

## St. Thomas' Use of the Pauline Corpus in Explaining the Mysteries of Christ's Public Life

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*Abstract:* Along with the gospels and the early Church Fathers, the theology of St. Paul is an important resource for the Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his questions on the mysteries of Christ's public life in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas utilizes a wide variety of Pauline passages to explain Christ's manner of life, temptation, teaching, and miracles. This essay examines the location and function of these passages and argues that the influence of St. Paul is more prominent in the earlier questions than the later ones. Aquinas finds numerous passages in Romans to be useful in discussing the manner of Christ's life and His teaching, and he draws on both letters to the Corinthians when discussing each of the four dimensions of Christ's public life. In the questions on Christ's miracles, however, St. Paul's theology is much less influential.

*Keywords:* Thomas Aquinas, Pauline Epistles, Christology, Christ's public life

*Resumen:* Junto con los Evangelios y los primeros Padres de la Iglesia, la teología de San Pablo es un recurso importante para la cristología de Santo Tomás de Aquino. En sus preguntas sobre los misterios de la vida pública de Cristo en la *Tertia Pars* de la *Summa theologiae*, el Aquinate utiliza una amplia variedad de pasajes paulinos para explicar el modo de vida, la tentación, la enseñanza y los milagros de Cristo. Este ensayo examina la ubicación y la función de estos pasajes y argumenta que la influencia de san Pablo es más prominente en las cuestiones anteriores que en las posteriores. El Aquinate encuentra numerosos pasajes de Romanos útiles para discutir la forma de vida de Cristo y su enseñanza, y se basa en las dos cartas a los Corintios para discutir cada una de las cuatro dimensiones de la vida pública de Cristo. Sin embargo, en las cuestiones sobre los milagros de Cristo, la teología de San Pablo es mucho menos influyente.

*Palabras clave:* Tomás de Aquino, epístolas paulinas, cristología, vida pública de Cristo

Recibido: 11/06/21

Aprobado: 07/09/21

The writings of St. Paul are vital for Aquinas' understanding of the mysteries of Christ's public life in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae* (III, qq. 40-45). Obviously, the accounts of Christ's life in the gospels are extremely important, as well, as are the numerous patristic and medieval sources that shape Aquinas' Christology. Given, however, the fact that the influence of St. Paul's writings on the theology of Thomas Aquinas has recently merited some consideration<sup>1</sup>, and the fact that this recent attention has been paid principally –and with justification– to Aquinas' commentaries on the Pauline epistles<sup>2</sup>, it seems appropriate to explore the influence of Saint Paul's theology on Aquinas' Christology.

Since Jean-Pierre Torrell wrote *Le Christ en ses mysteres: la vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, more attention has been paid to qq. 27-59 of the *Tertia Pars*<sup>3</sup>. It is not as though these questions or the concept of *mysteria* were neglected before that<sup>4</sup>, but Torrell rightly drew attention to the theologi-

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Levering, M. (2014). *Paul in the Summa Theologiae*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press; Harkins, F. (2013). *Docuit Excellentissimae Divinitatis Mystera: St. Paul in Thomas Aquinas*. In S. R. Cartwright (Ed.), *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages* (pp. 235-263). Leiden, Boston: Brill.

<sup>2</sup> See Domanyi, T. (1979). *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Thomas von Aquin: Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung seiner Auslegungsmethoden*. Bern: Lang; Guggenheim, A. (2004). *Jésus Christ, grand prêtre de l'ancienne et de la nouvelle Alliance. Étude du Commentaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin sur l'Épître aux Hébreux*. Paris: Parole et Silence; Levering, M. & Dauphinais, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press; Mirosław, M. (2015). Virtue Epistemology and Aquinas's Biblical Commentary to the *Corpus Paulinum*. In P. Roszak & J. Vijgen (Eds.), *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas. Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives* (pp. 435-456). Turnhout: Brepols.

<sup>3</sup> See Torrell, J.-P. (1999). *Le Christ en ses mysteres: la vie et l'oeuvre de Jésus selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*. Paris: Desclée; Gondreau, P. (2016). Life of Christ. In P. McCosker & D. Turner (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Summa Theologiae* (pp. 240-254). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Horst, U. (2005). Die Geburt Christi als *manifestatio divinitatis* nach Thomas von Aquin Zur Interpretation von *Summa Theologiae* III 36. *Archa Verbi*, 2, 105-127.

<sup>4</sup> See Biffi, I. (1976). I misteri della vita di Cristo nei commenti biblici di San Tommaso d'Aquino. *Divus Thomas*, 53, 217-254; Biffi, I. (1994). *I misteri di Cristo in Tommaso d'Aquino. La costruzione della Teologia*, vol. 1. Milan: Jaca Book; Henry, A. M. (1958). The Life of Jesus. In *Theology Library, Vol. 5: The Historical and Mystical Christ* (pp. 118-144). Chicago: Fides Publishers Association; Lohaus, G. (1985). *Die Geheimnisse des Lebens Jesu in der Summa Theologiae des heiligen Thomas von Aquin*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder; Scheffczyk, L. (1985). Die Stellung des Thomas von Aquin in der Entwicklung der Lehre von den *Mysteria vitae Christi*. In M. Gerwing & G. Ruppert (Eds.), *Renovatio et Reformatio. Wider das Bild vom 'finsternen Mittelalter'* (pp. 44-70). Münster: Aschendorff.

cal richness of these questions and commented on each question in great detail. Elsewhere, Torrell contends that these questions constitute “a scriptural and patristic return to sources that would astonish those who do not wish to see in Thomas anything other than an impenitent Aristotelian” (2005, pp. 261-262)<sup>5</sup>. Although the questions on the mysteries of Christ’s public life constitute only a small portion of Aquinas’ Christology, they contain a variety of intriguing questions situated just before Aquinas discusses Christ’s death and resurrection. Other than the gospels and Church Fathers, the theology of St. Paul is an important source for Aquinas, especially in qq. 40-42. These questions contain over 30 direct quotations of the Pauline epistles and several allusions or oblique references; the majority of these references occur in the first three questions, but other references are scattered throughout qq. 43-45<sup>6</sup>.

If questions 27-39 of the *Tertia Pars* were about Christ’s coming into the world (*ingressus*), questions 40-45 are about the development (*progressus*) of His public life. Aquinas treats Christ’s departure from the world (*exitus*) in qq. 46-52 and His exaltation (*exaltatio*) in qq. 53-59. According to Aquinas’ outline of the mysteries of Christ’s public life at the beginning of question 40 of the *Tertia Pars*, there are four aspects to His public life: 1) His manner of life (q. 40); 2) His temptation (q. 41); His teaching (q. 42); and His miracles (qq. 43-45)<sup>7</sup>.

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For an overview of Biffi’s work and the literature since then, see Mateo-Seco, L. y Brugarolas, M. (2014). Teología, economía e historia. La renovada lectura de Santo Tomás. *Annales theologici*, 28, 167-196.

<sup>5</sup> See also the discussion of these questions in Gondreau, P. (2005). The Humanity of Christ, the Incarnate Word. In R. Van Nieuwenhove & J. Wawrykow (Eds.), *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (pp. 252-276). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

<sup>6</sup> On the role of the mysteries of Christ’s life in the structure of the *Tertia Pars*, see Boyle, J. (1996). The Twofold Division of St. Thomas’s Christology in the *Tertia pars*. *The Thomist*, 60, 439-447; O’Meara, T. (1988). Grace as a Theological Structure in the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 55, 130-153; Patfoort, A. (1998). *La Somme de saint Thomas et la logique du dessein de Dieu* (pp. 217, 237-239). Saint-Maur: Parole et Silence; Torrell, J.-P. (2005). *Aquinas’s Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception* (pp. 56-58). Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press; Torrell, J.-P. (2012). Life and Work. In B. Davies (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas* (pp. 1-20). Oxford: Oxford University Press; Wawrykow, J. (2005). Hypostatic Union. In R. Van Nieuwenhove & J. Wawrykow (Eds.), *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (pp. 222-251). Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press.

<sup>7</sup> “Consequenter, post ea quae pertinent ad ingressum Christi in mundum vel ad eius principium, considerandum restat de his quae pertinent ad progressum ipsius. Et primo, considerandum est de modo conversationis ipsius; secundo, de tentatione eius; tertio, de doctrina; quarto, de miraculis” (III, q. 40). Translations are, with some altera-

### Christ's Manner of Life

Question forty, in which Aquinas discusses Christ's manner of life (*modo conversationis*), contains eight passages from the Pauline letters. Jean-Pierre Torrell has rightly noted that *conversatio* is a difficult word to translate and that in Scripture it has a wide semantic range (1999, p. 211). It can signify presence, intimacy, and living in community, among other things. The particular concern of article one regarding Christ's *conversatio* is whether it was fitting for Christ to associate with other humans in His earthly life. If Christ had lived apart from other humans, it seems that He would have manifested more persuasively His divinity and the superiority of a uniform, contemplative life (*ST III, q. 40, a. 1, obj. 1-3*).

The first two of Aquinas' citations of Paul in this section occur in the *respondeo*. Aquinas asserts that Christ came into the world for three reasons, namely, to manifest the truth, to save humanity from sin, and to allow humanity to have access to God. In John 18:37, Christ Himself attests to the first of these purposes, when He says to Pontius Pilate, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth". Citing Paul, however, Aquinas says:

Secondly, He came in order to free men from sin; according to 1 Tim. 1:15: "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners". And hence, as Chrysostom says, "although Christ might, while staying in the same place, have drawn all men to Himself, to hear His preaching, yet He did not do so; thus giving us the example to go about and seek those who perish, like the shepherd in his search of the lost sheep, and the physician in his attendance on the sick".

Thirdly, He came that by Him "we might have access to God", as it is written [in Rom. 5:2]. And thus it was fitting that He should give men confidence in approaching Him by associating familiarly with them. Wherefore it is written [in Mt. 9:10]: "It came to pass as He was sitting... in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Jesus and His disciples". On which Jerome comments as follows: "They had seen the publican who had been converted from a sinful to a

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tions, from (1947) *Summa Theologica*. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger.

better life: and consequently they did not despair of their own salvation". (ST III, q. 40, a. 1, resp.)<sup>8</sup>

Paul's statement in 1 Timothy that Christ came to save sinners is used by Aquinas elsewhere to address questions about whether God would have become incarnate if humans had not sinned and whether Christ's birth should have been made known to all (ST III, q. 1, a. 3, *sed contra*; III, q. 36, a. 1, obj. 2). In this passage, however, he uses it to argue, with the supporting interpretation of John Chrysostom, that Christ's dwelling among other humans is an example for His followers to seek out those who are lost spiritually.

The passage from Romans 5 counters two of the objections. The last two objections contend that Christ should have led a solitary life on account of the fact that a life that always manifested the superiority of the contemplative life would be one of solitude. Aquinas interprets Paul's statement that through Christ "we have access through faith into this grace in which we stand" to mean that it was fitting for Christ to live among the people He intended to save. As Aquinas says in the reply to the second objection:

[T]he contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, is more perfect than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ. (ST III, q. 40, a. 1, ad 2)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Secundo, venit ad hoc ut homines a peccato liberaret, secundum illud I Tim. I, Christus Iesus venit in hunc mundum peccatores salvos facere. Et ideo, ut Chrysostomus dicit, licet in eodem loco manendo posset Christus omnes ad se attrahere, ut eius praedicationem audirent, non tamen hoc fecit, praebens nobis exemplum ut perambulemus et requiramus pereuntes, sicut pastor ovem perditam, et medicus accedit ad infirmum. Tertio, venit ut per ipsum habeamus accessum ad Deum, ut dicitur Rom. V. Et ita, familiariter cum hominibus conversando, conveniens fuit ut hominibus fiduciam daret ad se accedendi. Unde dicitur Matth. IX, factum est, discumbente eo in domo, ecce, multi publicani et peccatores venientes discumbebant cum Iesu et discipulis eius. Quod exponens Hieronymus dicit, viderant publicanum, a peccatis ad meliora conversum, locum invenisse poenitentiae, et ob id etiam ipsi non desperant salutem.

<sup>9</sup> Ad secundum dicendum quod, sicut in secunda parte dictum est, vita contemplativa simpliciter est melior quam activa quae occupatur circa corporales actus, sed vita activa secundum quam aliquis praedicando et docendo contemplata aliis tradit, est per-

If Christ had lived a purely contemplative life without any interaction with those He intended to save, it would have been impossible for Him to communicate the “fruits of his contemplation” to humanity. Christ’s life as preacher is thus more perfect than the contemplative life “that stops at contemplation”<sup>10</sup>.

Two more quotations of Saint Paul occur in article two, one in the *respondeo* and one in the reply to the first objection. The question in article two asks whether it would have been fitting for Christ to live an austere life rather than one in which he was “eating and drinking” (Mt. 11:19). The objections argue that an austere life would have been appropriate for Christ. Because John the Baptist set an example of austerity meant to be imitated, or at least admired (*ST* III, q. 40, a. 2, obj. 1), it seems that Christ should have lived such a life. Also, an austere life, which Christ pursued during His fasting in the desert at the outset of His preaching ministry, would have encouraged continence in Christ’s interlocutors. Instead, as Aquinas notes in the *sed contra*, quoting Mt. 11:19, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking”. He goes on:

Now it is most fitting that he who associates with others should conform to their manner of living; according to the words of the Apostle (1 Cor. 9): “I became all things to all men”. And therefore it was most fitting that Christ should conform to others in the matter of eating and drinking. Hence Augustine says (*Contra Faust.* xvi) that “John is described as ‘neither eating nor drinking’, because he did not take the same food as the Jews. Therefore, unless our Lord had taken it, it would not be said of Him, in contrast, ‘eating and drinking’”. (*ST* III, q. 40, a. 2, resp.)<sup>11</sup>

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fector quam vita quae solum contemplatur, quia talis vita praesupponit abundantiam contemplationis. Et ideo Christus talem vitam elegit.

<sup>10</sup> On the importance of Christ as a preacher in Aquinas, see Horst, U. (1998). Christ, *Exemplar Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, According to Saint Thomas Aquinas. In K. Emery & J. Wawrykow (Eds.), *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans* (pp. 256-270). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. On the role of contemplation in Aquinas’ exegesis, see Roszak, P. (2016). Exegesis and Contemplation. The Literal and Spiritual Sense of Scripture in Aquinas’ Biblical Commentaries. *Espíritu*, LXV, 481-504.

<sup>11</sup> Qui autem cum aliquibus conversatur, convenientissimum est ut se eis in conversatione conformet, secundum illud apostoli, I Cor. IX, omnibus omnia factus sum. Et ideo convenientissimum fuit ut Christus in cibo et potu communiter se sicut alii haberet. Unde Augustinus dicit, contra Faustum, quod Ioannes dictus est non manducans neque bibens, quia illo victu quo Iudaei utebantur, non utebatur. Hoc ergo dominus nisi uteretur, non in eius comparatione manducans bibensque diceretur.

Aquinas is interested here primarily in Paul's becoming "all things to all men". Since Rom. 14:17, quoted in the reply to the first objection, says, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink", there can be nothing wrong intrinsically with eating and drinking, even if abstinence is also praiseworthy (*ST III*, q. 40, a. 2, ad 1).

Abstinence from food and drink is conducive for developing self-control, but because Christ was perfect, He had no need to develop self-control<sup>12</sup>. The purpose of His fasting in the desert was to offer an example when He returned to society (*ST III*, q. 40, a. 2, ad 3). Withdrawing into the desert also offered Christ an opportunity for contemplative prayer, but as Aquinas noted in article 1, it is beneficial for those whom Christ saved to receive the fruits of that contemplation by means of His preaching. In his reply to the objection in this article that Christ should not have proceeded from a more austere form of life to what seems to have been a laxer form of life, Aquinas says that this way of proceeding exemplifies the importance of sharing the fruits of contemplation with others (*ST III*, q. 40, a. 2, ad 3). By living among those whom He was sent to save, Christ became "all things to all men" in His own way.

Article three, which asks whether Christ should have led a life of poverty, also has two quotations from the Pauline letters, but one of them is found in an objection. That argument cites 1 Tim. 6:17: "Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded". Aquinas cites this passage in the third objection to make the argument that, because humility is especially praiseworthy among the rich, Christ Himself should have been rich so as to exemplify that virtue. The second objection in this article hearkens back to article two, and Aquinas' reply includes a Pauline text to refute it. The objection notes that Christ's manner of living included "eating and drinking" as others did. Since article two had established the appropriateness of such a manner of life, so that Christ could become "all things to all men", it seems reasonable to suppose that Christ should have lived as the vast the majority of others did and not in extreme poverty (*ST III*, q. 40, a. 3, obj. 3). Aquinas argues, however, that in order for Christ to maintain His preaching ministry, it was appropriate for Him to be poor. Preachers must be "wholly free from care of worldly matters" (*ST III*, q. 40, a. 3, resp.). Aquinas also cites in response 2 Cor. 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich he became poor, for your sakes; that through his poverty you might be rich". This Pauline verse clearly establishes that Christ's

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<sup>12</sup> On the importance of temperance in Aquinas' theology, Levering, M. (2019). *Aquinas's Eschatological Ethics and the Virtue of Temperance*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

voluntary poverty was for the sake of those whom He came to save. Aquinas draws the analogy between Christ's death and poverty on the one hand and the life and richness He bestowed on the other: "[J]ust as He took upon Himself the death of the body in order to bestow spiritual life on us, so did He bear bodily poverty, in order to enrich us spiritually" (ST III, q. 40, a. 3, resp)<sup>13</sup>.

Aquinas cites St. Paul two more times in article four, which is on whether Christ followed the Mosaic Law. The objections to this article argue that Christ violated the Law and encouraged His disciples to do so, well. They cite as instances from the gospels Christ's healing on the Sabbath, telling the man He healed to take up his bed, excusing His disciples from picking grain or corn on the Sabbath, and denying that what one eats makes one unclean (ST III, q. 40, a. 4, obj. 1-3).

In response, Aquinas offers two passages from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. The first is Gal. 5:3, where St. Paul contends that anyone who is circumcised is bound to observe the whole Law. Christ freely chose to observe the whole Law to show "His approval of the Old Law [to] perfect it and bring it to an end in His own self [and] to deprive the Jews of an excuse for slandering Him" (ST III, q. 40, a. 4, resp.)<sup>14</sup>. A final goal that Christ had was "to deliver men from subjection to the Law" and Aquinas quotes Gal. 4:4-5 to support this position. In that passage, St. Paul asserted that "when the fulness of time had come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons". One aspect of Christ's redemptive act was to fulfill the Law by observing it. Those words and actions of Christ's that seem to have shown disregard for the Law were in reality divine works such as miracles, human works that were necessary to save or preserve life, or human works that pertained to the worship of God (ST III, q. 40, a. 4, ad 1 and ad 3)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Secundo quia, sicut mortem corporalem assumpsit ut nobis vitam largiretur spiritualem, ita corporalem paupertatem sustinuit ut nobis spirituales divitias largiretur, secundum.

<sup>14</sup> Voluit autem Christus secundum legem conversari, primo quidem, ut legem veterem comprobaret. Secundo, ut eam observando in seipso consummaret et terminaret, ostendens quod ad ipsum erat ordinata. Tertio, ut Iudaeis occasionem calumniandi subtraheret.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Christ's fulfillment of the Law according to Aquinas, see Levering, M. (2002). *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press; Vijgen, J. (2021). Saint Thomas Aquinas's Biblical Exegesis: Hebrews 2:9 as a Case Study. *Nova et Vetera*, 19(1), 269-298.



### Christ's Temptation

In addition to quoting St. Paul in his question about Christ's manner of life, Aquinas also uses Pauline passages when discussing Christ's temptation. The first article discusses whether it was fitting for Christ to be tempted. The objections contend that it was unfitting for Christ to be tempted because His power was known to the demons, because He was supposed to destroy the works of the devil and not suffer them, and because He had not been tempted by the flesh or by the world (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 1, obj. 1-3). In response, Aquinas argues that Christ had four reasons for wishing to be tempted by the devil. The first three reasons are that Christ wished to strengthen others when they experienced temptation, to disabuse especially more holy people of the notion that some people do not experience temptation or are in danger of succumbing to temptation, and to teach others how to overcome the temptations of the devil. The fourth reason is "to fill us with confidence in His mercy" (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 1, resp.)<sup>16</sup>.

Hebrews 4:15 offers the reason for why God's adoptive children can have confidence in His mercy: "We have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things as we are, without sin". Christ has compassion on His adopted children as one who knows what it is like to be tempted. Aquinas also cites Heb. 4:15 in the reply to the third objection, focusing on the part of the verse that highlights Christ's temptation. In that reply Aquinas explains why Christ wanted to be tempted by the devil but was not tempted by the flesh or the world. He says that:

Temptation which comes from an enemy can be without sin: because it comes about by merely outward suggestion. But temptation which comes from the flesh cannot be without sin, because such a temptation is caused by pleasure and concupiscence... And hence Christ wished to be tempted by an enemy, but not by the flesh. (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 1, ad 3)<sup>17</sup>

Because Christ did not have concupiscence, He could not be tempted by the flesh, but He could submit Himself to the devil's temptations in order to

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<sup>16</sup> Quarto, ut nobis fiduciam de sua misericordia largiretur.

<sup>17</sup> Tentatio autem quae est ab hoste, potest esse sine peccato, quia fit per solam exteriorem suggestionem. Tentatio autem quae est a carne, non potest esse sine peccato, quia haec tentatio fit per delectationem et concupiscentiam [...] Et ideo Christus tentari voluit ab hoste, sed non a carne.

encourage His adopted children to overcome temptations themselves and to trust in His mercy.

Article two discusses whether Christ should have been tempted in the desert, and Aquinas cites two more Pauline passages in its reply to the first objection. The first objection argues that Christ should have been tempted openly before those who were intended to benefit from His example (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 2, obj. 1.). In his reply, Aquinas weaves together Heb. 12:2, Rom. 10:17, and John 20:29 as scriptural authorities manifesting how Christ is to be understood as an example:

Christ is set as an example to all through faith, according to Heb. 12:2: "Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith". Now faith, as it is written (Rom. 10:17), "comes by hearing", but not by seeing: nay, it is even said (John 20:29): "Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed". And therefore, in order that Christ's temptation might be an example to us, it behooved that men should not see it, and it was enough that they should hear it related. (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 2, ad 1)<sup>18</sup>

In the *respondeo* of the article, Aquinas had argued that Christ went into the desert so that his isolated condition might provoke the devil into attacking him: "And so it was that Christ went out into the desert, as to a field of battle, to be tempted there by the devil" (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 2, resp.)<sup>19</sup>. Citing Ambrose, Aquinas also teaches that Christ's venturing into the desert was an attempt to represent symbolically humanity's fallen condition. Adam had been exiled from paradise "into the desert", and so it was fitting for Christ to deliver humanity from its exile by Himself journeying into the desert. These actions were most fittingly performed alone, precisely so that humanity might acquire the faith that is necessary for salvation; and this faith, according to Saint Paul, "comes by hearing".

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<sup>18</sup> Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Christus proponitur omnibus in exemplum per fidem, secundum illud Heb. XII, aspicientes in auctorem fidei et consummatorem, Iesum. Fides autem, ut dicitur Rom. X, est ex auditu, non autem ex visu, quinimmo dicitur, Ioan. XX, beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt. Et ideo, ad hoc quod tentatio Christi esset nobis in exemplum, non oportet quod ab hominibus videretur, sed sufficiens fuit quod hominibus narraretur.

<sup>19</sup> "Et inde est quod Christus in desertum exivit, quasi ad campum certaminis, ut ibi a Diabolo tentaretur". Torrell has rightly called attention to the importance of spiritual combat here (1999, pp. 229-232).

The third article discusses whether it was fitting for Christ to submit to temptation after having fasted for forty days and forty nights. Earlier, Aquinas argued that it was appropriate for Christ to dwell among those He was to save “eating and drinking” (Mt. 11:19), and thus it seems very austere to abstain from food and drink for such a long period of time and then subsequently to submit oneself to temptation when in such a physically weak condition (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 3, obj. 1). Aquinas points out, however, that it is not food and drink that will strengthen people to endure temptation but rather fasting. This insight derives from a long passage in 2 Cor. 6, in which St. Paul says:

But in all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulation, in necessity, in distress, in stripes, in prisons, in seditions, in labors, in watching, in fasting, in chastity, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Spirit, in charity unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God, by the armor of justice on the right hand and on the left.

Although St. Paul lists many of trials that Christians may have to endure, Aquinas links for the purposes of the present argument fasting and the armor of justice. Christ’s fasting in the desert gives His followers an example to emulate. Before enduring temptation, it is important to fast in order to prepare spiritually for combat with the devil or “his members” (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 3, resp.)<sup>20</sup>.

Highlighting again the importance of preaching in the reply to the first objection, Aquinas repeats his contention in *III*, q. 40, a. 2 that it was fitting for Christ not to maintain “an extreme form of life” (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 3, ad 1)<sup>21</sup>. In the context of that article, however, the form of life was connected directly to eating and drinking. Some form of austerity, nevertheless, was suitable, not because Christ experienced unruly concupiscible passions, but rather because “no one should take up the office of preacher unless he be already cleansed and perfect in virtue” (*ST III*, q. 41, a. 3, ad 1)<sup>22</sup>. Christ fasted after His baptism then “in order to teach us the need of taming the flesh before

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<sup>20</sup> On temptation by the devil’s members, see *ST III*, q. 41, a. 2, resp.

<sup>21</sup> Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Christum non decuit conversatio austerioris vitae, ut se communem exhiberet illis quibus praedicavit.

<sup>22</sup> Nullus autem debet assumere praedicationis officium, nisi prius fuerit purgatus et in virtute perfectus.

passing on to the office of preaching"<sup>23</sup>. Aquinas further justifies this example by quoting 1 Cor. 9:27, where Saint Paul says, "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway". Both Christ and Saint Paul demonstrate the need to fast before preaching, and these two examples justify, for Aquinas, why Christ prepared for His temptation by the devil in just such a way.

### Christ's Teaching

The greatest number of Pauline citations in these questions occurs in question forty-two, in which Aquinas examines Christ's teaching (*doctrina*). Article one asks whether Christ should have preached to the Jews alone or to the gentiles, also. Of the five Pauline citations in this article, four derive from Romans. One objection cites Rom. 15:20, where Saint Paul claims, "I have so preached this gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation" (*ST III*, q. 42, a. 1, obj. 2). The objection uses this quotation to argue that if Saint Paul preached to people who had not heard of Christ, Christ Himself could have demonstrated the superiority of His teaching by preaching to the gentiles rather than to the Jews.

In the *respondeo*, however, Aquinas notes that a few verses earlier in Romans 15, St. Paul calls Christ the "minister of the circumcision" (*ministerium circumcisionis*), which corresponds to Christ's remark quoted in the *sed contra* that He was sent to lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24). To this note about Christ's mission, Aquinas also adds the observation of St. Paul in Rom. 10:14-15, "How then shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?" Returning to Romans 15, one can observe that the reason Christ was sent to the Jews was "to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15:8).

That is not to say that Christ neglected the Gentiles altogether, but rather He attended to them by sending His apostles. When Aquinas cites Rom. 13:1, which says every soul should be "subject to higher powers; for there is no power but from God, and those that are, are ordained of God" he does so to argue that Christ's teaching would be more readily understood by the

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<sup>23</sup> Et ideo Christus statim post Baptismum austeritatem vitae assumpsit, ut doceret post carnem edomitam oportere alios ad praedicationis officium transire.

monotheistic Jews who were “closer to God” (*qui Deo erant propinquiores*) and who would then communicate this teaching to the gentiles.

The final Pauline passage in article one is Phil. 2:8-11:

He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also has exalted him, and has given him a name which is above all names; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.

Aquinas uses this passage to argue that “it was through the triumph of the cross that Christ merited power and lordship over the Gentiles” (*ST III, q. 42, a. 1, resp.*)<sup>24</sup>. For this reason, it was fitting for Christ to preach to the gentiles through the ministry of His apostles after His crucifixion and resurrection, when He commanded them to teach and baptize all nations (Mt. 28:19).

The second article asks whether Christ should have preached to the Jews without offending them, and this article contains only one Pauline citation. In 1 Tim. 5:1, St. Paul exhorts Timothy not to rebuke his elders. The third objection thus argues that the elders of the Jewish people, the priests and leaders, should not have been rebuked. To this objection Aquinas responds by saying that this exhortation applies only to those elders and leaders who are virtuous: “But if by sinning openly they turn the authority of their years into an instrument of wickedness, they should be rebuked openly and severely” (*ST III, q. 42, a. 2, ad 3*).

Article three inquires as to whether Christ should have taught openly or whether He should have reserved some teachings for His immediate disciples. The second objection uses Saint Paul’s claim in 1 Cor. 2:6 that “we speak wisdom among the perfect” to imply that not all of Christ’s teaching should have been made known to the multitudes. In the *respondeo*, Aquinas says that teaching may be hidden according to the intention of the teacher, insofar as it is not offered to everyone, and according to the manner of teaching (*ST III, q. 42, a. 3, resp.*). On the part of the teacher’s intention, what is to be taught could be hidden either on account of the teacher’s envy or on account of the “vileness” (*inhonestatem*) of the teaching. Christ could not possess envy, of course, nor could His teaching involve anything impure, and

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<sup>24</sup> Quarto, quia Christus per crucis victoriam meruit potestatem et dominium super gentes.

on the latter point Aquinas cites without attribution 1 Thess. 2:3, where Saint Paul contends that “For our exhortation was not of error, nor of uncleanness (*immunditia*), nor in deceit”. Christ’s teaching, therefore, could not be hidden for that reason. It is true that Christ’s manner of teaching was to use parables when instructing crowds of people, but that was only because they were not capable of grasping the depths of the spiritual truths those parables contained. He taught His disciples, however, the deeper meanings of those parables, insofar as they were able to grasp them, so that they in turn could teach others. Another passage from St. Paul confirms the rationale of this method, when Aquinas says that “our Lord expounded the open and unveiled truth of these parables to His disciples, so that they might hand it down to others worthy of it, according to 2 Tim. 2:2: ‘The things which you have heard of me by many witnesses, the same command to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others’” (*ST III*, q. 42, a. 3, resp.)<sup>25</sup>. This passage confirms Aquinas’ contention that even though Christ was sent to preach to the Jews, He also preached to the gentiles through His disciples. The use of parables, then, was not an act of concealment but rather an open communication according to the capacity of Christ’s listeners, regardless of whether they were in the crowds or in the inner circle of His disciples.

The last article of question forty-two addresses whether Christ should have communicated His teaching in writing along with His preaching it orally. Interestingly, there is one Pauline passage in the second objection and two in the reply to that objection. The second objection argues that if the Old Law was written on tablets of stone, as recorded in Exodus, and if, according to Heb. 10:1, the Old Law had only “a shadow of the good things to come”, then it would be appropriate for Christ also to commit His teaching to writing.

Before responding to this argument with two other Pauline passages, Aquinas gives three reasons why Christ did not do so. The first is that, like other great teachers, such as Pythagoras and Socrates, Christ did not write down His teaching, because of the superiority of His manner of teaching (*modo doctrinae*), which was to imprint it on His hearers (Torrell, 1999, pp. 250-254). The second reason is that writing cannot communicate the full depth of Christ’s teaching. And the third reason is that the order (*ordo*) by which Christ taught involved sending His disciples; if He had written something down,

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<sup>25</sup> Harum tamen parabolarum apertam et nudam veritatem dominus discipulis exponerat, per quos deveniret ad alios, qui essent idonei, secundum illud II Tim. II, quae audisti a me per multos testes, haec commenda fidelibus hominibus, qui idonei erunt et alios docere.

that would have reduced the role He wanted His disciples to play in communicating His teaching.

The Pauline passages Aquinas marshals to buttress these arguments and reply more pointedly to the second objection are Rom. 8:2, which claims that Christ's teaching is "the law of the spirit of life", and, more importantly, 2 Cor. 3:3, where St. Paul addresses his readers by saying, "you are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, and written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart". Aquinas takes this passage not to signify that the Corinthians are written with the Spirit of the living God, but rather that Christ's teaching, which instructs them, is ultimately written by the Spirit of the living God. This manner of Christ's teaching contrasts with that of the Old Law, which "was given under the form of sensible signs" (*ST III*, q. 42, a. 4, ad 2) and explains why Christ communicated His teaching only by word of mouth<sup>26</sup>.

### Christ's Miracles

The remaining questions about Christ's public life pertain to Christ's miracles, and here the influence of Saint Paul is much less in these three questions than in the previous three. Question forty-three discusses Christ's miracles in general, question forty-four examines the different kinds of miracles Christ performed, and question forty-five reflects on Christ's transfiguration as a unique miracle<sup>27</sup>. In these three questions there are only eight Pauline quotations scattered throughout and five allusions or unattributed citations.

The only Pauline passages that Aquinas cites in question forty-three are found in the first article, which asks whether Christ should have performed miracles. The objections argue that Christ should not have performed signs because only "an adulterous generation" (Mt. 16:4) seeks signs, as Christ Himself said, because Christ's first coming was in weakness and miracles manifest great power, and because miracles lessen the merit of faith (*ST III*, q. 43, a. 1, obj. 1-3).

Aquinas contends that God does indeed work miracles through chosen humans and that it was important for Christ to work miracles before men. Here is Aquinas' explanation, quoting Gal. 3:5 towards the end:

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this question, see Armitage, J. M. (2008). Why Didn't Jesus Write a Book? Aquinas on the Teaching of Christ. *New Blackfriars*, 89(1021), 337-353.

<sup>27</sup> Torrell notes that the transfiguration, as a manifestation of Christ's glory, should not be considered as one miracle among the rest (1999, pp. 259, 280).

I answer that, God enables man to work miracles for two reasons. First and principally, in confirmation of the doctrine that a man teaches. For since those things which are of faith surpass human reason, they cannot be proved by human arguments, but need to be proved by the argument of Divine power: so that when a man does works that God alone can do, we may believe that what he says is from God. Just as when a man is the bearer of letters sealed with the king's ring, it is to be believed that what they contain expresses the king's will.

Secondly, in order to make known God's presence in a man by the grace of the Holy Spirit: so that when a man does the works of God we may believe that God dwells in him by His grace. Wherefore it is written in Gal. 3:5: "He who gives to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you". (ST III, q. 43, a. 1, resp.)<sup>28</sup>

In question forty-two, Aquinas discussed Christ's teaching, and in this question, Aquinas shows that miracles confirm that teaching. They confirm the teaching because that teaching surpasses human reason, and thus works that only God can perform demonstrate the veracity of that teaching. If God works miracles among those who comprise the churches in Galatia (Gal. 1:2.) He certainly can work them through the ministry of the incarnate Son.

The fact that Christ's first coming was "in weakness" does not preclude the additional fact that He lived "in the power of God" (*ex virtute Dei*), a phrase from 2 Cor. 13:4 that Aquinas uses in the reply to the second objection without attribution. He does cite, however, 1 Cor. 14:22 in response to an objection that miracles lessen the merit of faith. That verse is part of an extended passage on the gift of tongues; St. Paul states that "tongues are for a sign, not to believers, but to unbelievers; but prophecies not to unbelievers, but to believers". Aquinas takes this to mean that miracles "lessen the merit of faith in so far as those are shown to be hard of heart who are unwilling to

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<sup>28</sup> Respondeo dicendum quod divinitus conceditur homini miracula facere, propter duo. Primo quidem, et principaliter, ad confirmandam veritatem quam aliquis docet. Quia enim ea quae sunt fidei humanam rationem excedunt, non possunt per rationes humanas probari, sed oportet quod probentur per argumentum divinae virtutis, ut, dum aliquis facit opera quae solus Deus facere potest, credantur ea quae dicuntur esse a Deo; sicut, cum aliquis defert litteras anulo regis signatas, creditur ex voluntate regis processisse quod in illis continetur. Secundo, ad ostendendum praesentiam Dei in homine per gratiam spiritus sancti, ut dum scilicet homo facit opera Dei, credatur Deus habitare in eo per gratiam. Unde dicitur, Galat. III, qui tribuit vobis spiritum, et operatur virtutes in vobis.



believe what is proved from the Scriptures unless (they are convinced) by miracles" (*ST III*, q. 43, a. 1, ad 3)<sup>29</sup>. It is better, however, he says, that people are converted to the faith by miracles than not at all.

In question forty-four, the principal Pauline passages Aquinas uses are in article one. That article asks whether Christ should have worked miracles in spiritual substances; this formulation of the question is another way of asking whether Christ should have cast out demons from humans who were afflicted by them. 1 Cor. 2:7-8 is an important passage in this article; there St. Paul states, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew; for if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory". This passage is used in the second objection, which argues that Christ should not worked miracles in demons because that would have made known Christ's divine nature, and that knowledge would have prevented the demons in general and the devil in particular from trying to persuade people to crucify Christ.

Another objection contends that working miracles in spiritual substances should imply working miracles in angels, which is not recorded in the Scripture. Another notes that miracles elicit praise from those who witness them, and yet they failed to do so for demons. Yet another objection notes that on at least two occasions, expelling demons led to further suffering or needless loss of life (e.g., leaving a man almost dead and leading to the loss of the swine who cast themselves into the sea) (*ST III*, q. 44, a. 1, obj. 1-2, 4).

To the first objection, Aquinas replies by citing Col. 1:20, which claims that Christ was "to reconcile all things unto Himself, making peace through the blood of his cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven". Aquinas takes this passage to mean that there was no need to work miracles in angels. Christ's miracles were to deliver people from the power of demons; He did not need to perform miracles in angels, although He did allow angels to become visible to humans at important moments, such as at His birth and at His resurrection and ascension (*ST III*, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1).

Regarding the second objection, which had used 1 Cor. 2:7-8 to argue that Christ's miracles would prevent the devil from inducing people to crucify Christ, Aquinas highlights those parts of the passage that mention the hiddenness of God's wisdom: "a wisdom which is hidden [...] which none

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<sup>29</sup> Ad tertium dicendum quod miracula intantum diminuunt meritum fidei, inquantum per hoc ostenditur duritia eorum qui nolunt credere ea quae Scripturis divinis probantur, nisi per miracula.

of the princes of this world knew; for if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory". It is true that if the "princes of this world" had known that Christ was the Son of God, they would not have conspired to crucify Him. Aquinas acknowledges that the devil did suspect that Christ was the Son of God, but he still tried to have Christ killed, not realizing the consequences of Christ's self-sacrificial Passion (*ST III, q. 44, a. 1, ad 2*).

The fourth objection had argued that at least two of Christ's miracles had led to greater suffering or loss of life. Aquinas contends that Christ allows further bodily harm only for the purpose of spiritual healing, such as to instruct in virtue, to show the harmful power of demons, and to demonstrate His power over them (*ST III, q. 44, a. 1, ad 4*). When the man whom Christ healed was left almost dead, Aquinas teaches that he "'became as dead', says Jerome, 'because to those who are healed it is said: You are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God'" (*ST III, q. 44, a. 1, ad 4*)<sup>30</sup>. The reference to one's life being hidden with Christ, derives from Col. 3:3, although Aquinas does not attribute it to that passage. It exemplifies the teaching, nonetheless, that physical death can be a symbol of hidden spiritual life and that Christ would never perform a miracle unless it would procure spiritual healing.

Question forty-five examines Christ's transfiguration as a unique miracle<sup>31</sup>. In this question, Aquinas cites only one passage from St. Paul's writings, and that is in the first article on whether it was fitting for Christ to be transfigured. The objections argue that transfiguration might suggest that Christ's body was not real, that the word "transfiguration" is not appropriate, and that He should have assumed other qualities than clarity (*claritas*) (*ST III, q. 45, a. 1, obj. 1-3*).

Aquinas argues that the purpose of Christ's transfiguration was to encourage His disciples to persevere in suffering as He Himself was to do. Citing Phil. 3:21, Aquinas says that Christ "will reform the body of our lowliness, configured to the body of his clarity (*configuratum corpori claritatis suae*)" (*ST III, q. 45, a. 1, resp.*). Shortly before Christ was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, He told His disciples that He would suffer in Jerusalem and that anyone who would follow Him must take up his cross (Mt. 16:21-28). Thus, Christ revealed His glory to show a glimpse of the kingdom of God, the end of

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<sup>30</sup> Factus est etiam homo sanatus velut mortuus, ut Hieronymus dicit, quia sanatis dicitur, mortui estis, et vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Aquinas' understanding of Christ's transfiguration, see Canty, A. (2011). *Light and Glory: The Transfiguration of Christ in Early Franciscan and Dominican Theology* (pp. 196-244). Washington, D.C. The Catholic University of America Press.

the journey that must pass through suffering and death. This glory will affect the soul through beatific vision, and it will affect the body by the gift (*dos*) of clarity. Even though the path to heaven is difficult, the transfiguration reveals how earthly bodies will be made like Christ's body in the afterlife.

### Conclusion

Of course, such a reading of these questions about the mysteries of Christ's life omits numerous sources of great importance to Aquinas, such as passages from the Old Testament, the gospels, and the Church Fathers. It also omits many of Aquinas' arguments and concerns. There are, nonetheless, advantages in highlighting the importance of St. Paul's writings in these questions. While the gospels are the principal sources for reflecting on Christ's life, the writings of St. Paul, the "vessel of election"<sup>32</sup>, are a chief witness to Christ's divinity and saving work, not only to the churches of the first century but also to the whole Church in every age (Thomas Aquinas, 1953, vol. 1, nn. 1-7, 10-11). Not surprisingly, Aquinas finds numerous passages in the Pauline corpus, as he understood it in his day, to shed light on the mysteries of Christ's life.

It is important to note that in these six relatively brief questions, Aquinas draws from numerous passages from throughout the Pauline corpus. Even though Aquinas omits drawing on such letters as those to Titus and Philemon, he does appropriate a wide variety of passages from the vast majority of the letters. Aquinas, for example, finds numerous passages in Romans to be very useful in discussing the manner of Christ's life and His teaching, and he draws on both letters to the Corinthians when discussing each of the four dimensions of Christ's public life.

Although the theology of St. Paul does not appear in every article, it is indispensable when Aquinas treats certain questions. For example, Aquinas cites St. Paul five times just in article one of question forty-two, on whether Christ should have preached only to the Jews. Passages from the Pauline corpus are also crucial when Aquinas formulates his answers on whether Christ should have observed the Law, whether He should have been tempted by the devil, and whether He should have taught openly. Conversely, when Aquinas discusses Christ's miracles, he finds the writings of St. Paul much less useful. The preponderance of direct citations occurs in III, qq. 40-

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<sup>32</sup> See Aquinas' prologue to his commentary on the Pauline letters in (1953, vol. 1, n. 1).

42, which contain about three-fourths of the direct citations, while in III, qq. 43-45, Aquinas not only interacts with St. Paul much less, but in those questions, Aquinas is also more prone to allude or make oblique references<sup>33</sup>.

Among these questions, Aquinas finds St. Paul's writings to be particularly useful with regard to certain topics. For example, 1 Tim. 1:15 ("Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners") indicated the purpose of the Incarnation. Romans 5:2 indicates that Christ is the one through "whom also we have access through faith into this grace", and Aquinas infers from this passage that Christ desired to live with those whom He came to save. St. Paul's efforts to communicate the Gospel to a variety of audiences is expressed by his statement in 1 Cor. 9:22 that he became "all things" to all people. Aquinas uses this passage to express why Christ was poor but not austere.

Other passages from the Pauline corpus are crucial for the questions that Aquinas raises subsequently. Hebrews 4:15 is an important passage for Aquinas' discussion of Christ's temptation. That passage states that Christ is a high priest who was tempted "in all things" but without sin. Christ knew human weakness and could thus encourage His followers to overcome temptations themselves. St. Paul offers other exhortations to persevere in bodily discipline, including fasting and other hardships. For example, 2 Cor. 6:4ff. and 1 Cor. 9:27 offer such appeals especially to ministers and preachers. On the subject of Christ's teaching, Aquinas finds that several passages from Romans 10-15 are helpful in explaining that although Christ was sent to save all humans, He was sent to the Jews directly and to the Gentiles indirectly through the apostles. Christ's power and lordship over the Gentiles are rooted in the merit of His crucifixion, which is alluded to in Phil. 2:6-7. There are other passages in the Pauline corpus that Aquinas appropriates, but on these topics, the ones mentioned here are the most germane. Thus, even though some passages in the Pauline corpus are more important than others and even though some passages are not mentioned at all, nonetheless the epistles of St. Paul are indispensable for Aquinas' interpretation in this section of the *Tertia Pars* on the principal mysteries of Christ's public life.

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<sup>33</sup> On Aquinas' use of scriptural references in general, see Roszak, P. (2015). The Place and Function of Biblical Citation in Thomas Aquinas's Exegesis. In P. Roszak & J. Vijgen (Eds.), *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas. Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives* (pp. 115-139). Turnhout: Brepols.

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