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Mariology and the *Tertia Pars*

Mariologia w świetle trzeciej części *Sumy teologicznej*

ABSTRACT: This essay argues that Christology needs Mariology, and specifically that Thomistic Christology needs to integrate Mariology in a more conscious manner today. In questions 27–32 of *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas treats such topics as the Blessed Virgin Mary’s sanctification, her virginal conception of her Son, her virginal integrity in giving birth, her perpetual virginity, and the matter from which her Son’s body was formed. These questions are relatively neglected in contemporary Thomistic Christology. By comparison, past theologians drew significantly upon these questions. One thinks of writings by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Benoît-Henri Merkelbach, and Édouard Hugon – although R. Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa* leaves out questions 27–32. The present essay focuses on questions 28–32, with particular emphasis on questions 28–30. My approach will be broadly expository, but I will also bring in contemporary theological resources for defending Aquinas’s perspectives. I propose that the *Tertia Pars*’s Mariological questions deserve a place in contemporary Thomistic Christology because they help to underscore that Jesus Christ really was “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4) and because they highlight the eschatological signs of the inaugurated kingdom of God.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas, Mariology, virgin birth, Thomistic Christology, *Summa Theologiae*, *Tertia Pars*, Mary’s perpetual virginity, inaugurated kingdom, eschatological signs

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu wykazanie, że chrystologia potrzebuje mariologii, a w szczególności, że chrystologia tomistyczna musi dziś w bardziej świadomy sposób zintegrować mariologię. W pytaniach 27–32 trzeciej części *Sumy teologicznej* Tomasz z Akwinu porusza takie zagadnienia, jak: uświęcenie Najświętszej Maryi Panny, dziewicze poczęcie Syna, dziewicza czystość podczas porodu, wieczyste dziewictwo, materia, z której zostało poczęte ciało Jej Syna. Zagadnienia te są we współczesnej chrystologii tomistycznej niedostatecznie opracowane, mimo że we wcześniejszym okresie teologowie (m.in. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Benoît-Henri Merkelbach czy Édouard Hugon) poświęcali im znacznie więcej miejsca (choć R. Garrigou-Lagrange

w *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa* pomija zagadnienia 27–32). W niniejszym artykule omówiono szeroko zagadnienia 28–32 (a zwłaszcza 28–30). W obronie argumentów Akwinaty uwzględniono też współczesne źródła teologiczne. Zagadnienia mariologiczne *Tertia Pars* zdecydowanie zasługują na ponowne opracowanie we współczesnej chrystologii tomistycznej, ponieważ kładą nacisk na osobę Jezusa Chrystusa jako rzeczywiście „zrodzonego z niewiasty” (Ga 4, 4) oraz podkreślają eschatologiczne znaki nadchodzącego królestwa Bożego.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Tomasz z Akwinu, mariologia, dziewicze narodziny, chrystologia tomistyczna, *Summa teologica*, *Tertia Pars*, wieczyste dziewictwo Maryi, zapoczątkowanie królestwa Bożego, znaki eschatologiczne

Introduction

In questions 27–32 of the *Tertia Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas is concerned not only with the Blessed Virgin Mary's sanctification—he comes close to the doctrine of the immaculate conception while rejecting it on soteriological grounds—but also with her virginal conception of her Son, her virginal integrity in giving birth, her perpetual virginity, and the derivation and purity of the matter from which her Son's body was formed.¹ Such questions comprise a pivotal section of the *Christology* of the *Tertia Pars*. They constitute a transition from the first section of the *Tertia Pars* (questions 1–26), which Aquinas describes as being “about the mystery of the Incarnation itself, whereby God was made man for our salvation,” to the second section of the *Tertia Pars* (questions 27–59), “about such things as were done and suffered by our Saviour—i.e. God incarnate.”²

¹ In the prologue to question 27, Aquinas states that he will consider four topics: her sanctification, virginity, espousal, and annunciation. I do not attempt in this essay to cover all these topics.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981) III, Prologue (hereafter: *STh*). In the prologue to question 27—marking the transition from questions 1–26—Aquinas describes his approach (in questions 27–59) in a more complex manner: “After the foregoing treatise of the union of God and man and the consequences thereof, it remains for us to consider what things the Incarnate Son of God did or suffered in the human nature united to Him. This consideration will be fourfold. For we shall consider (1) Those things that relate to His coming into the world; (2) Those things that relate to the course of His life in this world; (3) His departure from this world; (4) Those things that concern His exaltation after this life. The first of these offers four points of consideration: (1) The Conception of Christ; (2) His Birth; (3) His Circumcision; (4) His Baptism.”

Questions 27–32 have not been without influence during the 750 years since Aquinas’s death. For instance, when the Jesuit theologian Francisco Suárez published what is now considered the first modern Mariological treatise, he did so in the guise of a commentary on questions 27–30.³ Yet, questions 27–32 have not been integrated into Thomistic Christology as fully as one would wish. Consider for example the recent revitalization of Thomism, after some decades of relative desuetude after the Second Vatican Council. Many books on Aquinas’s Christology have appeared, especially in English and French. To my knowledge, however, none of these volumes has dealt in any extensive way with Aquinas’s Mariology as part of his Christology.⁴ Nor have scholarly journals in these decades published much on Aquinas’s Mariology, beyond an occasional piece on Aquinas and the Immaculate Conception.

This situation stands in some contrast to the interest in Mariology taken by the leading Thomists of the early twentieth century. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, for example, remains a valuable resource for contemporary Mariology.⁵ Benoît-Henri Merkelbach’s *Mariologia* also deserves mention, both in its own right and as one of R. Garrigou-Lagrange’s most important sources.⁶ Many other works could be named, including Édouard Hugon’s *Mary, Full of Grace*.⁷

³ See Francisco Suárez, *Commentaria ac disputationes in Tertiam Partem D. Thomae*, R.P. Francisci Suarez e Societate Jesu Opera Omnia 19 (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1867), 2–144. I owe this citation to John L. Nepil, *Bride Adored: Mary—Church Periochoreosis in Modern Catholic Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic Press, 2023), 19. I note that, strictly speaking, questions 31 and 32 are not “Mariological” but rather are “Christological,” because they treat “the matter from which [Christ’s] body was conceived” (*STh* III, q. 31, prologue) and “the active principle in Christ’s conception” (*STh* III, q. 32, prologue). In my view, however, these questions are both Mariological and Christological, because the matter comes from Mary, and Christ’s conception involved Mary in a profound way. Although I will include questions 31 and 32 in what follows, I will not give them a thorough treatment.

⁴ I am part of the problem, although in Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), I do briefly discuss some places where Aquinas reflects upon Mary, including in relation to the Temple.

⁵ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, trans. Bernard J. Kelly (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1993).

⁶ Benoît-Henri Merkelbach, *Mariologia: Tractatus de beatissima Virgine Maria, matre Dei atque Deum inter homines mediatrice* (Paris: Desclée, 1939).

⁷ Édouard Hugon, *Mary, Full of Grace*, ed. and trans. John G. Brungardt (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2019). For a valuable recent study by a noted Thomist theologian, see Thomas Joseph White, “Mariology and the Sense of Mystery: The Virgin Mary and the Spiritual Practice of Catholic Theology,” in *Thomas Aquinas as Spiritual Teacher*, ed.

In “S. Thomas et la Vierge Marie”—a study included in his *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*—Jean-Pierre Torrell notes that in his Christology, “Aquinas puts in relief the two great essential truths of the motherhood of Mary and her virginity.”⁸ But J.-P. Torrell comments that Aquinas’s “insistence on the physical sign of her virginity can be surprising for a modern reader,”⁹ and one comes away from Torrell’s brief essay—and from his commentary on the *Tertia Pars* as a whole—with the impression that Torrell himself believes that Aquinas’s approach to these matters will not be of great help to contemporary theologians. Indeed, in his widely influential *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, Torrell expositis Aquinas’s theology with verve and profundity, but never mentions Mary. To his credit, Torrell in *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin* gives extensive attention to questions 27–32, whereas R. Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa* leaves out those questions.¹⁰

In what follows, I will focus my attention on questions 28–32 (and especially 28–30, though without being comprehensive).¹¹ I will suggest that Aquinas’s Mariological questions require careful attention in a well-balanced Thomistic Christology especially for two reasons: the Incarnation is not an abstraction or a theory, but rather Jesus Christ really was “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4); and

Michael A. Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, and Roger W. Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2023), 211–44. On a popular level, see Romanus Cessario, *The Seven Joys of Mary* (New York: Magnificat, 2011); Romanus Cessario, *The Seven Sorrows of Mary* (New York: Magnificat, 2014).

⁸ Jean Pierre Torrell, “S. Thomas et la Vierge Marie,” in *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin: Encyclopédie: Texte de la Tertia Pars (ST III^e) traduit et commenté, accompagné de Données historiques et doctrinales et de cinquante Textes choisis*, Jean Pierre Torrell (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 1096.

⁹ Jean Pierre Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin: Encyclopédie: Texte de la Tertia Pars (ST III^e) traduit et commenté, accompagné de Données historiques et doctrinales et de cinquante Textes choisis* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), 493.

¹⁰ See Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christ the Savior: A Commentary on the Third Part of St. Thomas’ Theological Summa*, trans. Bede Rose (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1957).

¹¹ For relatively recent studies of Aquinas on the Virgin Mary, see also Basil Cole and Francis Belanger, “The Immaculate Conception, St. Thomas, and Blessed Pius IX,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 4, no. 3 (2006), 473–94; Terence Quinn, “St. Thomas’ Teaching on the Immaculate Conception,” *Dominicana* 39 (1953), 297–303; Daniel Ols, “La bienheureuse Vierge Marie selon saint Thomas,” in *Littera, Sensus, Sententia. Studi in onore del Prof. Clemente J. Vansteenkiste O.P.* Ed. A. Lobato, Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe 33 (Milan: Massimo, 1991), 435–53; George Frendo, “The Mariology of St Thomas Aquinas in the Light of Vatican II,” *Scientia*, 1986, 26–35; Gabriel Maria Roschini, “Ciò che è stato scritto sulla mariologia di S. Tommaso,” in *San Tommaso e l’odierna problematica teologica: Saggi*, Studi Tomistici 2 (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1973), 159–95.

the mysteries of Mary are eschatological signs of the new creation inaugurated by the Incarnation. As I hope to show, the Mariology of Aquinas manifests these two fundamental principles. I should note that my investigation will be constructive as well as expository, insofar as I write as a theologian and not a historian. I will attempt to defend Aquinas's arguments in contemporary terms and to bring his perspective into conversation with Catholic and Protestant theology and exegesis.¹²

Summa Theologiae III, Question 28: Of the Virginity of the Mother of God

Question 28 of the *Tertia Pars* treats Mary's virginity, including her virginal conception of Jesus and her *virginitas in partu*.¹³ It is her *virginitas in partu* that is most controversial today, and so my treatment of it will include some contemporary theological engagement. Even the truth of the virginal conception of Jesus is debated today, and so my discussion of question 28 will not be solely expository.

In article one, on Mary's virginal conception of her Son, Aquinas's five objections are important. Taken together, they contend that affirming Mary's virginal conception of Christ would make the Incarnation *less* concrete, turning the Incarnation into something ideal and separating Christ from the human race. The first two objections argue that Jesus must have had a human (biological) father and that his Davidic descent requires a biological descent from Joseph. In the third objection he observes that although Paul in Gal 4 knows that Jesus is born of a woman, Paul appears to have in view a woman who is

¹² Inevitably, this will mean that my analysis will sometimes occlude the particularities of Aquinas's texts in the context of the medieval debates. For a full exposition of these particularities, see Torrell's *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*.

¹³ For background see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 492–500; and John Baptist Ku, "The Fittingness of Mary's Virginity in Birth," *The Thomist* 87 (2023), 451–62, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2023.a900227>. John Baptist Ku provides patristic and magisterial support for Mary's *virginitas in partu*, and he then examines Aquinas's three reasons for the fittingness of this mystery. Ku focuses on how Mary's "virginity in birth . . . points ahead to the glory of beatitude with which Christ can endow our human bodies" (Ku, 458), and he explores the properties of a glorified body, especially subtlety. He maintains, "This [i.e. Mary's virginity in birth] was a proleptic manifestation: Christ's subtlety in the virgin birth 'represented' the future subtlety of his body. Mary's giving birth without losing her virginity, then, is an affirmation of Christ's beatitude" (Ku, 461).

not a virgin.¹⁴ The fourth objection states that to be a member of the human race one needs to be generated according to the human mode, namely, sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. The fifth and final objection makes a similar point. Concretely, a human body is comprised of semen from a male and a female—a father and a mother.¹⁵ Since this is so, it seems that a body constituted in any other way would not be human. If Jesus were conceived solely by his mother, his flesh—far from being grounded in the concreteness of human history—would be an oddity, not human but freakish.

In the *sed contra* of the article, Aquinas points to Isa 7:14, quoted in its LXX version in Matt 1:23, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” His point is that God willed Jesus to be born of a virgin. But how does this truth comport with the objections that Aquinas has raised? In his response to the fifth objection, he argues that it is not a requirement of human nature, as such, to come forth from a man and a woman.¹⁶ For instance, Adam was directly created by God, but he still had human nature. Although Aquinas does not mention it here, Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib would also be an instance of what Aquinas has in view. God’s power can act upon the ovum in a manner sufficient to bring forth a human child (including by ensuring that the needed chromosomes are present, not least the Y chromosome, something that Aquinas is unaware must be done). Since this is so, Jesus can possess human nature and

¹⁴ The objection runs as follows: “Further, it is written (Gal. iv. 4): *God sent His Son, made of a woman*. But according to the customary mode of speaking the term *woman* applies to one who is known of a man. Therefore Christ was not conceived by a virgin mother.”

¹⁵ Alicia D. Myers notes, “For Aristotle, the *pneuma* is part of the unique contribution from male semen that initiates life in the matter provided by the woman. . . . Galen mixes Aristotelian ideas with his two-seed theory that allows for *pneuma* to be provided by both the male and female, though the male’s provision is of greater heat and, therefore, potency, thus supplying the necessary ‘motion’ for life” (Alicia D. Myers, *Blessed among Women? Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 61). Drawing from the work of Gwynn Kessler, A. D. Myers adds that “later Second Temple Jewish sources *do* convey familiarity with Aristotelian ideas by describing the male’s ‘virile’ and causative seed, which shapes the nourishing female blood” (Myers, 61). See Gwynn Kessler, *Conceiving Israel: The Fetus in Rabbinic Narratives*, *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and see also Matthew Thiessen, “The Legislation of Leviticus 12 in Light of Ancient Embryology,” *Vetus Testamentum* 68 (2018), 297–319.

¹⁶ In making his point, Aquinas draws upon Aristotle’s faulty biology. For discussion, contrasting Aquinas’s use of Aristotle with his use of Genesis in the same reply to the fifth objection (and arguing that “difficulties or solutions that claim to stay on the biological level alone can only constitute a distorted path” for resolving issues pertaining to Mary’s virginal conception), see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 495.

be a full member of the human race without having a human father. This point includes answers to both the fifth and the fourth objection.

Regarding Paul's remark in Gal 4:4, Aquinas argues (in his reply to the *fourth* objection) that being born of a woman need not entail being conceived through sexual intercourse, once the divine power is taken into account. Regarding Matthew's genealogy (the second objection), Aquinas relies upon the responses offered by Jerome and Augustine, who argue that there are reasons to suppose that Mary was of the lineage of David.¹⁷ Finally, indebted to Augustine, Aquinas observes in response to the first objection that Mary and Joseph had a real marriage and so Joseph can truly be called Jesus' father, even if not his biological father.

In the *respondeo* of the article, Aquinas underlines that the human concreteness of Jesus' conception in Mary's womb certainly does not require that no miracle be involved.¹⁸ Indeed, Aquinas thinks it fitting that a miracle *should* be involved, although Aquinas does not use the term "miracle." Mary truly conceives Jesus in her womb. But since the Incarnation is an eschatological event (to employ contemporary language), it is fitting that God highlight its uniqueness by enabling Mary to conceive in her womb in a unique way. The Incarnation is the entrance into the world of "the true and natural Son of God" who, fittingly, has no other "father than God."¹⁹ The purpose of the Incarnation is that human beings become adopted children of God, sharing in the inheritance of the Son. This filial adoption occurs when we are "born again as sons of God" through the grace of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ Aquinas explains that just as our adopted sonship occurs by the divine power rather than by a natural

¹⁷ Aquinas takes up the genealogies in detail in question 31, and so I will discuss them more fully when I treat that question.

¹⁸ Aquinas's *respondeo* in *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1 argues, "We must confess simply that the Mother of Christ was a virgin in conceiving, for to deny this belongs to the heresy of the Ebionites and Cerinthus, who held Christ to be a mere man, and maintained that He was born of both sexes. It is fitting for four reasons that Christ should be born of a virgin"—to maintain the divine Father's dignity, as befitting the Word's eternal conception without corruption, as befitting Christ's sinless humanity, and as befitting the goal of the Incarnation (namely, that humans should be born anew as sons of God by the power of God rather than by any human power). In this paragraph, I engage three of these four reasons of fittingness, without providing a detailed exposition of Aquinas's *respondeo*. It bears noting that Aquinas, in his reasons of fittingness, focuses on Christology.

¹⁹ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1.

²⁰ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1. See Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John A. Kincaid, *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), chapter 5; Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 22 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); and see also Daria Spezzano,

process, so also it is fitting that Christ's Incarnation occur not *solely* by a natural process but also by divine power. Just as the Holy Spirit is responsible for the conception of Christ, the Holy Spirit is responsible for our becoming adopted sons in the Son.²¹ As the angel of the Lord tells Joseph in a dream in the Gospel of Luke, Mary "will bear a son," and "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:19–20).²²

In the second article of question 28, Aquinas asks whether Mary preserved her virginal integrity during Christ's birth.²³ He remarks in the second objection of this article that an affirmative answer would seem to undermine the human

The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015), 179–207, especially 192–207.

²¹ See Gilles Emery, "The Holy Spirit in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans," in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Dauphinais Michael (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 144–49. See also the extensive background in Luc-Thomas Somme, *Fils adoptifs de Dieu par Jésus Christ* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997).

²² In his *respondeo*, Aquinas observes that "it was not possible in a nature already corrupt, for flesh to be born from sexual intercourse without incurring the infection of original sin." He notes that this fact makes fitting the virginal conception of Christ. Torrell clarifies here that Aquinas "does not say that the conjugal act is the cause of 'corruption' of the flesh," and so it is necessary to be careful when reading Aquinas's teaching on this matter through an Augustinian lens" (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 495). Aquinas holds that "the conjugal act can only transmit a 'corrupted' nature, that is to say a nature deprived of grace, because it is already in this state since the original sin" (Torrell, 495).

²³ Torrell comments, "For Thomas, there is no doubt about Mary's *virginitas in partu*, but it is necessary to recognize that this affirmation about Mary is a matter less anciently attested than the virginal conception" (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 496). According to Torrell, the first magisterial text that clearly teaches Mary's *virginitas in partu* is Leo's Tome, and it was also taught by Pope Martin I and, in solemn fashion, by Pope Paul IV. Torrell comments that from Pope Leo the Great through 1950, Catholic theologians affirmed Mary's *virginitas in partu* almost unanimously. However, beginning around 1950, "many theologians have emphasized that the normal consequence of a childbirth does not involve any injury to Mary's virginity, and these theologians have therefore contested the view that the miraculously preserved permanence of the physical sign of her virginity belongs to the contents of faith" (Torrell, 496). For a significant recent defense of the doctrine of Mary's *virginitas in partu*, see Brian A. Graebe, *Vessel of Honor: The Virgin Birth and the Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021). Brian A. Graebe points out that rejection of Mary's *virginitas in partu* undermines the traditional doctrine of the virgin birth not least by "reducing it to the natural consequence of the virginal conception," thereby separating out the birth itself as not part of the miracle (Graebe, 300). Graebe also comments that the doctrine helps to highlight Mary's status as the intact vessel of the Word (divine revelation) and Mary's status as "the Virgin Bride. It is she, as Daughter Zion, who leads Israel to the goal and reward of the covenant. . . . The Assumption not only crowns Mary's physical integrity, which remains uncorrupted, but becomes the hope for the faith of the new Israel on their journey to the Promised Land"

concreteness of the Incarnation. The danger again is that the Incarnation may seem to be an ethereal event that does not credibly involve real bodies. Aquinas states in this objection: “nothing should have taken place in the mystery of Christ, which would make His body to seem unreal. Now it seems to pertain not to a true but to an unreal body, to be able to go through a closed passage; since two bodies cannot be in one place at the same time.”²⁴ If one claims that Christ came through the birth canal without causing any physical damage, it may appear that the realism or concreteness of the Incarnation has been lost. Insisting upon Mary’s virginal (bodily) intactness throughout the childbirth may seem to remove the event of Jesus’ birth far away from the realities of human flesh.

What is Aquinas’s answer to this objection? First, he feels biblically compelled to hold to Mary’s virginity in giving birth. Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23, he thinks, teach not only that Mary will be a virgin in conceiving her Son (“a virgin shall conceive”) but also that Mary will be a virgin in giving birth to her Son (“a virgin shall . . . bear a son”). But why should “virginity” entail physical intactness in giving birth? Aquinas turns again to his guiding principle: the miraculous is combined with the mundane in everything pertaining to the Incarnation. Christ, in order to show the truth of his Incarnation, “mingled wondrous with lowly things. Wherefore, to show that His body was real, He was born of a woman. But in order to manifest His Godhead, He was born of a virgin.”²⁵ In Aquinas’s view, for Mary to be a virgin in conceiving her Son is a miracle that is fittingly paired with the miracle of her continuing to bear the mark of virginity in giving birth.

Aquinas’s position is not a matter of supposing that women who lack virginal integrity are no longer “pure.”²⁶ For Aquinas, instead, what is at stake is the

(Graebe, 302). See also the defense of the doctrine in René Laurentin, *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* (Washington, NJ: Ave Maria Institute, 1991), 324–34.

²⁴ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 1, obj. 2. The Latin word here translated ‘unreal’ is *phantasticum*.

²⁵ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2, ad 2.

²⁶ See also Ignace de La Potterie, *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza* (Genova: Marietti, 1988), 118–43, cited in Manfred Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, trans. Richard Chonak (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 185–86. Whether or not Ignace de La Potterie is correct in his reading of John 1:13 and Luke 1:35, he is correct to draw attention to the significance of ritual purity. Matthew Thiessen has recently focused attention upon Luke 2:22, “And when the time came for their purification, according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’” Scholars have previously assumed that the evangelist

nature of the virgin birth in light of the mission of the Son. Christ does not come to wreak damage. As the Messiah, he comes instead as the healer, the one who inaugurates the new creation and who does so, Catholics believe, in a unique way in Mary's flesh.²⁷ Certainly, Christ comes to call his followers to carry their own crosses, even unto martyrdom. But he does not inflict damage upon those who love him. Fleshly damage involves bodily "corruption" and tends in the direction of death, and childbirth often resulted in the mother's death in the ancient world. By contrast, as Aquinas observes, Christ's Incarnation has among its primary purposes "that He might take away our corruption."²⁸ Since the Incarnation has this eschatological purpose, Aquinas concludes with Augustine that "it is unfitting that in His birth He should corrupt His mother's virginity. Thus Augustine says in a sermon on the Nativity of Our Lord: *It was not right that He who came to heal corruption, should by His advent violate integrity.*"²⁹

This argument regarding the virgin birth is one of fittingness, based on Matt 1:23 as interpreted by the Church Fathers. Aquinas is receiving and handing on what he understands to be a settled point of the doctrinal inheritance of the Church. In his *sed contra* in this article, he places front and center a sermon preached at the Council of Ephesus, a sermon that suggests that the virgin birth did not corrupt Mary's virginal integrity. While Augustine and Bede are among his sources, he draws his central analogies from this sermon,

made a mistake in supposing that not only Mary, but also the infant Jesus would have been considered to be in a state of ritual impurity. As M. Thiessen shows, even though Leviticus 12 speaks only of the ritual impurity of the woman after childbirth, Luke demonstrates a firm knowledge of the Judaism of his day by including the infant Jesus, since contemporaneous texts such as *Jubilees* and 4Q265 also implement Leviticus 12 in this manner. See Matthew Thiessen, "Luke 2:22, Leviticus 12, and Parturient Impurity," *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012), 16–29, <https://doi.org/10.17613/7KFP1-JB335>; and, for further background, see also Thiessen's "The Legislation of Leviticus 12 in Light of Ancient Embryology." In my view, it is plausible that Mary participated in the rite of purification as a public sign of fidelity to God's Torah, even while knowing that neither she nor Jesus was in a state of ritual impurity.

²⁷ For the latter point, see Matthew Levering, *Mary's Bodily Assumption* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

²⁸ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2.

²⁹ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2; translation slightly altered. Brian A. Graebe examines some mid-twentieth-century misunderstandings of Aquinas's position on Mary's *virginitas in partu*: see Graebe, *Vessel of Honor*, 58–60, 67. He also discusses the Holy Office's July 1960 monitum, which brought to an end (if only for a short period) a discussion in which the more notable participants were casting doubt on the doctrine of Mary's *virginitas in partu* as traditionally understood.

which states: “Whosoever brings forth mere flesh, ceases to be a virgin. But since she gave birth to the Word made flesh, God safeguarded her virginity so as to manifest His Word, by which Word He thus manifested Himself: for neither does our word, when brought forth, corrupt the mind; nor does God, the substantial Word, deigning to be born, destroy virginity.”³⁰

If Christ’s birth left Mary’s bodily integrity undamaged, does this miracle undermine what I have called the concreteness of the Incarnation? I have made clear above that Aquinas is sensitive to arguments that it does.³¹ Yet, he deems it fitting that just as the virginal conception of Christ is both ordinary in certain respects and extraordinary in others, so the same is true of the virgin birth. In his view, the twofold operation of the virginal conception of Christ—both a real human conception in Mary’s womb and a miraculous virginal conception caused by God—fittingly reflects Christ’s humanity and divinity. Similarly, the virgin *birth* reflects Christ’s humanity and divinity, in that Christ passes through the birth canal but miraculously does not cause Mary bodily damage.

At the heart of Aquinas’s understanding of Christ’s birth is his insistence that it was virginal, in fulfillment of the Isaianic (LXX) / Matthean text, “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” Again, it is not only the virginal *conception* that shows the divine presence and action in the eschatological coming of the divine Son into the world; the virgin *birth* also shows this same miraculous power. Jesus’ birth is as much a theological mystery as is his conception—as befits the coming of the Messiah and Lord.

Let me illumine Aquinas’s perspective a bit more by directing attention to a recent exchange between two Evangelical scholars, Andrew T. Lincoln and Daniel Treier, neither of whom accepts Mary’s perpetual virginity or her *virginitas in partu*. In his *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology*, A. T. Lincoln asks: “Does belief that Jesus Christ was God incarnate necessarily entail belief in his virginal conception?”³² He replies that

³⁰ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 2.

³¹ Commenting on Aquinas’s answer to the third objection of article 2, Torrell makes the case that by rejecting the future Pope Innocent III’s position that the infant Christ possessed the gift of subtlety (which pertains to glorified bodies), Aquinas “is making an anti-Docetist profession of faith that connects with that of the authors of the first centuries who rejected, on these grounds, the physical integrity of Mary during childbirth” (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 497). To my mind, however, Aquinas’s reasons for affirming—not rejecting—the physical integrity of Mary during childbirth go much further and are more persuasive than Torrell supposes.

³² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology*, ed. Andrew T. Lincoln (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 7. In the Anglican Church, A. T. Lincoln notes, denying the virgin birth has been repeatedly recognized as

the answer is no. The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke are shaped by a great deal of theological portraiture, as the evangelists seek to highlight the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Lincoln argues, furthermore, that if Jesus' flesh came solely from his mother, then he could not have had a male Y chromosome. His (virginal) conception would therefore have required a special divine creation, which is unfitting. While Lincoln professes a firm faith in "such realities of the Christian faith as creation, incarnation, atonement, resurrection and consummation," he does not believe in the virginal conception of Jesus.³³

Responding to Lincoln, Treier points out that the theological portraiture in the infancy narratives does not prove that the event of Mary's virginal conception did not happen. Indeed, all the events of Jesus' life are presented by the evangelists with a great deal of theological coloring, but it does not follow that (for example) Jesus was not crucified. Treier holds that God miraculously produced the Y chromosome and augments the genetic material given by Mary, so as to produce the full 46 chromosomes normally given by sperm and egg.³⁴

acceptable in support of faith in the Incarnation (see Lincoln, 300–301). For an instructive response to Lincoln, see Oliver Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 162–78. Lincoln responds to Crisp in Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Bible, Theology, and the Virgin Birth: Continuing a Conversation?," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 14, no. 2 (2020), 267–85, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.14.2.0267>.

³³ Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 12. By contrast, David Braine points out the deep theological connection between the doctrine of the virginal conception and the doctrine of the Incarnation: "If Mary and Joseph had had Jesus as their child by the natural process of their having intercourse and its bearing fruit in Jesus, then this Jesus would be first an embryo, then a child, and later an adult of whom one could say that he would have existed anyway as a human person, even if God had not willed him to be divine. His divinity would then be not key to his natural identity and existence but, as it were, an extra gift, one of his properties, or, in Aristotelian terms, 'accidents'—a matter relating to the point of his human life, not to his origin. A slightly different suggestion might be that, in this case, Mary and Joseph did not have fruitful intercourse except by special divine providence, and that it was by the same providence that God willed this fruit should be divine and called Son of God. However, this suggestion will not stand scrutiny, since it would be by one act of God's free will that Jesus existence as a human person, and still be by a logically independent act of God's free will that this person would be divine" (David Braine, "The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith: The Development of the Church's Teaching on the Virgin Mary in Modern Perspective," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 7, no. 4 [2009], 878–79).

³⁴ See Daniel J. Treier, "Virgin Territory?," *Pro Ecclesia* 23, no. 4 (2014), 375, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121402300401>. Lincoln criticizes positions like Treier's: "The more usual recent defence of the traditional view in the light of knowledge of genetics is to accept its findings but to claim that they do not constitute a problem. The miracle of Jesus' virginal

This miracle does not entail, however, that Jesus was not fully human, since it does not change the fact that he possessed a human nature in full.

Treier observes that Jesus' human nature is not in the same situation as ours, even if one brackets the issue of the virginal conception. In other humans, the coming-to-be of a human nature entails the coming to be of a human person. But Jesus' human nature always subsists in the Person of the Son, not in a *human* person.³⁵ Thus the subsistence of Jesus' human nature (namely, in the Person of the Son) differs radically from ours. Yet, the hypostatic union does not make Jesus less than fully human.

Regarding the virginal conception, Treier also asks "whether . . . God would have allowed the entirety of Christendom to get *fundamentally* off track on a vital doctrine for almost two thousand years."³⁶ Arguing that the answer is no,

conception simply involved the divine provision of the missing male Y chromosome. [Fergus] Kerr appeals to a statement of Aquinas: 'the divine power, which is boundless, completed what was necessary for the foetus' (*Summa Theologiae* 3.28.1). But, as we have seen, for Aquinas the mother supplied all that was necessary for the humanity of the foetus and the divine power completed not its human substance but what was necessary for the gestation and birth of the foetus, the active principle usually supplied by the human male. In any case this response fails to meet the problem. If the Y chromosome supplied was a human one but miraculously transferred without sexual contact, what was the point of the miracle and what is the message it conveys about sexuality? Why not use that of Joseph or some other male through the normal means?" (Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 260, referring to Fergus Kerr, "Questioning the Virgin Birth," *New Blackfriars* 75 [1994], 132–40). Aquinas offers numerous reasons "why not," as I have noted above. Lincoln also cites Oliver Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 79–85; and see Oliver Crisp, "On the 'Fittingness' of the Virgin Birth," *The Heythrop Journal* 49, no. 2 (2007), 197–221, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2007.00336.x>. In this discussion, a salutary warning comes from Juan Eduardo Carreño in "Theology, Philosophy, and Biology: An Interpretation of the Conception of Jesus Christ," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 22, no. 1 (2024), 77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2024.a919266>, emphasizing that God does not do an "assisted fertilization" (as though divine causality were ontologically on the same level as creaturely causality) and ruling out parthenogenesis. See also Michael L. Peterson, Timothy J. Pawl, and Ben F. Brammell, *Jesus and the Genome: The Intersection of Christology and Biology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 106–11, reviewing the options and advocating for Crisp's position.

³⁵ For further discussion, see Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series 5 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

³⁶ Treier, "Virgin Territory?," 379, emphasis added. I note that for a millennium, many or most theologians in the West failed to affirm Mary's Immaculate Conception. It seems to me that this does not represent a case in which Catholicism went fundamentally off track, however, because these same theologians almost all affirmed Mary's profound holiness

he suggests that for someone who believes in the doctrine of the Incarnation—as Lincoln does—this point should carry weight. Treier adds that Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox can agree about this “tradition-historical factor.”³⁷

Indeed, Aquinas’s conclusions regarding Mary’s *virginitas in partu* operate along just such tradition-historical lines.³⁸ The doctrine that Mary’s bodily integrity was not damaged by giving birth to Jesus was defended by Augustine and numerous other Church Fathers, appeared in Pope Leo’s Tome at the Council of Ephesus in relation to the defense of the Theotokos, and continued to be taught by the Church throughout the late patristic and early medieval periods.³⁹ For example, Bernard of Clairvaux argues that Mary’s childbearing of the Incarnate Lord reflects her stature as the New Eve, cooperating with her Son in his undoing of the curse of sin and death. Since the curse associated with Eve’s fall has to do with pain in childbearing (Gen 3:16), Bernard proclaims: “Eve’s curse was transformed in our Virgin, for she bore a child without pain. . . . A virgin gave birth and remained inviolate after the birth; she possessed the fecundity of offspring with the integrity of her flesh.”⁴⁰

and did not attribute sin to her. For further discussion, see Matthew Levering, “Mary and Grace,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 289–302; and see my discussion of John Henry Newman’s argument that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is a case of doctrinal development rather than (as Edward B. Pusey thought) rupture with the Church Fathers, in Matthew Levering, *Newman on Doctrinal Corruption* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2022), chapter 4.

³⁷ Treier, “Virgin Territory?,” 379.

³⁸ Treier is aware that Catholics will be quick to point out this implication of Treier’s proposal. Thus, he notes that some Catholic scholars gladly “concede . . . that the explicitly scriptural case for the virgin conception is, like those for Mary’s immaculate conception and bodily assumption, tenuous—but traditional dogmas these remain” (Treier, 378). While firmly disagreeing with the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, Treier would agree that Christians need not suppose that only doctrines demonstrable by historical-critical methods are truly biblical doctrines. As Treier notes, without rejecting historical-critical scholarship and its insights, we can recognize that some “assumptions implicit in modern historical argumentation can gradually lead even scripturally committed Trinitarian Christians to deny or fundamentally reinterpret articles of ecumenically orthodox faith” (Treier, 378).

³⁹ See Graebe, *Vessel of Honor*, 33–42.

⁴⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption,” in *St. Bernard’s Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. a Priest of Mount Melleray (Chulmleigh: Augustine, 1984), 206–7. For discussion of the scope of Bernard’s Mariology, see Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 131–41; Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2009), 184–89.

For Aquinas, then, the doctrine of the virgin *birth* communicates the truth about what God actually accomplished in the childbearing of the New Eve: a woman has given birth (miraculously) without damage to her bodily integrity, because her Son is the incarnate Lord, the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation, and she herself is a sign of this new creation. Thus, as we read in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, "the birth of Our Lord . . . did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it."⁴¹

⁴¹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (1964), §57, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes the same point, quoting *Lumen Gentium* (and citing numerous earlier magisterial teachings): "The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth 'did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. [Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997], §499). Thomas G. Weinandy argues that it would be more fitting for the New Eve to suffer physical pain in childbirth. The reversal of Adam and Eve's sin and its curses is accomplished by Christ through entering into suffering and death and reversing the curse from within. Likewise, it seems appropriate that Mary should have entered into pain in childbirth so as to reverse the curse (given to Eve) from within. Weinandy explains, "As Christ, in becoming human, assumed the penalty of Adam's sin and so, on the cross, transformed it into an act of loving salvation, so Mary assumed the curse of Eve, giving birth in pain, and so transformed it into a loving act of giving birth to the one who would free humankind from all pain and suffering" (Thomas G. Weinandy, "The Annunciation and Nativity: Undoing the Sinful Act of Eve," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 [2012], 229, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2011.00623.x>). For Weinandy, Mary could have experienced this pain in childbirth even while miraculously preserving her bodily integrity, although he does not rule out the possibility that Jesus' birth damaged her bodily integrity (depending upon what is required by the Church's magisterial tradition, which Weinandy does not here resolve). I think it was fitting that Mary enter into the suffering and death endured by Christ, but I think the virgin birth was most fittingly a sign of the inauguration of the new creation. Among recent notable Catholic theologians who suggest that the birth of Jesus damaged Mary's bodily integrity, Weinandy names Karl Rahner, Otto Semmelroth, and Jean Galot—and to this list can be added Walter Kasper and also Gerhard Müller (in Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Was heißt: Geboren von der Jungfrau Maria? Eine theologische Deutung*, 2nd ed. [Basel: Herder, 1989], 100–104). On the issue of whether Mary's *virginitas in partu* has been solemnly taught by the Catholic Church and thus is *de fide*, see also Robert Fastiggi, "Fr. Peter Damian Fehlner on Divine Maternity," in *The Spirit and the Church: Peter Damian Fehlner's Franciscan Development of Vatican II on the Themes of the Holy Spirit, Mary, and the Church*, ed. J. Isaac Goff, Christian W. Kappes, and Edward J. Ondrako (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 83–84, revising the position he took in Robert Fastiggi, "Francisco Suárez, S.J. (1548–1617) on Mary's *Virginitas in Partu* and Subsequent Doctrinal Development," *Marian Studies* 58

I will only briefly treat the question of whether Mary remained a virgin *after* Christ's birth, as Aquinas holds. Aquinas is well aware of the objections raised against Mary's perpetual virginity, concerns expressed by Helvidius in the fourth century.⁴² Aquinas recognizes that Matt 1:25 says that Joseph "knew her not *until* she had borne a son"—the implications of the Greek conjunction being the contested point, as noted above.⁴³ He knows of the brothers of Jesus mentioned at various points in the New Testament. Aquinas's answers to these issues rely partly upon Augustine's reading of Scripture, specifically Ezek 44:2 where the prophet receives the following command during his vision of the eschatological Temple: "This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut."⁴⁴ In Aquinas's view, Augustine's reading of this text deserves to be accepted, given the text's reference to the eschatological age that Christ inaugurates.

Aquinas gives reasons of fittingness for Mary's perpetual virginity, including Joseph's knowledge that the conception of Jesus had been accomplished by the Holy Spirit. This would have made Mary's womb a sacred Temple in Joseph's eyes. Similarly, it is reasonable to suppose that Mary, having given birth to

(2007), 26–45. For the main lines of the twentieth-century debate, see Juan Luis Bastero, "La *virginitas in partu* en la reflexión teológica del siglo XX," *Scripta Theologica* 32, no. 3 (2017), 835–62, <https://doi.org/10.15581/006.32.14916>; Graebe, *Vessel of Honor*, 55–111; Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, 190–92. For Rahner's influential article, see Karl Rahner, "Virginitas in Partu: A Contribution to the Problem of the Development of Dogma and of Tradition," in *More Recent Writings*, vol. 4 of *Theological Investigations*, Karl Rahner, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Seabury, 1974), 134–62.

⁴² See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 497–98. James B. Prothro has recently shown that even from a historical-critical perspective, the Gospels' references to Jesus' "brothers" do not necessarily indicate that Mary had additional children. See James B. Prothro, "Semper Virgo? A Biblical Review of a Debated Dogma," *Pro Ecclesia* 28, no. 1 (2019), 78–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063851219829935>. See also Braine, "The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith," 898–904; and Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, 194–97. Hauke points out, "The indication that Jesus is the 'first-born' [Luke 2:7] does not imply anything about other possible brothers. But the reference is important because it casts doubt on the theory that the Gospels are talking about other children of Mary, because in Mark 3:21, 3:31–35 and John 7:2–5, the 'brothers' act in a dominating manner, and this, in the ancient East, is unthinkable on the part of younger brothers addressing the first-born" (Hauke, 195). For further helpful argumentation, see Josef Blinzler, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967).

⁴³ *STh* III, q. 28, a. 3, obj. 3.

⁴⁴ It should be clear that, for Aquinas, "virginity" denotes—at least in the case of Mary—both the absence of sexual intercourse and the presence of bodily integrity. Arguments regarding which of these elements is primary for Aquinas miss the point, since he affirms both.

the perfect Son, would have devoted all her attention to that Son rather than striving for more children.⁴⁵

Summa Theologiae III, Questions 29–30

At some length, Aquinas in question 29 explores why Mary was espoused to Joseph when she gave birth to Jesus. The reasons why God ordained this to be so are fairly evident and uncontroversial, and so I will largely pass over them here. Without Joseph's presence, Mary would have been defamed as an adulteress. The baby Jesus would not have had the support of a father. Since the couple were engaged but not married when Mary became pregnant, Joseph was able to give witness to Mary's virginity. For Aquinas, the marriage of Mary to Joseph ensures that in her person she honors both virginity and marriage, and that she stands as a typological (eschatological) sign of the virgin-mother Church.⁴⁶

In the first article of question 30 (a question devoted to the Annunciation), Aquinas highlights the spiritual or personal dignity of Mary at the Annunciation. She is no mere funnel for the Incarnation; the Lord does not simply make use of her womb. It is highly fitting that "she should be informed in mind concerning Him, before conceiving Him in the flesh."⁴⁷ Aquinas quotes Augustine, who points out (in accord with Mark 3:35) that it is more blessed to conceive Christ in one's heart—to have faith—than to conceive Christ in one's womb. If Mary were merely a conduit in conceiving and gestating Jesus, her role in this event would be a purely biological one, and in this sense less than fully human.

Aquinas is eager to insist, on biblical grounds, that Mary's virginal conception of Jesus involved Mary's graced intellect and will. Mary receives the angel's communication about the plan of salvation, and she inquires into this plan, asking how it could be since she is a virgin. She consents with great faith and full freedom of will. She thereby becomes a full participant and a real "witness of this mystery," offering to God the obedience of faith in welcoming the incarnate Lord on behalf of his people.⁴⁸ Indeed, Mary's consent is the

⁴⁵ For discussion of these reasons of fittingness as found in Origen and Augustine, see John C. Cavadini, "The Sex Life of Mary and Joseph," *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 13, no. 2 (2015), 365–77.

⁴⁶ *STh* III, q. 29, a. 1. For discussion of question 29, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 500–503.

⁴⁷ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1.

⁴⁸ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1.

greatest act that a mere human being (as distinct from the God-man) ever accomplished. She is so personally, intelligently, and spiritually engaged in her concrete act of faithful obedience that we can say of the Annunciation: “the Virgin’s consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature [*loco totius humanae naturae*].”⁴⁹ Her “yes” is the opposite of a lighthearted response; it is an extraordinary profession of faith, representing all humanity: “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:28, 38). In light of Luke 1:38, Aquinas concludes that the eschatological marriage of God and humanity takes place in the Incarnation. Mary’s active spiritual role in her virginal conception of Jesus ensures that in the Incarnation, “there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature.”⁵⁰

The dignity of Mary’s participation is amplified by the second article of question 30. The first objection wonders why God sent an angel to make the

⁴⁹ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1. For the sources of Aquinas’s insight here—including pseudo-Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and (in a certain way) Augustine himself—see Pierre Kocian, *Marie et l’Église: Compénétration de deux mystères*, Bibliothèque de la Revue thomiste (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2018), 615, n. 59. Edward B. Pusey registers a concern with the way in which some devotional Catholic books “have delighted to dwell on the Incarnation, as though our redemption depended upon the ‘fiat’ of Mary. For, although God,—in conformity with that His wondrous condescension, whereby He reverences (if I may so speak) the free will with which He has endowed us, and will not force our will—would not accomplish the Incarnation without the free will of His creature, yet, of course, there was nothing really in suspense. Had He indeed, amid the manifold failures which He has allowed in His work of grace, willed to allow this scope also to free-will, that it should reject the privilege of being Theotokos, and so have offered it to one who would not accept it, the Incarnation might have been delayed for a while; it could not have failed. But He did not so will” (Edward B. Pusey, *First Letter to the Very Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D., In Explanation Chiefly in Regard to the Ever-Blessed Theotokos, and the Doctrine of Her Immaculate Conception* [Oxford: Parker, 1869], 23). Aquinas affirms that Mary was predestined in the order of grace, but in Aquinas’s view this fact should not hinder in any way our praise for Mary’s fiat, just as the fact that Jesus was predestined does not hinder our praise for Jesus’ willingness to endure the Cross. For his part, Pusey recognizes Mary’s greatness: “she, of whom He deigned to take His Human Flesh, was brought to a nearness to Himself above all created beings; . . . she stood single and alone, in all creation or in all possible creations, in that, in her womb, He Who, in His Godhead, is Consubstantial with the Father, deigned, as to His Human Body, to become Consubstantial with her” (Pusey, *First Letter to the Very Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D.*, 24).

⁵⁰ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 1. See also Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 505–6. Torrell observes that for Aquinas’s medieval predecessors, notably Albert the Great and Bonaventure, “Mary is little more than the place where this union is accomplished (‘the nuptial chamber’); this is perhaps the reason why the scholastics could envisage, at least in the abstract, that the Incarnation could have been accomplished without the knowledge of Mary” (Torrell, 506).

announcement rather than making it directly. The second objection, citing 1 Cor 14:34–35 about women’s silence in church, asks whether a male human being, such as Joseph, should have been chosen to make the announcement to Mary. In his *respondeo*, Aquinas offers various reasons of fittingness, such as Bede’s remark that it was fitting that a good angel announce the Good News, given that the fallen angel Satan contributed to the fall of Adam and Eve. But most noteworthy are Aquinas’s replies to the objections, where he underscores that Mary “was above the angels as regards the dignity to which she was chosen by God,”⁵¹ and where he points out that Mary, the Mother of God, was not under her husband’s authority. The deeper he probes into Luke’s narrative, the more he perceives the exalted character of Mary’s participation in Christ’s inauguration of the new creation.

Summa Theologiae III, Questions 31–32

Question 31, comprised of eight articles, considers the matter from which Jesus’ body was conceived in the womb. Some of the argumentation in this question reflects outdated Aristotelian science. Neither Aristotle nor Aquinas accurately understood the process by which conception occurs. Even so, a number of issues raised by these eight articles remain theologically important, including whether Christ’s human nature was fallen as well as whether Christ truly descended from Adam and from David.

The first article of question 31 remarks that Christ did not heal the human race by starting a new human species. Receiving a human nature traceable to Adam, Christ restored fallen human nature from within.⁵² But the Son did not assume a human nature that contracted original sin. According to Aquinas, this is because Christ’s human nature, even while derived from Adam in bodily substance, is not linked by the thread of sexual intercourse to Adam’s “seminal virtue” or generative power, through which fallen humans are one with Adam as our first mover, and through which we inherit human nature in a disgraced state of original sin.⁵³ Aquinas recognizes that if Christ’s humanity were in

⁵¹ *STh* III, q. 30, a. 2, ad 1.

⁵² Torrell states, “the Word has not saved solely *a* concrete human nature, that which he personally assumed, but *the* human nature as such” (Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 511). He emphasizes Aquinas’s Pauline insistence upon Christ’s status as the second Adam.

⁵³ *STh* III, q. 31, a. 1, ad 3: “corpus Christi fuit in Adam secundum corpulentam substantiam, quia scilicet ipsa material corporalis corporis Christi derivata est ab Adam: non autem fuit

a fallen state, then he too would need salvation. Fallenness is not a prerequisite for possessing a human nature derived from Adam.⁵⁴

In the second article of question 31, Aquinas states that Christ must come from the physical stock of Abraham and David. Such descent is required to fulfill the promises of Gen 17:18 (as interpreted by Paul in Gal 3:15) and of Ps 132:11, “The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: ‘One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.’”⁵⁵ Following Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Jerome, and John of Damascus, among others, Aquinas therefore seeks to harmonize the genealogies, even while he

ibi secundum seminalem rationem, quia non est concepta ex virili semine.” See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d’Aquin*, 511–12, exposing Aquinas’s debt here to Augustine. I explore Aquinas’s theological account of the transmission of original sin in Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), chapter 6. See also Mark F. Johnson, “Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin: Doctrine, Authority, and Pedagogy,” in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 145–58; and, more broadly, Daniel W. Houck, *Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). See the valuable contextualization and response to D. W. Houck offered by Reinhard Hütter, “Original Sin Revisited: A Recent Proposal on Thomas Aquinas, Original Sin, and the Challenge of Evolution,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 21, no. 2 (2023), 693–732, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2023.a919220>.

⁵⁴ Weinandy argues that Christ’s flesh is fallen: see Thomas G. Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); Thomas G. Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 104–9. For Aquinas, it is of course true that Jesus takes on some bodily defects caused by original sin, including mortality. For a valuable discussion of the issues involved here (and for criticism of Weinandy’s position), see Joshua Evans, “What Is Not Saved Is Not Assumed: Thomas Weinandy, Julian of Eclanum, and Augustine of Hippo on Whether Salvation Requires Christ’s Temptations to Sin,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 19, no. 2 (2021), 563–86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2021.0024>.

⁵⁵ I employ here the RSV, but Aquinas’s Vulgate version communicates still more clearly the promise of a biological descendant: “Of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne” (Ps 131:11). Like the Church Fathers, Aquinas reads this psalm as a Messianic prophecy. In the view of Raymond Brown, it is not necessary for the Messiah to be descended biologically from David, so long as he is in the Davidic line by adoption. Brown states that “in a Jewish mindset, through Joseph’s acknowledgment, Jesus could be legally, even if not biologically, Joseph’s son and thus share Joseph’s Davidic descent” (Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2nd ed. [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 589). See also the emphasis on Jesus’ Davidic kingship in Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

recognizes that the genealogies have distinct theological-apologetic purposes.⁵⁶ The genealogies trace Jesus' Davidic lineage through Joseph, but of course Joseph was not his biological father. As noted above, Aquinas solves the problem of Davidic descent not only by insisting on the efficacy of adoption, but also by suggesting that Mary too could have been in the line of David. There are other problems as well, which Aquinas (following the Fathers) harmonizes: for instance, Matthew's identification of Joseph's father as Jacob (Matt 1:16), by contrast to Luke's identification of Joseph's father as Heli (Luke 3:23).

I agree with Joseph Ratzinger that this approach is not necessary.⁵⁷ Ratzinger points to the genre of the genealogies: "Neither evangelist is concerned so much with the individual names as with the symbolic structure within which Jesus' place in history is set before us: the intricacy with which he is woven into the historical strands of the promise, as well as the *new beginning* which paradoxically characterizes his origin side."⁵⁸ While Jesus is part of the people of Abraham and is in the line of David, the evangelists have freedom to reconstruct his genealogy in order to serve theological purposes.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See *STh* III, q. 31, a. 3. For discussion, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 512–14.

⁵⁷ See Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 8. See also Raymond E. Brown's observation: "Both genealogies can be truly scriptural and inspired by God [even] if only one or neither was a historically accurate family record. (Indeed, pressing further, I would ask: If one appeals to God's intention to argue that the genealogies *must* be historically reconcilable, why did God not inspire each evangelist to give us the same record?) Genealogies serve different purposes, and no assumption can be made that the format demands genuine lineal descent" (Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 588).

⁵⁸ Ratzinger/Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, 8–9. See Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 70–83, 117–24. Oddly, however, Lincoln considers it "plausible . . . that Matthew held that Jesus was illegitimate simply in the sense that he was illegitimately conceived by someone other than Joseph and that he depicts this issue as immediately resolved through Joseph's public acknowledgement of Jesus as his own son. Although Jesus had been conceived irregularly, Joseph's acceptance of him meant that he would not have been seen as a *mamzer*; there would have been no public questioning of his paternity or treatment of him as having any other status than Joseph's son. Matthew's account effectively further excludes any good reason for Jesus' compatriots to question his paternity because, by the time his parents set up home in Nazareth, they already constitute a bona fide family" (Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin?*, 83).

⁵⁹ I note here that, like both the Church Fathers and modern readers, Aquinas is impressed by the theological points that the genealogies make, such as that Jesus comes from a line of sinners (including some women who committed adultery or prostitution) in order to redeem sinners: see *STh* III, q. 31, a. 3, ad 5.

Aquinas devotes two articles to the fact that Jesus' flesh came from a woman. He observes that this fact serves to ground the Incarnation in human history. Indeed, the role of Mary pertains to the dignity of the whole human race, since not only a man, but also a woman was at the center of the event of the Incarnation.⁶⁰

For Aquinas, as he discusses in article 5 of question 31, Jesus' flesh came from Mary's "purest blood." Here he relies upon Aristotle's view that the conception of a child involves "the woman's blood, not any of her blood, but brought to a more perfect stage of secretion by the mother's generative power, so as to be apt for conception."⁶¹ This biology is false, but I agree that the Incarnation took place through Mary's bodily material and through the activity of Mary's body (along with the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit) in preparing that bodily material. Employing his outdated biology, Aquinas states that "this blood was brought together in the Virgin's womb and fashioned into a child by the operation of the Holy Spirit."⁶²

Question 32 treats the active cause of Christ's conception. Aquinas affirms that the whole Trinity, acting as one *ad extra* by the divine power, caused the conception of Christ in Mary's womb. Yet, he also affirms that this conception is rightly attributed to the Holy Spirit, as we read in the Gospels of Matthew

⁶⁰ Among Aquinas's Aristotelian errors is the following unfortunate claim, made in article 4 of question 31: "The male sex is more noble than the female, and for this reason He took human nature in the male sex. But lest the female sex should be despised, it was fitting that He should take flesh of a woman" (*STh* III, q. 31, a. 4, ad 1). For a sharp critique of Aquinas's view of women, see Lindsey Hankins, "Aquinas on Woman at Prayer" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2020). For a critique of Aquinas's view of women, but with more nuance, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 514.

⁶¹ *STh* III, q. 31, a. 5. See Bernard Hubert, "Le statut de l'embryon humain: une relecture d'Aristote," *Nova et Vetera* 76, no. 4 (2001), 53–81.

⁶² *STh* III, q. 31, a. 5, ad 3; translation slightly altered. Aquinas also addresses the implications of Heb 7:9–10, "One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him." In Aquinas's view, what the Letter to the Hebrews here says of Levi cannot be said of Christ. He explains, "Therefore by giving tithes to Melchisedech, Abraham foreshadowed that he, as being conceived in sin, and all who were to be his descendants in contracting original sin, needed that healing which is through Christ. And Isaac, Jacob, and Levi, and all the others were in Abraham in such a way so as to be descended from him, not only as to bodily substance, but also as to seminal virtue, by which original sin is transmitted. Consequently, they all paid tithes in Abraham, i.e. foreshadowed as needing to be healed by Christ. And Christ alone was in Abraham in such a manner as to descend from him, not by seminal virtue, but according to bodily substance" (*STh* III, q. 31, a. 8). For discussion of these passages, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 514–16.

and Luke.⁶³ The first reason for the fittingness of this attribution is that in the Trinity, the Spirit's personal property is Love proceeding. This fits with the Incarnation, which is grounded in divine Love. Since the Spirit is rightly said to be the cause of the conception, the evangelist Matthew is not exaggerating when he states that Mary "was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18).⁶⁴

Like Augustine, Aquinas carefully shows that the causality of the Spirit (and of the whole Trinity) does not make Christ, in his humanity, the son of the Spirit (or of the Trinity). In his humanity, Christ the divine Son is the Son of Mary. Aquinas remarks, "Christ was conceived of the Virgin Mary, who supplied the matter of His conception unto likeness of species. For this reason He is called her Son."⁶⁵ The Spirit caused Jesus' conception in Mary's womb, but "not unto likeness of species," and so the Spirit is not the *father* of Jesus in his humanity.⁶⁶ The incarnate Son has only one Father, namely, his Father according to his eternal generation as the Son.

In accord with his Aristotelian biology, Aquinas holds that only the male "seminal virtue" causes the woman's special blood to form a child's body. In this sense, he mistakenly assumes that Mary did not "co-operate actively in the conception of Christ's body."⁶⁷ As noted above, however, Aquinas does think

⁶³ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2 of *Spiritual Master*, ed. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 157–61. More broadly, see Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and Bruce D. Marshall, "What Does the Spirit Have to Do?," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 62–77. See also the thorough treatment of Trinitarian appropriation—placing Aquinas's approach in the context of the approaches taken by Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Abelard, William of Auxerre, Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure—by Dominique-Marie Cabaret, *L'étonnante manifestation des personnes divines: Les appropriations trinitaires chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, ed. Gilles Emery, Bibliothèque de la Revue thomiste, Études (Paris: Parole et silence, 2016). Cabaret treats the Spirit's role in the Incarnation both as found in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and as found in the *Summa Theologiae*: see Cabaret, 286–89 and 373–76.

⁶⁴ See *STh* III, q. 32, a. 2.

⁶⁵ *STh* III, q. 32, a. 3, ad 1.

⁶⁶ *STh* III, q. 32, a. 3, ad 1. For discussion of the issues treated in this paragraph, see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 516–19.

⁶⁷ *STh* III, q. 32, a. 4, *sed contra*. Torrell points out that Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure take the opposite position: see Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 519. David Braine offers a clarification: "Jesus' conception was not a work in which a woman was a sole creaturely agent unassisted by a man, but a work in which neither woman nor man exercised their normal agentive function in procreation—or indeed in which either exercised any agentive function at all. Mary exercises, not agency, but only consent in respect

that *prior* to the conception, Mary's body cooperated actively in preparing the matter needed for Jesus' conception. Again in accord with his Aristotelian biology, Aquinas thinks that normally the matter is not ensouled in the womb prior to quickening and therefore does not become a human body until quickening. However, in the case of Christ, Aquinas makes an exception to this Aristotelian biology, since the divine power can speed up the process and "it was unbecoming that He should take to Himself a body as yet unformed."⁶⁸

Of course, Mary's divine motherhood is very much a grace, as shown in the angel's greeting and in her ability to obey God on behalf of all Israel and all humanity. Although Aquinas does not get Mary's grace quite right (insofar as he denies her immaculate conception), he is correct that Mary could not have properly been Mother of the Redeemer had she been tainted by actual sin, because in such a case she would not have had the full freedom to consent. When Mary is thought to be a normal sinner like the rest of us, it is no wonder that she quickly becomes merely a funnel through which the Son of God comes to earth. Her participation in the Incarnation is such as to require radical grace. Through his entrance into Mary's womb, Mary's Son grants Mary a profound participation in the event of the Incarnation. Aquinas aptly praises "the singular manner in which the Son of God, who is the *Divine Wisdom* (1 Cor 1:24) dwelt in her, not only in her soul but in her womb."⁶⁹

Conclusion

Even theologians can sometimes write as though it is "inappropriate that God should be involved with *bios* and matter."⁷⁰ By contrast, the Bible does not shy away from an emphasis on Mary's childbearing, and neither does Aquinas. In the above, I have suggested that Aquinas's engagement with this reality in the

to the conception of the Word. What comes about comes about by the power of the Holy Spirit, with this consent" (Braine, "The Virgin Mary in the Christian Faith," 882). Braine's point is true insofar as Mary could not produce Jesus Christ from any resources of her own. Even so, she is involved both spiritually and physically—in an active way, though not in a constitutive or sufficient way for causation—in the conception of the incarnate Lord by the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁸ *STh* III, q. 33, a. 1. See Torrell, *Jésus le Christ chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 520.

⁶⁹ *STh* III, q. 27, a. 4.

⁷⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 59.

Tertia Pars remains instructive. Aquinas takes up the biblical and patristic witness to Mary and demonstrates its theological fittingness and intelligibility.

In Mary's womb, the Incarnation involves both natural processes and divine miracles. Jesus Christ is truly conceived and born; Mary is truly his mother. Yet, as befits the eschatological coming of the Son of God, both his conception and birth have miraculous elements. The child conceived in Mary's womb is "Emmanuel," "God with us" (Matt 1:23). Contemplating Mary's spiritual and bodily participation in the event of the Incarnation, we rightly exclaim with her cousin Elizabeth: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42). Contemporary Thomistic Christology would therefore do well to fully include his Mariology, which highlights the Incarnation's concretely bodily character and eschatological dimension.

Although Aquinas's Mariology is an important part of his Christology, I should grant that his exposition of Mary has some notable lacunae. For example, Aquinas could have integrated more fully the theme of Mary's relation to the people of Israel, a theme that he does not ignore but does not accentuate either.⁷¹ This dimension of Mariology is presented much more richly in twentieth-century works such as Louis Bouyer's *The Seat of Wisdom* and Joseph Ratzinger's *Daughter Zion*.⁷² Likewise, in accordance with the Catholic Mariological tradition, Pope John Paul II teaches in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Mary's faith can also be compared to that of Abraham. . . . In the salvific economy of God's revelation, Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant."⁷³ In *Daughter Zion*, Ratzinger goes quite far in this direction. He shows that "the image of Mary in the New Testament is woven entirely of Old

⁷¹ See, however, *STh* III, q. 28, a. 3, ad 3, where Aquinas compares Mary's face to the face of Moses; and see Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*.

⁷² See Louis Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom: An Essay on the Place of the Virgin Mary in Christian Theology*, trans. A. V. Littledale (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962); Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*.

⁷³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), §14, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html. Louis Bouyer similarly comments, "It is to her [Mary] that the supreme announcement of the Word is to be made; in her is to take effect the divine initiative that will bring into being the new creation. Her faith will utter that 'fiat' necessary to a creation which is not a creation from nothing, but from human freedom under sentence of death and in need of new life. The Church has always, in reflecting on St Luke's narrative, been convinced that Mary's faith was the supreme fulfilment of all the Old Testament holiness, a holiness of preparation, aspiration, acceptance and consent to the divine plan in a growing detachment from self" (Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom*, 119).

Testament threads.”⁷⁴ Mary represents the whole people of Israel, which in the Old Testament often appears in feminine terms, as “woman, virgin, beloved, wife and mother.”⁷⁵ Ratzinger emphasizes that Mary participates in the event of the Incarnation as “the authentic daughter Zion . . . who is thereby the mother of the savior.”⁷⁶

Aquinas’s insistence upon Christology requiring Mariology is characteristic of Ratzinger’s work as well. In Ratzinger’s view, without attention to Mary, the theology of the Incarnation falls into Nestorianism, which “surgically removes God so far from man that nativity and maternity—all of corporeality—remain in a different sphere.”⁷⁷ I agree with this concern, which highlights why Aquinas’s Mariological reflections within the Christology of the *Tertia Pars* are so important, both for Aquinas and for contemporary Thomistic Christology. To understand the Incarnation of the Word in its historical concreteness, which is an *eschatological* concreteness, Christology must embrace and explore the biblical testimony to Mary’s miraculous motherhood.

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⁷⁴ Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 12.

⁷⁵ Ratzinger, 21.

⁷⁶ Ratzinger, 24.

⁷⁷ Ratzinger, 35.

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