peter 1:4, a favorite way of defining grace), then only God can cause grace. But, is there a sense in which the humanity of Christ—that is, what the incarnate Word does through and in the Word’s assumed humanity—is productive of grace, of glory?

Bonaventure thinks here in terms of *sine qua non* causality, which would appear to be the majority thirteenth-century position.¹ It is God who causes grace, brings to glory; but God does so on the occasion of Christ’s human actings and sufferings, thus conveying grace, glory, in conjunction with this human acting, on the basis of a promise or agreement binding God’s rendering of grace to that human’s doing. Aquinas for his part by mid-career (that is, by the time of the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the chapters, in book IV, on Christ; see in particular IV.41, and 36) comes to think of Christ’s humanity standing to his divinity as a personal, conjoined, animate instrument. The instrument is personal, for it is the Word’s: the Word is the subject of this humanity, has instantiated it, and is the subject of Christ’s human acts and suffering. It is conjoined, because the
second nature has been united to the first, in the person of the Word; and it is animate, because body and soul—and the capacities brought by soul—have been truly taken up by the Word in becoming incarnate, and the Word is truly active, precisely as human. The claim about ‘animate’ in fact nicely acknowledges a key feature of Aquinas’s version of a single subject, double nature, Christology. It is not just that the Word incarnate has two natures; those natures are operative, are each operative. The Word incarnate operates both as God and as human. As God, the Word knows and wills in a divine way; as incarnate Word, the Word knows and wills as is appropriate to a true human, one who, in accordance with his salvific mission, is perfectly good and operating, as a human, at the highest level.

AQUINAS

A closer examination of our theologians on Christ and human flourishing is in order. I begin with Aquinas, concentrating on the teaching in his most famous writing, the Summa theologiae. That writing is immense, over one and a half millions words in length; in it Aquinas offers his most extensive accounts both of the moral life, and, of Christ. In this writing his pedagogical skill in teaching Christ and human flourishing is on full display.

The ST is divided into three Parts. The first is on God, and, on the procession of creatures from God (so, on God in Godself, and as the beginning of all creatures as creator). The Prima Pars offers the basics of an anthropology in a lengthy ‘treatise on man’ (I.qq.75-102), reflecting on the constitution of the human person in body and soul, as well as offering some questions on the original state. However, it is the Second and the Third Parts of the ST that principally concern us here.
The Second Part of the ST is on the movement of the rational creature to God as end (for this description, see the Prologue to ST I.2), and is itself divided into two parts. The First Part of the Second Part (the Prima Secundae; I-II) looks at the movement of the rational creature to God as end in general terms, treating first of beatitude (the end of human beings, in which their fulfillment rests) (qq.1-5); then human acts, including a review of the main components of a complete, good act, and, an extensive set of questions on the passions (qq.6-48); and then the principles of human acts (qq.49-114), both intrinsic (qq.49-89), and extrinsic (qq.90-114). The intrinsic principles of human acts are the habits, and Aquinas discusses in turn habits in general (q.49-54), the virtues, that is, the habits that are good and dispose a person well (qq.55-70), and vice (bad habit) and sin (qq.71-89). The extrinsic principles of human acts are law in its various types (qq.90-108), and, grace (qq.109-114). The opening questions, on beatitude, set the tone for the entire Second Part. Objectively, beatitude is found in God, for God, when known and loved directly, completes a human, fulfills that human; subjectively, then, that is, with regards to the human, it is through human operation (knowing and loving) that beatitude is attained. The beatific vision is the goal of human existence, of human acting; and it is reached, if it is, in the next life, when the human person knows and loves God directly.

God as beatifying end should provide the orientation to life in this world. What is willed and done here, in this life, should be ordered to God as beatifying end; and what is willed and done, when correct, prepares for that end, moves one closer to that end, and can anticipate that end. The beatific vision involves human operation at its highest pitch: the direct knowing and loving of God in the next life. Talk of movement lends itself to
the notion of a ‘journey.’ In the present life, this is a journey of act, of operation; and one makes progress in the journey by acts of knowing and loving that are appropriate to life in this world, as ordered to God as end.

Aquinas is keenly aware of divine transcendence, and affirms that God’s establishment of the triune God as beatifying end of human beings is a gift of God, not a due of the nature. Indeed, Aquinas has made this point in the very first article of the Summa (ST I.1.1c), in which he asserts the necessity of sacred doctrine, that is, of the divine revelation of the truths needed for salvation. Some truths of God can be attained by natural reason; these include that God exists, and is one (these are the preambles of faith). But, other truths needed for salvation simply exceed the reach of reason, and humans can come to know these truths only on the basis of God’s revelation (these are the articles of faith); and the example that Aquinas gives in the Summa’s opening article is God as beatifying end, a point that he illustrates with a quotation of Isaiah 64:4. That Isaiah is quoted as well by Paul, in I Corinthians 2:9-10, in the course of his meditation on Christ and God’s wisdom, which differs from worldly wisdom. Incarnation, and the work of the incarnate One, for Aquinas is also counted among the articles of faith. Aquinas’s first readers would have picked up on the implicit Pauline reference.

That God has freely and generously appointed God as the end of human existence informs the discussion in the Prima Secundae, of human act, and of the capacity for the acts that bring one to beatitude. Acting presupposes capacity. The natural powers of the human person (qua human) are insufficient to attain the glory of heaven and for acts that would prepare one for heaven. Hence, throughout the Second Part (including the Second Part of the Second Part), in light of the ontological gap between God and the rational
creature, Aquinas returns repeatedly to those endowments, having to do with added
capacity, that God provides, to make possible the successful journey to God as beatifying
end. Thus, to hit the most important examples: in his taxonomy of the virtues, he
introduces infused virtues, which include the theological virtues (faith, hope, charity) and
moral virtues (I-II.63.3-4), all of which orient their possessor to God as beatifying end
and incline to acts that bring one to that end;⁴ defines the New Law as in its essence the
grace of the Holy Spirit (I-II.106.1c), which Law not only directs to good action (as do
other laws reviewed in ST I-II.90-108) but provides the power to do what God seeks of
humans; treats as part of the discussion of virtue, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, habits that
make their possessor more docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit (I-II.68); and,
brings the Prima Secundae to term by stressing grace itself, understood both as habitual
grace, elevating the self and providing the fundamental orientation to the beatifying God,
and as auxilium, the direct involvement in human acting of the Spirit who is leading,
urging, directing, the person to God as end and to acts that are pleasing to God (I-II.109-
114). Grace, virtue, gift: all augment capacity, providing an elevating that in principle
bridges the ontological gap.

Yet, in Aquinas’s telling, there is more to the ‘eudaimonean gap’ than the
ontological distance between God and humans (I first came to know of ‘eudaimonean
gap’ as a way of putting what complicates the attainment of beatitude from David Elliot’s
recent University of Notre Dame dissertation).⁵ Aquinas is acutely aware of sin—original
sin, actual sins, the predisposition to sin by vice (I-II.71-84)--and how sin complicates,
might frustrate, the journey to God as beatifying end. Thus, in his account of grace,
Aquinas insists as well on the healing function of grace. ST I-II.109.2c nicely conveys
the riches of Aquinas’s account. Is grace needed to will and do the good? Here, Aquinas doubles the question: are we talking about the natural good, or, the supernatural good? The natural good in principle lies within one’s natural powers. But, Aquinas adds, we need further to consider whether the willing and doing of good is pre- or post-Fall. Prior to the Fall, habitual grace would be needed only for the supernatural good, not for the natural good. For the latter, one’s natural powers would have sufficed. But, after the Fall, those natural powers do not suffice for the full natural good. Someone after the Fall and under sin can still do some naturally good things; Aquinas, making use of a Ps-Augustinian text, mentions such activities as planting vineyards and building stone walls. But, for the full range of naturally good activities, after the Fall grace is required. Thus, grace elevates, but for Aquinas it will also heal, needed to do so in face of the weakening of the self by sin.

The Second Part of the Second Part of the *Summa* (Secunda Secundae; II-II) moves from the general to the particular. Most of the Secunda Secundae is given over to lengthy examinations of each of the major virtues: of the theological virtues, faith (II-II.1-16), hope (II-II.17-22), and charity (II-II.23-46), and, of the cardinal virtues (and the virtues adjacent to prudence (II-II.47-56), justice (II-II.57-122), fortitude (II-II.123-140), temperance (II-II.141-170)). Aquinas includes in the treatise of questions on each virtue a review of its appropriate act(s); its opposed vice(s); the gift(s) of the Holy Spirit associated with a particular virtue; and the precepts of the virtue. The Secunda Secundae concludes with a discussion of the graces, given to some, that function in the building up of the Church (II-II.171-78), and, of religious states (II-II.179-189) (with attention to the contemplative and active lives, and their respective perfection). In the particular
investigations of the Secunda Secundae, the main lessons of the Prima Secundae are reinforced: action is important; acting presupposes capacity; the capacity required for the journey to the beatifying God is that of a human perfected by grace, virtue, and gift.

In the general and particular investigations of the First and Second Parts of the *Summa*’s Second Part, the focus is on the individual, on the individual’s movement to God as beatifying end. However, Aquinas’s teaching is not restricted to the individual; in discrete discussions, Aquinas will highlight what might be termed the social dimensions of the pursuit of holiness and of perfection in God. This makes sense; the journeyer, after all, is journeying in this life, and in this life, the journeyer lives with others and engages others, and how the journeyer lives in this life does make a difference, in terms of reaching God. Thus, to take some salient examples: By charity, one loves God above all things, and loves others, viewed as in relation to God (II-II.25.1). At its core, charity involves friendship (II-II.23.1), with God and with others as belonging to God, their creator. The virtue of justice, too, speaks to the social dimension: justice means to render what is owed to another (II-II.58), to God and to other human beings. The account of grace too acknowledges the social, in this case in terms of the church. In the treatise on grace (I-II.111.1; 4-5), Aquinas acknowledges the *gratiae gratis datae*, which differ from the grace (previously mentioned in this paper) that forgives, heals and elevates humans, by having as their focus the building up of Christian community by various gifts; Aquinas returns to these graces-for-the Church late in the Secunda Secundae (qq.171ff.). Aquinas’ sense of community and perception of the value of life with others, indeed service of others, informs his assessment of the different states of life, also at the end of the Secunda Secundae. In principle, the contemplative life is supreme, devoted as it is to prayer to
God and contemplation of holy things (a preparation and anticipation of the vision). But, in his treatment here, as elsewhere, Aquinas makes a nice argument for the *de facto* preferability of the mixed life, marked by both contemplation and action. Contemplation is important; but that contemplation is to be shared with others, and lived out with others. Here, Aquinas is taking into account his experience as a Dominican, as a member of an Order that was founded to preach Christ, by both word and example, and to do so in an informed, learned way. ‘Having contemplated, passing on what is contemplated to others’ (II-II.188.6c)—this saying of Aquinas nicely captures the charism of his Order, and his own sense of responsibility to others.

In the *Summa’s* Second Part, mention of Christ is relatively infrequent. But, the references are not insignificant; indeed, while Aquinas is not concentrating here on the role of Christ in the movement of humans to the beatifying God, Christ’s importance is evident. The following examples may here be noted. In his discussion of God as the cause of grace, Aquinas observes that God causes grace through Christ (I-II.112.1 ad 1), here adverting to the teaching on personal, conjoined, animate instrumentality noted earlier in this paper. It is Christ who inaugurates the era of the New Law and who gives the Holy Spirit who enables the willing and doing that is pleasing to God and conducive to eternal life (I-II.106.3). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are identified via a Christological reading of Isaiah 11 (I-II.68.4 sed contra, with a.3 ob 1/ad1); it is Christ who has the fullness of the gifts; by those gifts, Christ is rendered fully docile to the promptings of the Spirit; those who follow him and have received his Spirit and these gifts of the Spirit are themselves rendered docile to the Spirit’s promptings. It is Christ who teaches the (Matthaean) beatitudes (I-II.69). For Aquinas, the beatitudes are the acts of a person
marked by grace and virtue and especially the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These acts find their reward, first in this life, but eventually, and fully, in the next. This single question on the beatitudes thus glosses the questions that open the Prima Secundae (qq.1-5); humans are ordered to eternal life; they reach that end through actions promoted by Christ. And, as shown in the discussion of the virtue of charity and the gift especially associated with charity, the gift of wisdom, and the beatitude attached to this particular gift, in the Secunda Secundae as well Aquinas can put the journey in terms of conformity to Christ, a conformity to the natural Son that those adopted in the Spirit are led by the Spirit to attain (II-II.45.6c).

The infrequency of reference in this Part hardly speaks against the importance of Christ in the journey to God. Aquinas has a pedagogical reason, tied to his purpose in composing the Summa, for keeping the focus in this Part on humans as moving towards the beatifying God. Aquinas is following what he terms, in the general prologue to the Summa, the order of the discipline, which attempts a methodical unfolding of what is important in Christian teaching, so that a fuller understanding of each key aspect of Christian truth, and of the whole, is attained. It is worthwhile returning here to the prologue to ST I.2, mentioned earlier in the paper, where Aquinas describes the order of the entire Summa and sketches in broad strokes the content of each Part. Thus, after he states that the Second Part has to do with the movement of the rational creature to God as end, he states of the Third Part that it is concerned with Christ, who as human (secundum quod homo), is the way to God. In terms of the triple predication outlined in the opening section of this paper, we can recognize, in the reduplication (secundum quod homo), the pertinence of the humanity taken up and expressed by the Word in incarnation: it is the
Word as human who is the way \textit{via} to God as end. As indicated by his structural comments in that prologue, the Second Part is thus not the locus for the discussion of Christ and the work of Christ in bringing about human flourishing; that is the task of the Third Part. Once the Second Part is in place, with its discussion of human flourishing, Aquinas can turn in the Tertia Pars to a fuller, sustained investigation of the Christological dimensions of the journey, in the process adding resonance to the account of human flourishing offered in the Second Part.

As conceived by Aquinas, the Tertia Pars would have discussed Christ, sacrament, and, the end things; Aquinas, however, in early December, 1273, broke off the writing, in the middle of the examination of the sacraments. Aquinas devoted 59 questions to Christ in the Tertia Pars. The treatise on Christ falls into two parts: in the first (qq.1-26), Aquinas limns what might be termed the grammar of incarnation, looking in turn at the fittingness of the incarnation (q.1), the mode of union of the natures (qq.2-15), and the consequences of the union (qq.16-26). In the second main part of the treatise on Christ, Aquinas looks at such things that were done and suffered by the Savior, God incarnate. There are four sections in this second main part of the treatise: the entry into the world; his life in the world; his passion and death; and, his exaltation after this life. Depth is given to the second main part by the first; the first main part of the treatise, devoted to incarnation as both act and description of the reality that results from the act (see the first section of this paper), informs the presentation in the second main part of what might be loosely termed the ‘story’ of Jesus.

Throughout these questions on Christ, Aquinas is fully intent on maintaining the close link between Christology and soteriology; the Word incarnate is indeed \textit{secundum}
quod homo the way to the beatifying God. The opening question of the treatise insists on the link, thus setting the tone for the rest of the treatise on Christ. The second article is especially rich. The incarnation is fitting for several reasons, all tied to human salvation and the need to overcome the obstacles to a fruitful journey. In total, Aquinas offers ten reasons in this article for the fittingness of the incarnation, all keyed to salvation; these ten are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Five have to do with ‘furtherance in the good,’ the other five, with ‘withdrawal from evil.’ (That language, not incidentally, will be familiar to readers of the Second Part; it is used, for example, of the quasi-integral parts of justice, at II-II.79.1) In terms of furtherance in the good, Aquinas brings in the theological virtues: the Word of God becoming incarnate, doing so out of love, acts to stimulate faith and charity, and provides a basis for hope. The other two reasons for fittingness under this heading are equally impressive: by becoming human, the Word can thus provide a model for emulation; in joining the divine and the human in his own person, the incarnate Word also announces the end of human existence, when successful journeyers will be joined to God in their direct knowing and loving of God. As for the withdrawal from evil: that the Word has become human shows that people should not prefer the devil to themselves; underscores the dignity of being human without authorizing pride, or, presumption (for, humans need God, and the incarnate Word can do what people cannot do of themselves); and makes possible satisfaction, the voluntary payment by a human (a sinless human) of the debt owed by humans for the withholding of honor from God by sinning. These arguments for fittingness are based on certain fundamental convictions about God, and, about humans. God has called human beings into existence in order to share God’s own life with humans. Humans are made by and
for God, and will reach God through actions suited to attaining God as end. Sin thwarts
the movement to God, and must be overcome. In sum, ST III.1.2c builds nicely on the
teaching advanced earlier in the *Summa*.

Aquinas is much concerned with Christ’s agency, not least with the human
t agency of the Word incarnate. In III.7-15, Aquinas examines what he terms the co-
assumed. In qq.4-6, he has considered the human nature taken up by the Word in
becoming incarnate. In these subsequent questions, he is reflecting on those attributes or
features of a life that are not part of the nature, due to the nature (as are body and soul,
with the intellective and volitional capacities provided in soul), but may be found in a
particular human. What perfections (qq.7-13), what defects of body and soul (qq.14-15),
did this human have, did the Word in becoming human take up along with the nature? In
discussing the perfections and defects of Jesus in these questions, Aquinas is guided by
scripture (what claims about perfection, about defect, are authorized by scripture?), and
by soteriological considerations. Jesus will have had those perfections, and defects, that
are conducive to his saving work; he did not have those that would have hindered that
work. Thus, to keep to some (scripturally-obvious) points: Christ had grace, and to its
fullest; Jesus was without sin.

The first two of the questions on the co-assumed are given over to the perfection
that is grace. In q.7, Aquinas is asking about Christ’s personal grace, and all that might go
along with that. Did Christ have grace (a.1)? Did he have the virtues (a.2)? What about
particular virtues, such as faith and hope (aa.3-4)? Did he have the gifts of the Spirit
(aa.5-6)? And did he have the *gratiae gratis datae* (aa.7-8)? The list of topics—grace,
virtue, gift—is, of course, familiar from the *Summa’s* middle part: all are required for
correct human operation and so flourishing. Aquinas’ claims here are, in the main, unsurprising, in keeping with a view of Jesus’s moral perfection. The incarnate Word did have grace, and grace to its fullest (aa.9-10), including the *gratiae gratis datae*; did have the virtues, and the full range of virtues (a.2c); and did possess all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (a.5c). On this basis, then, what the incarnate Word willed and did, as human, could be (and was) perfect, given the fullness of his grace, virtue, gift.

Aquinas’s account of Christ’s virtue, however, turns out to be somewhat more nuanced. When it comes down to it, Christ did not have two notable *virtues*, those of faith and hope (aa.3-4). A fundamental imperfection is intrinsic to each virtue, and so these cannot, need not, be ascribed to Christ (at least, not *simpliciter*). Here, we are bumping up against an adjacent claim in this Christology, that Christ throughout his earthly existence enjoyed the beatific vision, and so was beatified in soul. One who has the vision sees God directly, is with God; but, in faith, one sees in a glass darkly, not face to face; and in hope, one is aspiring to a good that is future (enjoying the beatific vision, in heaven). Thus, the Christ beatified in soul is in no need of the virtue of faith, of the virtue of hope.

With other scholastics—the claim of earthly beatitude in soul is not original with Aquinas, but had been affirmed for centuries in the West and was shared by Aquinas with his scholastic contemporaries—Aquinas affirms the beatitude of Christ’s soul on soteriological grounds, in keeping with the affirmation of Christ as savior: only if Christ himself has such endowment, can he give it to others (see, e.g., *Compendium of Theology* I, 216). In advancing this claim, Aquinas is precise about what such beatitude does not entail. It is a beatitude of soul, but not of body. That will come in the next life, in the risen state. The denial of an earthly beatitude of body conforms to the basic soteriological
rule articulated above. Only those perfections will be affirmed of Christ that are conducive to his saving work. The impassibility and immortality of body that come in the body’s transformation in the final state, when the whole person is joined to God in perfect knowing and loving, would be counter-productive in the case of Christ, given his status and his saving work, in the passion and dying on the cross. Put somewhat more bluntly: his beatitude of soul does not entail a beatitude of body, during his life; he thus in the flesh, in the body animated by soul, is subject to suffering and change, and to feeling pain, and to being truly afraid before imminent danger. In the tertia pars, Aquinas makes the point in the course of talking of the imperfections that are co-assumed (see III.15.4-7) and in talking about Christ’s dying on the cross (ST III.46.8). While enjoying the beatific vision, Christ truly suffers, truly feels pain, in the process showing his great love of the Father and of those for whose sins he dies. His genuine suffering does not mitigate the vision; the vision does not mitigate the genuine suffering.

The affirmation of Christ’s earthly beatitude of soul is perhaps the most controversial claim in this Christology. It has caused consternation among even some of his most loyal readers, although others have even recently vigorously upheld and defended it. The scriptural evidence for Christ’s beatific vision throughout his life falls short of that for other claims about Christ’s co-assumed perfections and defects; and some worry that denying to him the virtues of faith and of hope, is putting Jesus far outside the experience of those who are correctly related to God. Aquinas’s affirmation of Christ’s beatification of soul throughout Jesus’s life is indeed challenging. Yet, it does seem pertinent to observe that while Aquinas denies these virtues to Christ, he is affirming that whatever of perfection there is in them, Christ has (ST III.7.9 ad 1). In
another writing (the Disputed question *de spe*⁹), Aquinas clarifies what he means: Christ exhibits the obedience that marks faith, and shows the trust in God, the reliance in God’s aid, that is crucial to hope.¹⁰ While in no need of these virtues *per se*, with their imperfection, the Word incarnate as human is nonetheless standing in correct relation to God because of what is included in them. The Word as incarnate does trust in God’s aid, is obedient to God; and surely that is pertinent to those who look to Christ for their lead.

The Word as incarnate is a perfect human agent, because of the perfections of grace, virtue, gift, successfully disposing Jesus to perfect human operation, and because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his acting out of these good habits. In his human operations, the incarnate Word attains the highest level of moral perfection, of personal holiness. Christ’s human flourishing, however, is not for its own sake; his effective operation, out of the fullness of his grace, virtue, gift, is geared to the perfecting of others. His salvific function is why he has received grace, virtue, gift, to the fullest, a point that Aquinas repeats throughout III.7. As a reminder, his humanity stands to the divinity as personal, conjoined, animate instrument; his perfect, human operations are thus instrumental. Through his perfect human operations, God causes the grace needed by others for correct relationship to God and for the acts that will bring them to glory, through Christ.

Aquinas has various ways of stating the salvific importance of Christ’s acts and suffering, drawing on the tradition, itself rooted in scripture: merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, redemption, to cite the terms employed in the account of the cross (ST III.48), in which God’s love for humans is shown through and with the love that Christ, the incarnate Word, has for others, in meeting their need and promoting their cause. ‘To satisfy’ is to
voluntarily repay the honor withheld from God by sin (III.48.3; recall III.1.2c); the
sinless Christ, who as sinless need not die, acting of the fullness of his grace and love,
thus meets that need arising from sin, offering to God what sinners cannot, but should. So
too by redemption (aa.4-5), Christ in his love and at the great cost of his life pays the
price laid up by sin, freeing humans from bondage to death and to the devil. Satisfying
and redeeming are tied closely to the cross, are likely restricted to it. The other two
terms—merit and sacrifice—are not so closely tied to the overcoming of sin, and are not
restricted to Christ’s work on the cross. ‘To merit’ (III.48.1; see too I-II.114) means to
deserve a reward from another. The one who merits must be on a par with the one who
rewards; merit and reward are a matter of justice, which assumes equality. In Christ, this
equality to God, the rewarder, is provided by the grace (participation in the divine nature)
and charity (given with habitual grace by the Holy Spirit, who is active in the willing and
doing of Christ) that perfect the Word in the Word’s humanity. Merit is not geared to the
overcoming of sin, as are satisfaction and redemption; merit presupposes that sin does not
disqualify the actor, presupposes that one is right with God, presupposes that the agent is
acting out of grace and charity. As for sacrifice: that can, to be sure, be related to sin,
offered up for sin. But, as is clear even in ST III.48.3c (an article on the cross), sacrifice
can also bespeak correct relationship to God, which is expressed and confirmed by
sacrificial acts, acts that are pleasing to God—in prayer and liturgy, but also in the praise
for God evident in good moral action (see too II-II.85). Again, as with the other ways of
putting Christ’s salvific work, sacrifice presupposes grace and charity, in Christ’s case,
their fullness. In discussing merit earlier in the Tertia Pars (e.g, q.34.3), Aquinas makes
the striking claim that Christ merited for others throughout his earthly life; each and
every one of his moral acts deserved spiritual reward from God. The same might be said of sacrifice, that Christ in his moral acts throughout his life offered due sacrifice to God. To return to the teaching about personal, conjoined, animate instrument: God causes grace, makes glory possible, by the actions of the human Word, by the incarnate Word’s graced, virtuous, gifted acts, throughout his life and then most strikingly in his suffering and dying. Conveying grace to others through such means grants to grace itself a distinctively Christological hue. And, as ST III.1.2c (with its reasons why the incarnation furthers in the good) has stated, the apt response to God’s outreach to humans will take its cue from Christ, in faith, hope and charity, and good moral acts. It is in relationship to God through Christ that one receives grace, and is shaped by grace, itself shaped by Christ.

For Aquinas, the movement to God as beatifying, while that of an individual, is nonetheless communal. The point comes through in Aquinas’s further exploration of the grace of Christ. Whereas in ST III.7 he focuses on that grace as personal, perfective of the Word in the Word’s taken up humanity, in the following question, he looks at Christ’s grace as head of the church. Christ’s personal grace and grace of headship are the same grace, viewed from different angles (III.8.5). If q.7 is attesting to Christ’s perfection in grace and so ability to act perfectly as human, q.8 is stressing that this grace is for others; q.8 is thus taking up a point that has already been made in q.7 (e.g., 1c, 9c), stating it more thoroughly. It is hard not to think, when considering qq.7 and 8 in tandem, of the Johannine comment, that Christ ‘was full of grace and truth; from his fullness, we have all received’ (John 1:14/16). For Aquinas, the Church is the body of Christ, the community of those who as members are joined to Christ as their head. This is a spiritual
body that extends throughout history and is found throughout the world. In potential, all human beings can be members of this body; in actuality, this body is made up of those who have affirmed Christ, by faith and charity, and have received from him as their Head, the grace and virtues and gifts conveyed by his Spirit (III.8.3). Made one by faith, charity, grace, and called to a discipleship to Christ that is rendered possible by participation in Christ, Christ’s members echo Christ’s own perfect operations by living for God and for others, whether actual members of this body, or those only potentially so.

**BONAVENTURE**

Bonaventure too is convinced of the close connection between Christ and human flourishing. Indeed, no one with even the slightest acquaintance with Bonaventure will dispute the centrality of Christ for Bonaventure. Bonaventure was a trained scholastic, adept in the scholastic genres; he was also a talented writer of spiritual theology. Whatever the mode in which he is working, Christ is to the forefront; and Bonaventure testifies throughout his writings to the dependence on Christ for humans to thrive and to attain fulfillment. In the main, what Aquinas teaches about Christ and human flourishing, so too does Bonaventure; the great exception has to do with Bonaventure’s adherence to *sine qua non* causality in figuring the relation between the divine and human in Christ (see the first section of the paper). Yet, while the teaching is familiar, Bonaventure does have his peculiar genius, and he can display the deep connection between Christ and the flourishing of others distinctively, when compared to Aquinas. In this section, I consider our topic in four writings of Bonaventure, taken as representative of his teaching, two of which are scholastic in nature (his *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, and, the *Breviloquium*), the other two, spiritual writings of the highest quality, his *Tree of Life*,


and, the *Life of Francis (Legenda Maior)*, the saint who had founded the Order to which Bonaventure belonged and whose own commitment to Christ had shaped Bonaventure’s sensibilities. One meets in these texts a series of nuanced treatments of Christ’s virtues, making clear that Christ’s moral and spiritual accomplishments are due to his reception of the fullness of grace and the attendant virtues, especially charity, and that the grace and virtues of others depend on and reflect Christ’s grace and virtues. I begin with Bonaventure’s *Commentary* on the Lombard’s *Sentences*.

There is an undoubted scriptural dimension to the teachings of Bonaventure and Aquinas on Christ. In contemplating the grace and virtues of Christ and limning his importance for others, Aquinas and Bonaventure have constant recourse to scripture, which for both of them is the locus of God’s revelation of the truths necessary for salvation. Scripture proclaims Christ’s moral and spiritual achievement and theology will be guided by scriptural claims when it comes to Christ and human salvation. However, without questioning the primacy of scripture, it can also be noted that a more recent work provided considerable help in their investigation of the grace and virtues of Jesus: the *Sentences* of the twelfth-century bishop of Paris, Peter Lombard. By the time of Bonaventure and Aquinas, the *Sentences* had been established as, in effect, the textbook of scholastic theology, and budding masters of theology were required to publically lecture on, and then publish their lectures on, the *Sentences*. These lectures were delivered over the course of many years, and the published/disseminated version could be very long— in the case of Aquinas’ commentary on the Sentences, perhaps a million words in length. The appeal of the *Sentences* was multiple. It aimed at comprehensiveness in topic, striving to identify and present the main theological themes;
it introduced the comments and ideas of the most important patristic authors, especially western, on these themes; and followed in its organization a plausible order, suggested by Augustine’s reflections, in his *de doctrina Christiana*, about things and signs, and the further division of things into those that are to be enjoyed, those that are to be used or employed; and those that are to be enjoyed and used. Hence, the four books of the Lombard’s *Sentences* looked first at topics having to do with the triune God (what is to be enjoyed); then in bk. II at the creation, and in particular human beings who are oriented to God as end; and then in bk. III at Christ (who is to be enjoyed and used) and what follows on Christ; and finally, in the fourth book, at signs, at the sacraments of the faith as well as end things. In terms of our topic—the virtues of Jesus and their significance for human flourishing—Peter makes pertinent comments in the second book, in discussing in a single distinction (d.27) virtue in general as part of his lengthy analysis of the need for grace, and then at greater length in the third book, in the course of his discussion of Christ and of the virtues needed for progress in discipleship to Christ. Distinction 13, on Christ’s grace and wisdom; distinction 18, on Christ’s merit as due to his grace and charity; distinctions 23, on faith, 26 on hope, and 27, on charity; as well as distinction 33, on the cardinal virtues, and distinction 36, on the connection of the virtues; are most important for this consultation.

Throughout the *Sentences*, Peter’s method is consistent. He advances a series of claims on a topic. He cites the pertinent authorities on the topic, in support of his claims. He also will note where there is disagreement, or seeming disagreement, in the preceding tradition. Often he will attempt a resolution of the disagreement, although sometimes he can admit he does not know what is correct. And, he can pose questions of his own, as a
way of stimulating the assimilation of the principal truths of the faith, theologically-considered. The pertinent distinctions in Bk. III express this method nicely.

Peter’s teaching about Jesus’s moral and spiritual goodness is pointed and coherent. The Christology is incarnational, and talk of Jesus’s moral goodness is treated in terms of the true humanness of the second divine person incarnate. Jesus did have grace and virtues, and indeed had the fullness of grace. Thus in his moral activity, Jesus works out of the grace and the attendant virtues that he has received as gift from God. With I Corinthians 13 in mind, the chief gift received by Jesus along with grace is charity. This orients Jesus to God as end, and shapes all of his actions: in acting he loves God as the highest Good for God’s own sake, and loves all else as seen in relation to God. Jesus possessed grace throughout his earthly sojourn, and all of his actions were possible by grace and the gifts attendant on grace. In proclaiming Jesus in his moral behavior, Peter can also highlight the virtues of humility and obedience. On the basis of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2, these are especially, but not exclusively so, expressed in the passion; Jesus’ humility and obedience are evident throughout his life. Endowed with the highest grace and moved by the strongest charity, all of Jesus’s actions are of the highest merit; what he does, does deserve reward from God, which Jesus can convey to those who affirm him and his work, in their faith and charity.

In affirming the grace and charity and humility and obedience of Jesus, Peter asserts a parallel with other humans; their good actions are possible by the grace and virtues provided them by God through Jesus, and Jesus’s behavior, made possible by his grace and virtues, is to be the model for theirs. They too are to love and be humble and obedient, all by the grace and virtues provided by God. However, the parallel is not
complete. It is not just that Christ’s grace and virtues are the fullest. Rather, Peter insists that Jesus lacked certain virtues that are in fact crucial for Christian life, for the successful movement of other humans, through Jesus, to God as to their end. Did Jesus have the virtue of faith, or the virtue of hope, and through these virtues, actually believe and actually hope? By faith, one is oriented to God as to the First Truth, and holds what God reveals about God and about things in relation to God, as pertinent to salvation. By hope, one aspires to God as to the end of human existence, as the future Good in whom the deepest desires and needs of the human will be met. Was Jesus not related correctly to God as Truth and (future) Good? In discussing the virtues of faith and hope, (dd.23, 26) the Lombard plays up the difference between the now and the future, between life in this world, seen as a journey to God as end, and, life in the next world, when successful journeys have reached the end of the journey. At the end of the journey, God will be known directly, face to face. The blessed enjoy the vision and comprehension—that is grasping of and irrevocable clinging to—of God. Faith and hope are characteristic of life in this world, of those who are moving to God as end but have not attained that end. Now one sees as in a glass darkly; then one will see face to face. Now one hopes for God, one aspires to a God who as end remains future. Now faith, then vision; now hope, then comprehension. There is a contrast between these two virtues and the third, with charity. Charity should mark life in this world, and will be active in the next; the theological virtue of charity will not yield to something else in the next life, although the charity of this life will reach its peak in the next. Worked into the very fiber of the virtues of faith and hope, however, is an imperfection, suggested by this tension between now and future. One who has vision of something does not believe that something; one who has reached
something and grasps it does not hope for that thing. Faith leads to beatific vision, hope to comprehension; but the blessed, those now in heaven, no longer believe, nor do they hope; they do not need to. In terms of Jesus, then, Peter answers his question in the negative. In his time in this world, Jesus was in some respects a journeyer, but in other respects a comprehensor; for throughout his time in the world, Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision. Thus, what holds of the blessed (that is, those who are in heaven) holds for Jesus. And so he had neither the virtue of faith nor that of hope; he did not need them (d.XXVI [ch.4]). However, while the emphasis here is on the imperfection woven into these virtues, Peter does toss in, in passing, that whatever of perfection is associated with these virtues, will be ascribed to Christ. Peter however does not spell out in what such perfection consists.

Turning to the Commentary: Bonaventure’s own teaching differs in several ways from the text on which he is commenting. For one thing, Bonaventure’s writing is much more elaborate. Each of his distinctions is distinguished into three main sections. In the first, Bonaventure divides the Lombard’s text, noting how that distinction is organized, and, how it fits into the books as a whole. The second section of Bonaventure’s distinction is given over to a tractate of articles; an article is comprised of questions each of which is organized according to a pattern of objections, sed contra, response, and response to the opening objections. The final part of Bonaventure’s distinction addresses doubts emerging from the letter of the Lombard, that is, with problematic phrasing or assertion. The effect of this pattern is to tease out the Lombard’s claims thoroughly, put them into a larger framework and address issues left undeveloped or even unstated by Peter. Secondly, in terms of differences, Bonaventure appears more sensitive to the range
of virtues and the ways in which they may be classified. He is alert, for example, to the difference between acquired and infused virtues, making clear that Peter’s interest, as is his own, in the third book is in infused virtues, those given by God to those to whom God grants grace. Similarly, he ties talk of theological, and, of cardinal, virtues more firmly to his own theological anthropology. Thus, theological virtues have to do with the mind (mens) in its superior aspect, cardinal virtues, with the mens in its inferior. Hence, theological virtues orient a person to what is above, to God, and make possible acts that relate the person to God, as to the highest Truth and Good; cardinal virtues have to do with relations within the self, and, to the neighbor. A final difference that might be observed here has to with charity. In his first book (d.17), the Lombard had identified charity with the Holy Spirit, positing a direct moving by the Spirit in acts of love. Thirteenth-century theologians had rejected that outright identification; and Bonaventure argued the rejection at length in the first book of his Commentary. Here, in the third book of his Commentary (see d.27), Bonaventure recalls that dispute, and aligns charity with the other theological virtues. Just as are they, charity is a virtue, a good habit that grants new capability; just as they, charity is infused in the person with the gift of grace, making the person righteous and set in the right relation to God.

Nonetheless, granted these and other differences, the teaching of Bonaventure in the Commentary stands in continuity with Peter’s when it comes to the virtues of Christ. Christ’s morally and spiritually good performance is due to the fullness of his grace and the perfection of his charity. He acts out of his grace and virtues, including humility and obedience, throughout his life, giving striking expression to them in his work on the cross. He is model as well as savior, and his graced, virtuous action is the root and source
of those who affirm him in faith and charity. He can elicit faith, hope and charity from others; but as blessed throughout his time in the world, he himself lacks the virtues of faith and hope, although not whatever perfection there is in them, while acting out of a charity that is utterly complete.

The teaching of the *Breviloquium*, in terms of content, repeats what is found in Bonaventure’s commentary and in the Lombard’s occasioning text. In sum, Christ is full of grace and has the greatest of the virtues, charity, from which he acts in service to others; humility and obedience are likewise important; he lacks the virtues of faith and hope, although not what is perfect in them; his acts, proceeding from his grace and virtues, ground the virtues of those who in discipleship to him are moving to God as their end. Where the *Breviloquium* marks an advance on Bonaventure’s *Commentary*, tied as it is to the Lombard’s ordering, is in the organization of the teaching. After its introduction, the *Breviloquium* is comprised of seven main parts. After parts on the trinity of God, the creation of the world, and, the corruption of sin, in Part IV Bonaventure discusses the incarnation of the Word and in Part V, the grace of the Holy Spirit. The fourth part, on the incarnation, is extensive and includes major treatments of the fullness of grace in Christ, and of his wisdom, as well as the perfection of the merit of Christ’s deeds. In the fifth part, Bonaventure studies grace and how it contributes to the righting of people and making possible their movement to God as end; Bonaventure also considers at length how this grace branches out into the habits of the virtues, and those of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and, of the beatitudes and then of the fruits of the Spirit. This part also considers grace in relation to what is to be believed, and, what is to be loved.
Compared to the Lombard’s *Sentences*, and his own *Commentary* on the *Sentences*, Bonaventure has in fact made two principal moves. First, the discussion of grace now comes after, rather than before, the discussion of Christ. That is, while the Lombard discusses grace (with a glance at virtue) in his second book, and then takes up Christ and the principal virtues of the Christian life in the third book, Bonaventure in the *Breviloquium* first discusses Christ, including his grace and virtues, and then discusses the grace and virtues needed for Christ’s followers to attain to God. And, secondly in comparison to the Lombard, Bonaventure’s discussion of Christ’s grace and virtues and of grace and virtues in general is much more discursive, spread out. In the light of the *Breviloquium*, one might fairly say that in the Lombard the treatment is conflated with gestures at Christ, whether in the uncomplicated affirmation of his virtues or in the consideration of his lack of a virtue (but not its perfection), worked into the mix. Here, on the other hand, the discussion of Christ’s grace and virtues comes into its own, and the treatment of that grace and that virtue, as the treatment of grace and virtue as received by Christ’s followers, is more discrete and methodical.

The upshot of these differences in organization and presentation between the *Sentences* and the *Commentary*, on the one hand, and, the *Breviloquium*, on the other, is twofold. For one thing, that grace and the virtues are important for Christ becomes even clearer. He can do what he does, as the Word incarnate, by the fullness of grace and the adjoined virtues that he has received (see, e.g., Part IV, ch.5). Grace and virtue perfect the Word in the Word’s assumed humanity; he acts out of their power. There is mention, of course, of the lack of the virtues of faith, of hope (ch.6); such receives its due, but no more than that. What is emphasized is that this one does what he does because he is
human and has received the power, through grace and the virtues, to do what he does.

And, in turn, the refined organization of the *Breviloquium*, which its more discursive style, also secures the more effectively the importance of Christ’s graced, virtuous acting. It is from his fullness that others receive; the grace and virtues of others have, then, a Christic origin and cast.

Bonaventure’s discussion of the virtues of Jesus is not restricted to writings of a scholastic cast. He also works in reflections on those virtues in more spiritual writings, and these writings add much to the presentation. Two such writings can be considered here. The *Tree of Life* is resolutely on our topic. The treatise focuses squarely on the virtues of Jesus and their reception by those who will follow Jesus. The treatise is a re-offering of the gospel account, highlighting the main points in the story of Jesus in order to promote spiritual growth. Jesus, the tree of the title, gives forth certain fruits; these are his most basic qualities, signs of his character, including those virtues out of which he acted. These qualities, fruits, should become those of his disciples. Progress in the spiritual life will be marked by the acceptance of these fruits and growth in them. There is, in effect, a two-layered journey that is depicted in this treatise. There is the story of Jesus, running from his distinguished origin to his glorious end and exaltation. That story is set in three main parts, with the middle recounting his passion and death. In each part, four main fruits are presented; those of the first two main parts are especially pertinent to life in this world. Thus, Bonaventure discusses such virtues as Jesus’s humility in his mode of life (Second Fruit); the plenitude of his piety (Fourth Fruit); and his confidence in trials (Fifth Fruit), patience in maltreatment (Sixth Fruit); and, his constancy (under torture) (Seventh Fruit). That story of Jesus, his journey, is to become that of the reader.
His fruits are offered to be ‘eaten’; by meditating on Jesus and his fruits, one learns how to live, and receives the inspiration and guidance to retell, through one’s own actions, the story of Jesus in one’s own life. That theme of conformity, through imitation, is present from the very opening lines of the treatise. ‘With Christ I am nailed to the cross,’ reads Galatians 2:19, quoted at the beginning. Bonaventure continues in the Prologue: ‘The true worshipper of God and disciple of Christ, who desires to conform perfectly to the Savior of all men crucified for him, should, above all, strive with an earnest endeavor of soul to carry about continuously, both in his soul and in his flesh, the cross of Christ until he can truly feel in himself what the Apostle (in Galatians) has said.’ And, this conformity to Christ is rendered possible by grace, a point nicely underscored by the prayer with which the treatise ends, asking for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, spelled out in close detail.

There is much that is familiar in the Tree when placed alongside the Commentary on the Lombard and the Breviloquium. The Christology is again incarnational, and the importance of the humanity of the incarnate Word is striking: the fruits that are lauded are the virtues of the Word as incarnate. And, in its main contours, the virtuous character of Jesus, and so of his followers, remains the same: humility and obedience receive their due, and throughout Jesus acts out of the love, for God and for others, that should shape, form, all virtuous action. Yet, when compared to these other writings, the Tree makes its own, indispensable contribution. There is a concreteness, a specificity, in this treatise that is lacking in those other writings. A fruit is not simply named; in each case it is illustrated by (four) episodes taken from the gospel. Through these episodes, the reader learns what is involved in a given fruit and how it is exhibited, in diverse fashion, by Jesus. Thus, to take but one example: when discussing Jesus’s affectionate piety (Fourth Fruit), his
commitment to others and concern to be of benefit to them, Bonaventure recounts how Jesus showed himself to be the Good Shepherd about whom he spoke; how Jesus wept for many, in their misery; how he lamented the coming destruction of the city whose citizens greeted him so royally upon his entrance into Jerusalem; and, his institution of the eucharist at the Last Supper, thus promising his presence as food to his friends, to sustain them, after his departure, on their journey to God as end. And, in presenting a fruit, and so extolling the virtuous character of Jesus, Bonaventure will also turn to his reader, encouraging the reader to act in imitation of Jesus, or of the good characters of the gospel involved in a given scene, and to refrain from the vicious activity exhibited by those gospel figures who interact wrongly with Jesus. By retelling the story, Bonaventure enables the reader to understand better what being humble or obedient means and so facilitates their making of Jesus’s virtues their own.

Our final writing by Bonaventure also effectively presents the virtues of Jesus and their importance for others. The Life of Francis (the Legenda Maior) commemorates, of course, Francis, and offers him as worthy of emulation. Its middle chapters, from chapter 5 on, are avowedly about his virtues, which are described in detail, along with the corresponding benefits provided him by God in recognition of his efforts. Thus, Bonaventure depicts Francis in his austerity, humility and obedience, love of poverty, affectionate piety, fervor of his charity, zeal for prayer, and, patience. Through Francis, then, one gains a keener sense of what it means to be Christian, and what is involved in the Christian life. This is a life of self-denial and self-offering, of proper estimation of oneself and of the world, and acknowledgment of God as supreme Good and end, in whom one should place one’s trust and to whom one is to aspire. And yet, as
Bonaventure goes to considerable lengths to show, Francis does not stand on his own, and his accomplishments are not his alone or primarily his. Rather, his is a life of discipleship, of discipleship to the poor, suffering Christ, a discipleship to that Christ that is an imitation of Christ resulting for Francis, ultimately, in an identification with Christ that culminates, by his virtues and acts, in the reception in his own body of the marks of Christ’s suffering. The dependence of Francis on Jesus is real, and fruitful, and Bonaventure is consistent on the sequence: first Christ, then Francis. In emulating Francis, one is emulating the Jesus who is Francis’s model and source, and ours. What Bonaventure advocates in the *Tree of Life*, Francis achieves in his own life. He has, in his burning love for Jesus, absorbed the fruits of Jesus, thus making the character of Jesus his own.

**SOME FINAL COMMENTS**

The sequence that Bonaventure so well maintains is found, of course, in Aquinas as well; and in this the two stand in profound continuity with the early Fathers. To evoke the language of the paper at this consultation on the early Christian writers, for Bonaventure and Aquinas, divinization is important in talk about Christ and about others and their flourishing. There is in effect a double divinization, hierarchically-ordered: that of Christ, and that of others as joined to Christ, which follows on and is due to Christ’s own. Christ is full of grace; from that fullness all have received. And so, in thinking about the church and about Christian discipleship, both authors play up participation. To flourish and to be in correct relation to God and to grow in that relationship, one must participate in Christ, receive from Christ the graces and gifts that are his, and make those more and more one’s own. And, to the extent that there is an imitative factor in the account of the Christian life
(and there is, as part of the proclaiming of Christ and the salvation that he brings), that imitation will itself presuppose participation. Only as enabled by Christ and the graces and virtues and gifts that he gives will one be able to emulate him in one’s own life, live out one’s relation to God and act in a way that is pleasing to God, as shaped by Christ.

To complement what we have seen in the Tree and the Life of Francis, it will be useful to conclude this paper by turning to a much lesser known writing of Aquinas, one of his academic sermons, entitled Puer Iesus. The point of departure of this sermon is Luke 2:52, which Aquinas reads in conjunction with the account immediately preceding in Luke, on Christ among the doctors. ‘Jesus advanced in age and wisdom and grace, before God and among people.’ What does this mean, and why is it worth proclaiming? Aquinas thinks the account of the twelve-year old Jesus is especially pertinent to his own audience, which seems to consist of young boys who are new to the Dominican life and to the life of study that is so important to the work of the Dominicans. In the sermon, Aquinas plays up development, taken in a twofold way. There is the ‘development’ that is shown in Jesus; and there is the development that should be shown in the young, as they reflect on the young Jesus and his ‘advancing’ in grace and wisdom. When it comes to the ‘advancing’ of Jesus, Aquinas’s take is quite familiar from the Fathers: he advanced in grace, not in the sense of coming to have a grace previously not had, or coming to have more of grace than previously possessed, but in manifesting his grace (fully possessed, in accordance with John 1) in age appropriate ways. By grace, he was right with God, and exhibited the rectitude in his self and in his dealings with others that presupposes grace; this comes to expression here in a way appropriate to a twelve-year old. (His grace, in its fullness, will, to extend the point, be manifested appropriately in other significant
moments in his life marked by different circumstances, as in the temptation in the desert; in the agony in the Garden; in his dying on the cross [each of which Aquinas discusses in the tertia pars; see q.41; q.21, esp.a.4; and, qq.46 and 48, esp. a.6, respectively].) So too, to return to the sermon, of wisdom. Jesus was not unwise, and then wise, or wise and then wiser. Rather, he manifested his wisdom at this time in a way appropriate in the young, illustrated by his engagement with the doctors in the Temple: he listened open-heartedly, inquired diligently, answered prudently, and meditated attentively.

What is truly striking in this sermon, however, is the extended attention given to the other development, that of the young, of these young people to whom Aquinas is speaking. It is in fact their development that is the focal point of the sermon, as seen in the light of Christ. And thus, repeatedly and at great length, Aquinas turns to the audience, and to the implications of Jesus’s example for them. They are to live as he lived, at the same age, and to become used to a life of study and service, to God and to others, as they aspire to God, all of which is possible through the grace and other gifts given to them by God through Christ. Christ’s pattern of relationship and attitude to God, and practice toward God and humans, is to become their own; and as they make that their own, they will experience the development and growth in Christ that God desires.

There is much that is intriguing about this sermon and its reading of the Luke. It nicely shows the continuity between Jesus and others, while keeping in view the crucial distinctiveness of Jesus. There is no playing off of Luke 2:52 with the Johannine assertion of the fullness of Christ’s grace, as if the latter were to be taken as a statement at the end of Jesus’s life, testimony to a life well-lived and of progress, come to fruition. Consequently, there is no reduction of Jesus’s ‘advance’ to the advance that God desires
in others, and through Christ. Rather, the distinctiveness of Jesus, the mediator between God and humans, is put in fine relief, even as Aquinas unfolds the importance of Jesus for the flourishing of others. All of this, I would think, is worthy of further consideration.

ENDNOTES


3 “The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee.“

4 The infused moral virtues differ from the virtues of the same name that can be acquired through human acts of a kind; the infused moral virtues are infused by God along with habitual grace and the theological virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

5 David Elliot, Rethinking Happiness: The Role of Hope in Virtue Ethics (June 2014)


7 ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.’

8 In his forthcoming The Incarnate Lord (The Catholic University of America Press; I have read this in first pages), Thomas Joseph White, OP, offers an extended defense of
the claim of Christ’s earthly beatitude of soul. The principal criticisms of the claim, coming from Catholics and Protestants, and from adherents of ‘high’ as well as ‘low’ Christologies, can be gleaned from this book. Also worthy of mention here is R. Michael Allen, *The Christ’s Faith: A Dogmatic Account* (London: T & T Clark, 2009). Allen is generally sympathetic to Aquinas’s incarnational Christology, but offers a critique of the ascription to the earthly Christ of the beatific vision, not least because it removes faith from Christ.


13 On the role of imagination in spiritual meditation, see Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation & Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), especially chapters two and three (on Bonaventure).

14 This is Sermon 8 in *Thomas Aquinas: The Academic Sermons*, translated by Mark-Robin Hoogland, CP (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), pp.87-107.