



Foundations for a Theological Aesthetics in Thomas Aquinas

Fundamentos para una estética teológica en Tomás de Aquino

 **Alice M. Ramos**

St. John's University-New York
EE.UU.

ramosa@stjohns.edu

Summary

1. Introduction
2. Creation as Revelatory of its Maker and Reasons for Man's Obscured Vision
3. The Incarnation as the Remedy for Man's Obscured Vision
4. Conclusion: The *Parousia*

Abstract: God's self-revelation in the universe is due to His creation of all things through the Word or the *Logos*; creation so conceived is revelatory or expressive of its maker. It is the case, however, that the images and traces of God's presence in the universe are not always perceived, leading at times to his denial. We will then investigate some of the reasons or causes for man's obscured vision. Man's vision or understanding requires healing if he is to attain his final end, and so we will speak of the need of the Incarnation which makes possible not only the restoration of man's vision or understanding but also that most sublime elevation of the human person to a participation in God's very life. And this process of divinization will also have repercussions for the state of the universe, since at the end of time the universe will be made a fitting dwelling place for men so perfected. My interest, then, will be in the three stages of salvation history: creation, redemption, and the *parousia*. At each of these stages we will see how beauty is at work, for God intends his creation to be ultimately a definitive theophany, a manifestation of God's glory, of his beauty.

Keywords: Beauty, Creation, Human Vision, the Incarnation, the *Parousia*

Resumen: Dios se revela en el universo porque todo ha sido hecho por la Palabra o por el *Logos*; la creación así concebida revela o expresa a su Hacedor. Sin embargo, las imágenes o los rastros de la presencia de Dios en el universo no siempre son percibidos por el hombre. Veremos en este trabajo algunas razones por la visión oscurecida del hombre. La visión o el entendimiento de la persona humana requieren sanación si el hombre ha de llegar a su perfección. Se precisa de la encarnación para restaurar la visión o el entendimiento humano y también para la elevación de la persona humana a

una participación en la vida de Dios. El proceso de divinización repercutirá en el estado del universo, ya que el universo se convertirá en un lugar propicio para acoger a los hombres que hayan llegado a su perfección. Se tratarán por lo tanto las tres etapas de la historia de la salvación: la creación, la redención, y la *parusia*. En cada una de ellas se verá como la belleza o la falta de belleza se manifiestan, ya que Dios ha querido que su creación sea una teofanía, es decir, una manifestación de su gloria, de su belleza.

Palabras Clave: Belleza, Creación, Visión humana, Encarnación, *Parusia*

1. Introduction

In the introduction to the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, Hans Urs von Balthasar indicates that theology need not renounce aesthetics for if it did, theology would then be giving up not only a good part of itself, but perhaps the best part.¹ While we generally attribute a concern for the beautiful to the Franciscan tradition, Thomas Aquinas's thought is not often viewed in this way. Indeed, some scholars argue that for Aquinas the beautiful is not a transcendental, as are the true and the good, although there are other scholars who refute this claim, or who take as a given the transcendental of the beautiful.²

Balthasar refers however to the beauty that radiates from the works of Anselm, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas because the human spirit of each one of these philosopher-theologians has been supernaturally transformed. In fact, Balthasar says that these men were "ecstatics," that is, they were "caught up and drawn into the unity of enthusiasm and holiness."³ The latter has been associated with beauty and expressions such as "the beauty of holiness"⁴ have been used, so that if the thinkers mentioned here were interiorly transformed by grace and thus participated in holiness, in moral or spiritual beauty, then it follows that the works of these men also radiate the beauty of their holy lives.

In addition, however, to the beauty which is expressive of a holy life and of that life's works, we may be able to apply Balthasar's conception of a theological aesthetics to Aquinas's work. For Balthasar, such an aesthetics must be developed in two phases: first, a theory of vision which is a theory about the perception of the form of God's self-revelation, and secondly, a theory of rapture which deals with the incarnation of God's glory and man's elevation to

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Volume I: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco-New York: Ignatius Press-Crossroad, 1982).

² See Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), especially his chapter on beauty as a "forgotten transcendental,"—phrase that he takes from Étienne Gilson. See also Christopher Scott Sevier, *Aquinas on Beauty* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), and Armand A. Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1983).

³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 78.

⁴ See John Saward, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty: Art, Sanctity, and the Truth of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997).

participate in that glory.⁵ My intention in this essay will not be to concentrate on Balthasar's own development of these two phases of his theological aesthetics—although I draw inspiration from his magisterial work—but to see, as has been mentioned, how they may be applied to the work of Thomas Aquinas. I will maintain that God's self-revelation in the universe is due to God's creation of all things through the Word or the *Logos*; creation so conceived is revelatory or expressive of its maker. It is the case, however, that the images and traces of God's presence in the universe are not always perceived, leading either to the denial of the attainment of knowledge of God or to the denial of God's very existence, thus to agnosticism or to atheism. This will lead us to investigate some of the reasons or causes for man's obscured vision. Man's vision or understanding requires healing if he is to attain his final end, and so we will speak of the need of the Incarnation which makes possible not only the restoration of man's vision or understanding but also that most sublime elevation of the human person to a participation in God's very life. As the Church Fathers would say, God became man so that man could become divine.⁶ And this process of divinization will also have repercussions for the state of the universe, since at the end of time the universe will be made a fitting dwelling place for men so perfected. My interest, then, will be in the three stages of salvation history: creation, redemption, and the *parousia*. At each of these stages we will see how beauty is at work, for God intends his creation to be ultimately a definitive theophany, a manifestation of God's glory, of his beauty. While the full development of this topic far exceeds the scope of an essay, my intention here will be to present briefly how beauty appears at each stage of salvation history and how the perception of beauty is either impeded or made possible.

2. Creation as Revelatory of its Maker and Reasons for Man's Obscured Vision

The metaphor of the divine artist is often used by Aquinas to describe and understand God's creative activity. Since art has traditionally been associated with the creation of what is beautiful, Aquinas says that no one takes pains to make an image or a representation except for the sake of the beautiful.⁷ God as artist creates things that are beautiful and good and are, moreover, expressive or representative of himself, for as Pseudo-Dionysius tells us God is the supersubstantial or superessential Beauty.⁸ Since a perfect agent acts by virtue of love for what it possesses, it may be said that from a love of his own beauty,

⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Introduction to Volume I, 125. According to Balthasar, the double and reciprocal *ekstasis*, that is, God's going out of Himself to man, and man's going out of himself to God, constitutes the content of dogmatic theology, which may be presented as a theory of rapture. See 126.

⁶ See for example St. Athanasius, *Oratio II contra Arianos*, 70: PG 26, 425 B—426 G, quoted in John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Boston: Pauline Editions, 2001), n. 12, p. 32.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, in *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), chap. 4, lect. 5-6, 273. Hereafter cited as Thomas Aquinas, *In De div. nom.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 269.

God wishes to communicate his likeness to others and so multiply his beauty as far as possible.⁹

According to Aquinas, Pseudo-Dionysius makes clear what the meaning of beauty consists in: the Areopagite indicates that when God makes beings participants in beauty he is “the cause of harmony and brilliance” in all things.¹⁰ As the source of light, God shares his luminosity with all things, such that through a participation in light things are rendered beautiful.¹¹ And as the cause of harmony, God calls all things to himself. Therefore God is not only the efficient cause but also the final cause of all, since all things are turned toward him as to their end.¹² It is interesting to note here that beauty in Greek is derived from *kalos*, which means ‘to call’;¹³ beauty thus calls out to things attracting them to itself and evoking a response of love, for as Augustine asks, “Do we love anything but the beautiful?”¹⁴

In addition, things are also ordered among themselves. Aquinas explains this type of order when he says, “[God] gathers all things to the same in all. . . . The higher things are present to the lower by participation, while the lower things are in the higher by eminence, and thus all things are in all. . . . from the fact that all things are found in all by some order it follows that all things are ordered to the same ultimate thing.”¹⁵ All things have something in common with all and the different parts of the whole are mutually adapted to each other and help one another such that higher things give perfection to lower things.¹⁶ There is moreover a due proportion among the parts of the whole such that there is constituted one universe of things, where “without any gap some members follow after others as long as the course of this world lasts.”¹⁷ There is then a diversity of beings and forms that are all harmoniously arranged and resplendent with varying degrees of light and intelligibility, and they all constitute an ordered unity of things, a cosmos whose order, according to Aquinas, is their chief beauty.¹⁸

In comparing God to an artist, Aquinas tells us that the knowledge of God is to his creatures as the knowledge of the artist is to the things made by his art.¹⁹ Just as the artist produces his work through the idea or word conceived in his

⁹ Ibid., 273.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 270.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. Examples of how the higher are in the lower and the lower in the higher can be given: reason is participated in by that which is lower as can be seen in the estimative sense, and the lower forms are found in the higher, such that what the lower forms can do the higher forms can do also.

¹⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. J. G. Pilkington, in *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, 2 vols., ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), IV, xiii, quoted in Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present, A Short History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1966), 92.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, 270.

¹⁶ Ibid., 276.

¹⁷ Ibid., 277.

¹⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, 71. Romae, Garroni, 1926.

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 14, a. 8, resp. Romae, De propaganda fide, 1888.

intellect and through the love of his will for that work, so also Aquinas speaks of God's creative activity: every creature is thought and willed by God. The knowledge of God as the cause of things is united to his will and thus this knowledge is usually called, according to Aquinas, the knowledge of approbation.²⁰ It may be said that this type of knowledge is evinced in the Book of Genesis where upon creating God approves of his work: he sees or knows that what he has created is good, very good, that it is indeed beautiful to contemplate and fills the seer with joy.

Aquinas also emphasizes the role of the *Logos* or Divine Word in creation—the Word is the perfect reflection or Image of God and as such this Word is said to be beautiful.²¹ Since all things have been created through the Word, through the Divine Idea which is also Divine Wisdom or Divine Truth, they participate through their being and their form in the beauty of the perfect Image of God.²² All creatures are then either images or traces of God's wise artistry.²³ The human person is especially favored as she has been made in the image of God—*imago Dei*—and as such imitates the exemplary cause that is the Divine Word. Moreover, through the person's own thoughtful and loving activity, it may be said that she is called to cooperate in perfecting the universe, that is, in giving the universe or the part of the universe that is assigned to her, its final form. Since Aquinas says that form is “a participation in the divine brilliance,”²⁴ brilliance being a feature of beauty, the human person is called then in a sense to beautify the universe, imitating as it were the divine artist. The human being's work is thus a participation in God's creative activity which is the cause of beautiful and good things.

While Aquinas did not write a treatise on beauty, his remarks on beauty which are scattered throughout his corpus are important for the relationship of beauty to word and to light. The Christian appropriation of both Plato and Dionysius in Aquinas's work enables us to situate in the Creator God and more specifically in the divine Word the origin of what may be termed the call of beauty. It is by the creation of all things through the Word or *Logos*, through whose luminous being everything is intelligible and participates in the beauty and light of the Word that all things are called into existence and are also called to return to the Word in whom is found the idea and measure of all things.²⁵ When Aquinas refers to the essential attributes of the divine Persons, *species* or beauty is appropriated to the Son or the Word; Aquinas also applies the three conditions of beauty to the Son, that is, integrity or perfection, due proportion or harmony,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 39, a. 8, resp. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2.

²² Ibid.

²³ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 45, a. 7, resp. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 93 on the production of man who is said to be made “to the image and likeness of God.”

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In De div. nom.*, chap. 4, 272.

²⁵ See my Alice M. Ramos, *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), chap.2: Aquinas on Measure, 27-46.

and brightness or clarity.²⁶ And regarding the third property, Aquinas says, “The third agrees with the property of the Son, as the Word, which is the light and splendor of the intellect, as Damascene says (*De Fide Orthod.* iii. 3). Augustine alludes to the same when he says (*ibid.*): “As the perfect Word, not wanting in anything, and, so to speak, the art of the omnipotent God.”²⁷

The Word is then the *species* that makes all things *speciosa* or beautiful. Reference must be made here to the forms of things which are likenesses of the first agent and “are traced back to the first agent as to an exemplar principle.”²⁸ Forms through which things have being are a participation in the divine clarity or light of beauty, as said above. And it is in function of their proper intelligible character, in function of their proper form that particular things are beautiful.²⁹ Moreover, the form participates in the act of being which is had in plenitude only in God. And the actuality of each thing is in some way its own light.³⁰ According to Aquinas, “[E]ach thing is known through its own form and inasmuch as it is in act. Hence, in the measure in which something has form and act, to that extent it has light. Thus, things which are acts, indeed, but not pure [act] are lucent, but are not light. But the divine essence, which is pure act, is light itself. (. . .) God lives in his own [domain], and this light is inaccessible, that is, is not visible to the fleshly eye, but intelligible.”³¹ From what Aquinas says here it is evident that God is light in a proper sense, not merely in a metaphorical sense.³² From God as the source of light, through God’s Word, an order of being, a hierarchical order of forms, is made. Because of their luminosity and clarity, so characteristic of beauty, then, the forms of things ‘call’ out to our senses and intellect to be received and experienced.

It is then through the luminosity and intelligibility of beings, of their forms, that we should be able to know the Creator, to perceive something about him in his creation. The beauty of things that proceed from the divine mind is meant to be known and contemplated by the human mind³³ and is meant to give us some knowledge, however little, of the Creator. For God has left, so to speak, his signature on creation just as an artist leaves his signature on his work. From the actualized forms of things we should then be able to reason to the Form of all

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 39, a. 8, resp.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929), 2.1.1.1 ad 5, quoted in Lawrence Dewan, *St. Thomas and Form as Something Divine in Things*, The Aquinas Lecture, 2007 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 44. See Latin at n. 111, p. 88 of Dewan.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera (Rome-Turin: Marietti, 1950), 4.5 (349), quoted in Dewan, *St. Thomas and Form*, 89.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In de causis*, prop. 6, n. 168, quoted in my article: Alice M. Ramos, “The Divine Ideas and the Intelligibility of Creation : A Way Toward Universal Signification in Aquinas,” *Doctor communis* 44, no. 3 (September-December 1991): 250.

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Primam epistolam b. Pauli ad Timotheum lectura*, ed. R. Cai (Turin: Marietti, 1953), 6.3, quoted in Dewan, *St. Thomas and Form*, 61.

³² See Kevin F. Doherty, “St. Thomas and the Pseudo-Dionysian Symbol of Light,” *The New Scholasticism* 34, no. 2 (1960): 170-89.

³³ See Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 2, Romae, Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1970. where Aquinas speaks of the transcendentality of truth, but which can also be applied to beauty as the latter encompasses both the true and the good.

forms who is Beauty itself. According to Aquinas, it is because man is *capax entis*, that is, capable of knowing things, that he is also *capax Dei*, that is, capable of knowing God. It is precisely this ascent from the knowledge of beautiful and good things in the universe that should lead to the knowledge of God. This way of knowing is made possible by natural reason, unaided by faith. But the perception of forms does not always yield knowledge of God.

There is a scriptural passage from the Book of Wisdom, which speaks precisely about the beautiful and good things in the world and which cautions us against the folly of idolatry, whereby creatures which are images and traces of the divine become idols or false gods for us and so do not enable us to raise our minds to God. According to this passage, from the good things that are seen in the universe, we should be able to recognize the divine artist, “for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.”³⁴ However, because we take inordinate pleasure in the beauty of earthly things or of the heavens, we are dazzled by their outward splendor, unable to see beyond them and transcend appearances, and thus forfeit knowledge of their creator, the author of beauty. We are so amazed by the power of the things of nature—of fire, wind, and water—that we cannot raise our vision to the infinite power of the one who formed them and gave them being. Rational creatures have the capacity to know so much in their investigation of the cosmos, and yet they may fail to attain knowledge of the Lord of the universe.³⁵ The Wisdom passage is emphatic about our capacity to know by natural reason the Creator of Beauty from our knowledge of good and beautiful creatures, just as we find that in Aquinas’s fourth way the human mind can ascend from creatures that are lower beauties or that participate in beauty to their cause, that is, to the maximum or absolute Beauty.³⁶ So emphatic is the Wisdom passage that it calls those people who are ignorant of God “foolish by nature.”³⁷ The foolish man is unwise, imprisoned, we might say, like Plato’s prisoner of the cave who only sees the shadows of reality, chained by loves that distort his vision of the real.

In speaking of folly, Aquinas interestingly opposes it to wisdom. According to Aristotle, whom Aquinas cites, it belongs to wisdom to consider the highest cause.³⁸ And to know God who is simply the highest cause is to be wise simply, for the wise man or the spiritual man, as he is also called, judges all things and is able to order them according to divine rules.³⁹ Now wisdom is in the intellect and its act is to judge rightly;⁴⁰ it is an intellectual virtue which pronounces right judgment about divine things once reason has made its own inquiry.⁴¹

³⁴ Wisdom 13:5.

³⁵ See Wisdom 13:1-9.

³⁶ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

³⁷ Wisdom 13:1.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 1, resp. Aquinas cites Aristotle, *Metaph.* i. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2, resp.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Folly too is in the intellect, according to Aquinas, for a fool fails in judgment regarding the highest cause and thus lacks the discernment that enables the wise man to rightly judge things and causes.⁴² Whereas the wise man has an “acute and penetrating” sense of judgment, the fool’s sense is on the contrary “dulled.”⁴³ As Aquinas says, “Folly denotes dullness of sense in judging, and chiefly as regards the highest cause, which is the last end and the sovereign good.”⁴⁴ That a man should contract dullness in judgment is explained chiefly in this way, “by plunging his sense into earthly things, whereby his sense is rendered incapable of perceiving Divine things, according to 1 Cor. 2:14, *The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God*, even as sweet things have no savor for a man whose taste is infected with an evil humor: and such like folly is a sin.”⁴⁵ Aquinas makes clear that folly is caused when the spiritual sense is dulled and so becomes incapable of judging spiritual things, and that this sense is plunged into earthly things principally, as he says, “by lust, which is about the greatest of pleasures; and these absorb the mind more than any others.”⁴⁶ The mind, then, is drawn to disordered loves and cannot therefore rise to God by recognizing the beauty of creation as revelatory of its maker.

Folly or that dullness of sense in judging, of which Aquinas speaks, is a sin; and it is precisely sin which causes man to be slow or unfit for perceiving the presence of God in the universe and for thus seeing or contemplating the truth.⁴⁷ In addition to personal sins, there is that original sin which gives rise in man to a new way of seeing things: no longer does man participate in God’s vision of the world, seeing things as God sees them, seeing them as marvelous gifts to behold and to respect, as what is very good, indeed, truly beautiful—gifts which represent so magnanimous a Giver.⁴⁸

It seems appropriate here to return to Balthasar and to what he says regarding vision—the vision to which God calls us because we are beings that are seen in God himself.⁴⁹ In developing a theory of vision as to how we perceive the form of God’s self-revelation or of God’s presence, Balthasar makes reference to

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 46, a. 1, resp. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2, s.c.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 46, a. 1, resp.

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 46, a. 2, resp.

⁴⁵ Ibid. According to Bernard of Clairvaux, “A wise man is one who savors all things as they really are.” The wise man knows then the real, unlike the fool whose sense of judgment is dulled and cannot therefore “savor” the real. See the cover of Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), where this quote appears.

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 46, a. 3, resp. In this same article, in the reply to objection 3, Aquinas says, “. . . the folly which is caused by a spiritual impediment, viz., by the mind being plunged into earthly things, arises chiefly from lust.”

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3.

⁴⁸ See my article Alice M. Ramos, “Foundations for a Christian Anthropology,” *Anthropotes*, V, n. 2 (December 1989): 241-242. While this article is centered on John Paul II’s theology of the body, what I say there is applicable here. John Paul II’s thought is indebted not only to phenomenology and personalism but also to Thomas Aquinas.

⁴⁹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 400. Balthasar makes reference to philosophers, theologians, and to the poet Paul Claudel in delineating some of the main concerns of a Christian anthropology.

Origen's doctrine of the spiritual senses. As a result of sin, Origen indicates that Adam's spiritual eye for God is closed, while at the moment of original sin his sensory eye is opened.⁵⁰ The eye is said to see from the heart or from what it loves;⁵¹ if reason submits to God, in loving obedience to him, then the eye of the soul will see, understand, and judge from love of God, but if the eye of the soul does not submit to God and is led rather by self-love, then it will not see things as they derive from God and will not be able to perceive God and divine things. The senses will therefore need to be spiritualized if they are to be capable of perceiving forms as revelatory of their creator and of perceiving absolute beauty. Since the senses and the knowledge we acquire through them are needed for the understanding and the judgment of the intellect, they too will need to be purified just as the intellect and the will need purification and conversion if we are to ascend from the beauty of the forms in the universe to their maker. Human nature wounded by sin needs to be transformed and renewed by participating once again in the life and vision of God. But for human beings to perceive the results of God's thoughtful and loving activity in the universe, their senses, mind, and will must be attuned to the real, and as Balthasar says, this can only happen if a habit of the mind is present which according to him involves "the trinity of faith, love, and hope," and ultimately grace.⁵² Perception and understanding thus require an ethics or an asceticism of cognition, and most importantly the infusion of grace.⁵³

3. The Incarnation as the Remedy for Man's Obscured Vision

It is precisely, then, the Incarnation which effects the transformation and renewal of human nature. Just as the senses become worldly through the fall of the first man, they become heavenly, as Balthasar puts it, through the conferral of grace which is a participation in God's very life.⁵⁴ Only Christ, the God-man, makes possible the renewal of man such that the old man—the man made old by sin—becomes the new man, thus acquiring new senses or spiritual senses.⁵⁵ God's love manifested in Christ, in his Son, is meant therefore to reorient our senses, our affections, and all our other powers, so that we may truly live giving glory to God, making him known, through our words and actions.⁵⁶ The senses and the mind of the human person need therefore to be formed according to the form of Christ. The spiritualization of the senses and ultimately of man's mind is needed if man is to perceive the relation between

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 392.

⁵² Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 61.

⁵³ See my Alice M. Ramos, *Dynamic Transcendentals*, 58. While I do not mention 'grace' in this section of my book, I do speak of an 'asceticism of cognition.'

⁵⁴ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 370.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 370-72.

⁵⁶ That man act as Christ, with his powers transformed by Christ, will enable man to live as Christ. Such action gives glory to God, thus bringing about beauty in the universe and in man himself. As St. Irenaeus says, "The glory of God is man alive," *Adv. Haer.* IV, 20, 5-7, quoted in Karol Wojtyła-John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 183.

the forms of the universe and the Form of forms from which they have their source. In his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Aquinas shows how putting on the form of Christ, putting on his mind, renders our senses spiritual so that we are able to perceive the beauty of God and of his works:

[Paul] says, therefore: Be humble, as I have said; hence *have this mind among yourselves*, i.e., acquire by experience the mind which you *have in Christ Jesus*. It should be noted that we should have this mind in five ways according to the five senses: first, to see His glory, so that being enlightened, we may be conformed to Him: "Your eyes will see the king in his beauty" (Is. 33:17); "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18); secondly, to hear His wisdom, in order to become happy: "Happy are these your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom" (1 Kgs. 10:8); "As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me" (Ps. 18:44). Thirdly, to smell the grace of His meekness, that we may run to Him: "Your anointing oils are fragrant... draw me after you" (Cant. 1:3); fourthly, to taste the sweetness of His mercy, that we may always be in God: "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:9); fifthly, to touch His power, that we may be saved: "If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well" (Mt. 9:21).⁵⁷

Putting on the mind or form of Christ effects, then, our being in conformity with him and thus gives us his sensibility, spiritualizing our senses such that by seeing his light and glory, a light which enlightens our mind and senses we are also enabled to share this light with others; by hearing his wisdom and obeying it, we submit our mind to him; by being attracted and drawn to his fragrance, the *bonus odor Christi*, others can also sense this fragrance in us; and by touching his power which makes us whole again, we are given that integrity or perfection which is characteristic of the beautiful.

God's going out of himself in Christ to man requires that man also go out of himself to God in his response of faith, hope, and charity; this going out of self or *ekstasis* is what Balthasar calls the theory of rapture, which follows his theory of vision.⁵⁸ As Christ humbles himself, so man must humbly submit his mind, heart, and senses to Christ; only in this way can man really put on the mind of Christ. In speaking of Christ's humility, Aquinas says, "The manner and the sign of his humility is obedience, whereas it is characteristic of the proud to follow their own will, for a proud person seeks greatness. But it pertains to a great thing that it not be ruled by something else, but that it rule other things; therefore, obedience is contrary to pride."⁵⁹ Since the lower powers of Adam and Eve were ordered by reason, their sin was not one of

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, OP (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1969), 2:6. Html-formatted by Joseph Kenny, OP. <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/SSPhilippians.htm> This text from Aquinas is also cited by Balthasar in his Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* in a different translation, 379-80. Balthasar mentions that Aquinas is influenced by Origen; see n. 185, p. 380.

⁵⁸ See n. 5 above.

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 2:6.

concupiscence but rather of pride, desiring knowledge in an inordinate way, not submitting reason to God, and thus not obeying God's will. The devil tempted Eve presenting her with a false beauty, that is, a false divinization; the devil says to her, ". . . your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶⁰ The sin of pride is therefore a false godliness, unlike humility which brings about a true divinization; pride clouds man's vision of the real, making himself the measure of reality, and thus ultimately renders him a fool. Christ's life, on the contrary, shows us that the way to be conformed to him and thus to be reconciled to God is through humility and self-abasement, which are opposed to the pride which is the beginning of every sin.⁶¹ As the Book of Proverbs tells us, "Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom."⁶²

Moreover, wisdom which judges rightly of divine things is the effect of charity, that is, of a sympathy or union with divine things,⁶³ whereby man loves God.⁶⁴ The gift of wisdom is therefore, according to Augustine whom Aquinas quotes, "becoming to peacemakers, in whom there is no movement of rebellion, but only obedience to reason."⁶⁵ It may be said that Christ who is the Word of Wisdom is the ultimate peacemaker, reconciling all things to God, and that in so far as man is conformed to Christ, having put on his form and mind, having spiritualized his senses, he too will be a peacemaker, effecting that peace which Augustine defines as tranquility in order, the order which is for Aquinas the chief beauty in things.⁶⁶

Because God goes out in Christ to man showing his love for man, giving himself, and being obedient unto death, God's love for man is made manifest in the person of Christ. Therefore, to put on the form of Christ means not only to put on the mind of Christ but also to put on the form of his life, which means as St. Paul says, "to put on charity, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."⁶⁷ Therefore, the vision that we need in order to perceive the presence of God in the universe is the loving knowledge, the knowledge by connaturality,⁶⁸ of the new man who has been recreated "to the measure of God."⁶⁹ To see or know with authentic love, with dispositions cultivated by virtue and elevated by grace, is to be transformed by the form and life of Christ;

⁶⁰ See Gen. 3:5.

⁶¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 86, a. 2, resp. and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 84, a. 2, resp.

⁶² Proverbs 11. It is interesting to note that disgrace also indicates a lack of moral beauty or glory.

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 4, resp.

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 5, s.c. In this article Aquinas also quotes Wis. 7: 28, "God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom." Aquinas also goes on to say, ". . . wisdom is in all those who have charity and are without mortal sin."

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 6, s.c.

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 71.

⁶⁷ Col. 3: 12-14. See also Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 103.

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2, resp. ". . . this sympathy or connaturality for Divine things is the result of charity, which unites us to God. . . . Consequently wisdom, which is a gift, has its cause in the will, which cause is charity, but it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge aright . . ."

⁶⁹ Eph. 4:24. See Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 103.

it is also to see with the loving gaze or vision of the Creator who approved of all he had made, seeing it as truly good, as beautiful.

After original sin, the image of God found in man's mind is as Aquinas puts it, "obscured and disfigured," but once man is justified, that image is "clear and beautiful."⁷⁰ This justification is effected through the Son or the Word of God in whose likeness everything was made. As Aquinas puts it, "[I]t was fitting that the creature should be restored in order to its eternal and unchangeable perfection; for the craftsman by the intelligible form of his art, whereby he fashioned his handiwork, restores it when it has fallen into ruin. . . . And hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God. . . . Hence it was fitting that by the Word of true knowledge man might be led back to God, having wandered from God through an inordinate thirst for knowledge."⁷¹ No longer obscured by sin, man's mind as re-created image,⁷² can then perceive creation as revelatory of its maker and also know through the example of the Incarnate Word that man best images God who is love when he himself truly loves, since God's love for man in and through Christ enables the transformation of man's vision and understanding of himself and of all else. As Balthasar puts it, "Love is the creative power of God himself which has been infused into man by virtue of God's Incarnation. This is why, in the light of the divine ideas [in the Word], love can read the world of forms and, in particular, man correctly. Outside of this light, man remains an incomprehensible and contradictory hieroglyph. Cross and Resurrection, understood as the love and the glory of God, bleeding to death and forsaken, render man decipherable."⁷³

The light of Christ's love on the Cross is manifest through the divinity and beauty which shone from his face,⁷⁴ the beauty that radiates from the virtues, chief among which is charity, and from grace. This beauty is not seen by everyone, but only by those who have left behind the so-called wisdom of the world to be immersed in the wisdom of God where humility, charity, and peace are found. As Balthasar puts it, "Christ's self-sacrifice for his friends places all followers under the same sign, the Logos of the Cross."⁷⁵ Divine logic here replaces human logic, for who could imagine that a complete self-emptying, a *kenosis*, would be the way chosen to effect new life? Not only does Christ, true

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 93, a. 8, ad 3.

⁷¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 3, a. 8, resp.

⁷² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 4, resp.

⁷³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 424. In *Love Alone*, Balthasar says, "Christian action means being taken through grace into God's action, and loving with God, the sole condition in which a (Christian) knowledge of God is possible, for 'whoever does not love, does not know God, for God is love,'" 94. It is interesting to note that outside of the Incarnate Word, who is the manifestation of God's love, Balthasar sees man as incomprehensible to himself. This is an idea taken up by John Paul II in his first encyclical *The Redeemer of Man*, perhaps precisely because much of contemporary thought sees man as an "undeciphered sign," to use Martin Heidegger's expression.

⁷⁴ Mark Jordan, "The Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1989): 407. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 15.

⁷⁵ Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 69.

God and true man, empty himself but his followers must do likewise if they are to be filled with newness of mind and of senses, and of authentic life. Our senses and our mind must die with Christ if we are to rise with him and have eternal life.

The recreated image that is man, that image effected through Christ's redemptive activity, is however yet to be transformed into "the likeness of glory," in so far as man will know and love God perfectly.⁷⁶ While man is said to be made in the image of God because of his rational nature and as such by natural reason can know God and also love him, we have seen how sin and what may be termed disordered loves obscure man's vision, for which reason man was in need of redemption. Through the gift of faith received in our initiation into Christ, we know God in part, as in a mirror,⁷⁷ but when we see and know God face to face, we are fully transformed "into [God's] very image from glory to glory."⁷⁸ Aquinas comments on our knowledge of God which transforms us by saying, "For since all knowledge involves the knower's being assimilated to the thing known, it is necessary that those who see be in some way transformed into God. If they see perfectly, they are perfectly transformed, as the blessed in heaven by the union of enjoyment: 'When he appears we shall be like him' (1 Jn. 3:2); but if we see imperfectly, then we are transformed imperfectly, as here by faith: 'Now we see in a mirror dimly' (1 Cor. 13:12)."⁷⁹

4. Conclusion: The *Parousia*

When the risen Christ appears and the dead resurrect and are judged, the universe will also be transformed so as to be made a fitting place for those who have been made like God, divinized by having put on the mind of Christ and lived his life. The whole world will be renewed shining forth with increased brightness.⁸⁰ All things will then be made subject to Christ, and Christ himself as man will be subject to God his Father who subjected all things to him, and God will then be all in all.⁸¹ According to Aquinas, the end of the resurrection from the dead, made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ, lies in the happiness of the rational creature who will be further led to the contemplation of God; men will then rest entirely in God for God alone is their

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 4, resp.

⁷⁷ See 1 Cor. 13:12.

⁷⁸ See 2 Cor. 3:18. Note the Latin of this text which appears in Aquinas's Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, OP. HTML-edited by Joseph Kenny OP., no. 115 <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/SS2Cor.htm>: "Et ideo dicit in eadem imaginem, id est sicut videmus, transformamur, inquam, a claritate in claritatem." The image whose exemplar is the Word participates in the Word's beauty, in his light.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 114.

⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl. q. 91, a. 3, s.c.

⁸¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, OP. HTML-edited by Joseph Kenny, OP., no. 950, <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm>. See 1 Cor. 15:20-28.

beatitude.⁸² And as Aquinas says, “. . . that God may be everything in everyone, because then it will be clear that whatever good we have is from God.”⁸³

In the words of Aquinas, the renewal of the world and its creatures has as its end that “God may become visible to man by signs so manifest as to be perceived as it were by his senses.”⁸⁴ The glory or light of God in bodies will be seen, especially in the body of Christ and in the glorified bodies. God will be perceived in things that are seen with our bodily eyes, and our intellect will see God in his creatures that are seen corporeally.⁸⁵ We shall then see God present in all things, his light and his beauty participated in by all. Aquinas quotes from Augustine who indicates this manner of seeing God corporeally: “It is very credible that we shall so see the mundane bodies of the new heaven and the new earth, as to see most clearly God everywhere present, governing all corporeal things, not as we now see the invisible things of God as understood by those that are made, but as when we see men . . . we do not believe but see that they live.”⁸⁶ Our vision will then be clear so as to capture God’s presence everywhere, delighting in the magnificence of his goodness and beauty as it will be displayed in the entirety of creation finally transformed.

Bibliography

- Aertsen, See Jan. *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present. A Short History*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1966.
- Dewan, Lawrence. *St. Thomas and Form as Something Divine in Things, The Aquinas Lecture*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007
- Doherty, Kevin F. “St. Thomas and the Pseudo-Dionysian Symbol of Light”. *The New Scholasticism* 34, no. 2 (1960): 170-89.
- John Paul II. *Sign of Contradiction*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1979.
- John Paul II. *Novo Millenio Ineunte*. Boston: Pauline Editions, 2001.
- Mark Jordan. “The Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas”. *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1989): 407.
- Maurer, Armand A. *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*. Houston, Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1983.
- Pieper, Josef. *Living the Truth*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.
- Ramos, Alice M. “Foundations for a Christian Anthropology”. *Anthropotes*, 5, n. 2 (December 1989): 241-242.
- Ramos, Alice M. “The Divine Ideas and the Intelligibility of Creation : A Way Toward Universal Signification in Aquinas”. *Doctor communis* 44, no. 3 (September-December 1991): 250.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supp. q. 91, a. 3, resp.

⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supp., q. 92, a. 2, resp.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

- Ramos, Alice M. *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012.
- Saward, John. *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty: Art, Sanctity, and the Truth of Catholicism*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997.
- Sevier, Christopher Scott. *Aquinas on Beauty*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015.
- Thomas Aquinas. *In De divinis nominibus*. Translated by Vernon J. Bourke, in *The Pocket Aquinas*, edited by Vernon J. Bourke. New York: Washington Square Press, 1960.
- Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. Translated by F. R. Larcher, OP. Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1969.
- Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians*. Translated by Fabian Larcher, OP. Html-edited by Joseph Kenny, OP. <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/>
- Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on the Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Translated by Fabian Larcher, OP. Html-edited by Joseph Kenny OP. <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/>
- Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*. Translated by Fabian Larcher, OP. Html-edited by Joseph Kenny OP. <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/>
- Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles*. Translated by Fabian Larcher, OP. Html-edited by Joseph Kenny OP. <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/>
- Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Translated by Fabian Larcher, OP. Html-edited by Joseph Kenny OP
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Love Alone*. Translated by Alexander Dru. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. Volume I: Seeing the Form. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco-New York: Ignatius Press-Crossroad, 1982.

La autora

Alice Ramos es catedrática de Filosofía en la Universidad de St. John's en Queens, Nueva York, Estados Unidos, donde imparte clases desde 1987. Es doctora en Filosofía por la Universidad de Navarra (España, 1986) y doctora en Literatura Francesa por la Universidad de Nueva York (EEUU, 1979). ramosa@stjohns.edu