

“Whoever Eats My Flesh and Drinks My Blood Remains in Me and I in Him” Saint Thomas Aquinas on Sacramental and Spiritual Reception of the Eucharist

Shawn Colberg
Saint John’s University, College of
Saint Benedict, Minnesota, USA
scolberg@csbsju.edu
ORCID: 0000-0003-0438-784X

Abstract: This study expositis Thomas’s teaching on Eucharistic reception, giving particular attention to his treatment of spiritual and sacramental eating as well as the *res et sacramentum* of the sacrament. It traces the theology of spiritual and sacramental reception in the *Summa theologies’* magisterial teaching on the Eucharist, and it argues that, far from acting merely as an esoteric or artificial heuristic intended to manage theological tensions in his doctrine of the Eucharist, Thomas identifies spiritual eating as vital for understanding three significant biblical accounts of receiving the body and blood of Christ. Thomas’s biblical commentaries on the *Gospel of Matthew’s* Last Supper Narrative (26:26-30), the *Gospel of John’s* Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22-71), and Saint Paul’s I Corinthians discussion of worthy reception (I Cor. 11:23-34) observe that the very truth of Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist –perfect in itself– makes sacramental and spiritual eating a decisive and scripturally operative difference for progress in the Christian life.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas, Eucharist, grace, faith, charity

Resumen: Este estudio expone la enseñanza de Tomás sobre la recepción eucarística, prestando especial atención a su tratamiento de la comida espiritual y sacramental, así como al *res et sacramentum* del sacramento. Se rastrea la teología de la recepción espiritual y sacramental en la enseñanza magistral de la *Suma teológica* sobre la Eucaristía, y se argumenta que, lejos de actuar meramente como una heurística esotérica o artificial destinada a gestionar las tensiones teológicas en su doctrina de la Eucaristía, Tomás identifica la comida espiritual como vital para entender tres relatos bíblicos significativos sobre la recepción del cuerpo y la sangre de Cristo. Los comentarios bíblicos de Tomás sobre el relato de la Última Cena del *Evangelio de Mateo* (26:26-30), el discurso del Pan de Vida del *Evangelio de Juan* (Juan 6:22-71) y la disertación de San Pablo en I Corintios sobre la recepción digna (I Cor. 11:23-34) observan que la propia verdad de la presencia de Jesús en la Eucaristía –perfecta en sí misma– hace que el comer sacramental y espiritual sea una diferencia decisiva y bíblicamente operativa para el progreso en la vida cristiana.

Palabras clave: Tomás de Aquino, Eucaristía, gracia, fe, caridad

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The theological contributions of Saint Thomas Aquinas are prodigious, and among them, few have exercised more formative influence on the church's doctrine, prayer, and worship than his teachings on the Eucharist. Scholars rightly cite as seminal influences his magisterial treatment of the sacrament in the *Summa theologiae* (III:73-83) as well as his *Officium de festo Corporis Christi* (c. 1264). Underlying these doctrinal and devotional texts is Thomas's appreciation and mastery of Scripture, including those passages which treat of the Eucharist in its biblical setting. Thomas often uses the genre of his scriptural commentaries to integrate questions of theology, practice, and devotion as natural dimensions of the scriptural text and its import. The following study explores Thomas's teaching on reception of the Eucharist giving particular attention to his treatment of spiritual and sacramental eating. It begins by tracing the theology of spiritual and sacramental reception in the *Summa theologiae's* magisterial teaching. It then argues that, far from acting merely as an esoteric or artificial heuristic intended to manage theological tensions in his doctrine of the Eucharist, Thomas identifies spiritual eating as vital for understanding three significant biblical accounts of receiving the body and blood of Christ. Thomas's biblical commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew's Last Supper Narrative (26:26-30), the Gospel of John's Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22-71), and Saint Paul's I Corinthians discussion of worthy reception (I Cor. 11:23-34) observe that the very truth of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist –perfect in itself– makes sacramental and spiritual eating a decisive and scripturally operative difference for progress in the Christian life. The study concludes that Thomas's language of spiritual eating ultimately illumines the truth of Christ's Eucharistic commands as well as well the vital roles played by faith and love in receiving the fruits of the sacrament.

Spiritual and Sacramental Reception of the Eucharist in the *Summa theologiae*

Saint Thomas's magisterial treatment of the Eucharist in his *Summa theologiae* addresses the sacrament itself, its matter, form, effects, recipients, minister and rite. In 78, "On the Form of this Sacrament", Saint Thomas makes a well-known observation about the unique status of the Eucharist as a sacrament; he writes:

"Whoever Eats My Flesh and Drinks My Blood Remains in Me and I in Him"

It should be said that this sacrament differs from the other sacraments in two ways. First, in comparison, this sacrament is perfected in the consecration of matter, but the other sacraments are perfected in the *use* of consecrated matter. Second, because in the other sacraments the consecration of matter consists only in a certain blessing...but in this sacrament the consecration of matter consists in a miraculous change of substance, which only God is able to perfect. (*ST* III:78, 1 c)¹

Thomas references this distinction no less than nine other times in the treatise on the Eucharist, underscoring its importance for the way in which he wishes to instruct his readers on the nature of the sacrament². The importance of the distinction is that, unlike other sacraments, the Eucharist is perfectly and fully what it signifies following the words of consecration; it is nothing other than the substantial presence of Jesus under the remaining accidents of bread and wine. No further act by the minister or, more importantly, by the recipient is needed to confect its substance or its sign. In that sense, it differs from the matter of other sacraments which instrumentally cause some transformation in the recipient³. The Eucharist is “perfect in itself”.

At the same time, Thomas consistently acknowledges that the effects of the Eucharist depend on the recipient’s proper disposition. The conditions under which the believer approaches the sacrament play a decisive role in the degree to which the Eucharist effects such ends as conferring grace (III: 79, 1), promoting the attainment of glory (III:79, 2), forgiving venial sins (III:79, 3) and preserving recipients from future sins (III:79, 6). Thomas’s teaching on the Eucharist therefore operates with simultaneous affirmations of the sacrament’s perfection in itself and the recipient’s vital role in reception. The former preserves the truth of the transubstantiated sacrament effected by divine power while the latter upholds the free and cooperative role of human beings

¹ Translations of the *Summa theologiae* (*ST*) are mine and taken from Thomae Aquinatis (1941-1945).

² Other places where Thomas describes the sacrament as perfect through the consecration of matter include: III:73, 3 c.; 78, 1 ad.2; 78, 6 ad.3; 79, 1 ad.1; 80, 1 ad.1; 80, 12 c and ad. 2.

³ Walsh (2005, pp. 326-64) introduces Thomas on the sacraments; see also (1993, pp. 321-52) and Yocum (2004, pp. 159-81). For an expansive and authoritative treatment of Aquinas on the Eucharist as part of a larger treatment of high scholastic theology on the Eucharist, see Wawrykow (2015, pp. 218-34).

in the efficacy of the Eucharist⁴. As Thomas treats the notion of the Eucharist's reception, he distinguishes between the sacrament itself and its effects: "Two things are to be considered in receiving this sacrament, namely the sacrament itself and its effects, and we have already spoken of both" (*ST* III:80, 1 c). Simply put, the Eucharist as perfect in itself can be distinguished from its effects in the recipient. As such, two kinds of reception or "eating" (*manducatio*) follow⁵. Eating sacramentally (*sacramentaliter*) refers to reception of the sacrament itself, under the sacramental species, without further salutary effects while eating spiritually (*spiritualiter*) refers to receiving the sacrament in such a way that its diverse and grace-filled effects are also received. Thomas writes:

Therefore, just as the perfect [complete] is contrasted against the imperfect [incomplete], so sacramental eating, through which the sacrament alone is received without its effects, is contrasted against spiritual eating, through which one receives the effects of this sacrament, by which a person is spiritually conjoined to Christ through faith and charity". (*ST* III:80, 1 c)⁶

Already vital is Thomas's contention that the grace or spiritual effects of the Eucharist depend on the recipient's faith and charity. While Christ is substantially and fully present in the sacrament so that sacramental eating is always possible, the recipient's proper disposition gives access to its spiritual effects.

The language of sacramental and spiritual eating trades on the broader distinction between the *res et sacramentum* of the sacraments in general. In the same article Thomas writes: "This same [sacramental v. spiritual] dis-

⁴ For a full discussion of the ways in which human beings participate cooperatively in the sacrament, see Colberg (2020, pp. 121-35).

⁵ Importantly, Thomas establishes the Eucharist as spiritual food in III:73; he writes: "It should be said that the sacraments of the church are ordained to serve persons in the spiritual life. But the spiritual life is conformed to the corporal life because corporeal things are similitudes of spiritual things. [...] And for that reason, just as Baptism, which is spiritual birth, and Confirmation, which is spiritual growth, are necessary for the spiritual life, so the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is spiritual food (*alimentum*), is necessary" (*ST* III:73, 1 c).

⁶ Thomas refers to the Eucharist as the sacrament of charity inasmuch as it moves unites the person to Christ at *ST*, III:73.3, ad. 3 and again at III:78, 3 ad. 6.

inction is used concerning Baptism and the other sacraments. For some receive the sacrament only (*tantum sacramentum*), while others receive the sacrament and the reality of the sacrament (*sacramentum et rem sacramenti*)” (ST III:80, 1 ad. 1). It is possible for someone improperly disposed to receive the *sacramentum tantum* without the reality of the sacrament’s effects; one can imagine someone forcibly baptized who does not assent to the Trinity. Likewise Thomas allows that someone can receive the *res tantum* in those extraordinary circumstances when one earnestly desires the sacrament under the proper disposition but is reasonably prevented from its sacramental reception⁷. He adds the specific distinction between sacramental and spiritual eating to the Eucharist because of its unique status:

There is nevertheless a difference, because the other sacraments are perfected in the use of the matter so that the receiving of the sacrament is the actual perfection of the sacrament, but this sacrament is perfected in the consecration of the matter; and for that reason, both uses follow from the sacrament. (ST III:80, 1 ad. 1)

The use of the sacrament by the recipient cannot condition the perfection of the Eucharist, “and so, the sacramental use is distinguished from the spiritual use more in this sacrament than in Baptism” (ST III:80, 1 ad. 1). Thomas further concludes that spiritual eating is not practically separate from sacramental eating. It is possible to consume the *sacramentum tantum* apart from the *res* for a person improperly disposed by lack of faith or charity⁸. For the properly disposed, however, sacramental and spiritual eating are naturally and ordinarily concomitant.

Thomas’s discussion of the effects of the sacrament underscores the balance between the Eucharist as perfect in itself and the role of the recipient’s disposition. He first affirms the power of the sacrament to bestow grace: “And for this reason, every effect that material food makes for the corporeal

⁷ Thomas speaks to reception and desire earlier in question 73; distinguishing between Baptism and Eucharist, he writes: “And for that reason the reception of Baptism is necessary in order to begin the spiritual life but reception of the Eucharist is necessary for its consummation; not necessarily possessed simply [or in actuality], but it suffices to have it in desire (*voto*), just as an end is possessed through desire and intention” (ST III:73, 3 c).

⁸ Thomas writes: “Sacramental eating which is also spiritual eating is not divided in contrast with spiritual eating, but is included under it; but that sacramental eating which does not secure the effect, is divided in contrast to spiritual eating” (ST III:80, 1 ad. 2).

life, namely sustaining, increasing, healing, and delighting, this sacrament makes entirely for the spiritual life" (ST III:79, 1 c). The Eucharist conveys the habitual and helping effects of grace which heal, elevate, and move the recipient into ever greater communion with God, sustaining the recipient with food for the journey (Colberg, 2020, pp. 130-36). At the same time, dispositions of faith (which mark one's presence in a state of grace) and charity (which maintain and advance life in a state of grace) facilitate the effects of grace in those receiving the Eucharist. Thomas reasserts the values of the sacrament as perfect as well as the recipient's necessary disposition when discussing the power of the Eucharist to forgive sins. He writes:

The power of this sacrament is able to be considered in two ways. In the first way in itself, and so this sacrament has the power to forgive any sin whatsoever through Christ's passion which is the font and cause of the forgiveness of sins. In another way [it can be considered] in comparison with the recipient of the sacrament insofar as there is found in him an impediment to the effects of the sacrament. (ST III:79, 3 c)

Sin impedes the effects of the Eucharist. Indeed, Thomas goes on to describe the mortal sinner as dead to the spiritual life and therefore unable to access the graces that belong to it. The venial sinner may still eat spiritually, but the sacrament's effects are limited in one vital way. Thomas reminds his readers that the Eucharist bestows grace both as a habitual gift and as an actual or helping (*auxilium*) grace; the former capacitates the recipient for the habit of charity while the latter moves the recipient to act -inebriating the recipient with gladness and love. For example, Thomas writes: "And for that reason, as regards the power of this this sacrament, not only is the habit of grace and of virtue bestowed, but it is furthermore aroused to act, according to II Cor. [5:14]: 'the charity of Christ presses us'" (ST III:79, 1 ad. 2)⁹. When

⁹ Thomas goes on to write: "And therefore through the power of this sacrament the soul is refreshed [nourished], because through this the soul is delighted spiritually and in a certain way [it is] inebriated with the sweetness of divine goodness, according to that Song of Songs 'Eat, o friends, and drink, and be inebriated o lovers'" (ST III:79, 1 ad. 2). Thomas also addresses this topic in the corpus of Question 79, 1: "Yet the reality (*res*) of this sacrament is charity, not only insofar as habit but also insofar as act, which is excited (*excitatur*) in this sacrament; and by this means venial sins absolved" (ST III:79, 1 c). For a specific discussion of the way in which the Eucharist conveys the grace of Auxilium, see Colberg (2016, pp. 187-210).

the recipient approaches the sacrament aware of its full signification and thus filled with love, the sacrament moves or actualizes ever deeper acts of charity and related virtue, further drawing the person into the life of God. When venial sin, however, causes the recipient to be distracted or to misdirect his love toward private goods, Thomas warns that the helping grace of the sacrament is lost. He writes:

In the second way, venial sins do not utterly impede the effects of this sacrament, but they do in part. For it was said that the effect of this sacrament is not only habitual grace or charity, but also a certain actual refreshment (*refectio*) of spiritual sweetness, which is indeed impeded if a person approaches this sacrament with a mind distracted through venial sin; growth in habitual grace and charity, however, is not taken away. (ST III:79, 8 c)¹⁰

While the sacrament heals and continues to elevate the habit of charity in every recipient who receives the Eucharist in a state of grace, a person struggling with venial sin during its reception loses the opportunity to be moved or refreshed so as to act with love. The habitual form remains in potency. Spiritual eating in its most effective form therefore requires conscious effort to cultivate a spirit love charity through the Mass itself –by recognizing Christ’s love made manifest in the passion and its extension in the sacrifice of the Mass– and by the continual cultivation of love for God and neighbor in those circumstances leading up to reception of the sacrament. Successful spiritual eating is therefore more than a way to understand that the effects of the sacrament depend in part on the recipient. It speaks to a way of life which includes the habitual practices of faith and love that progressively disposes one to be inebriated with the gladness of the Eucharist. Failure to recognize the full significance of the Eucharist can potentially mean, as Saint Paul suggests, to eat and drink the sacrament without fully discerning the body and blood of the Lord (I Cor. 11:29). Or put another way, recipients must understand that Jesus’ flesh is real food and his blood is real drink so that, upon receiving it, they may remain in Jesus and Je-

¹⁰ Thomas adds further detail to the topic of spiritual eating in the response to the first objection: “The one who approaches this sacrament with active venial sins eats spiritually indeed by habit [of faith and love] but not actively; and for that reason, the person receives the habitual effect of this sacrament but its active effect” (ST III:79, 8 c).

sus in them (John 6:55-56). Spiritual eating flows from discerning the body and blood of Jesus, growing in faith and love, and being transformed by the grace of the Eucharist. For Thomas, spiritual eating is a radically scriptural reality, and his biblical commentaries illumine its beauty.

Spiritual Eating in the Biblical Commentaries

Matthew 26: "Take and Eat"

It is vital to recognize that Saint Thomas is, fundamentally, a biblical theologian whose daily labor focused on the exposition of scripture. Scriptural commentary is the stream whose living waters feeds Thomas's systematic treatments of doctrine¹¹. Thomas leaves commentaries on no less than seventeen books of scripture from the time between his inception as a master in 1257 until his death in 1274¹². The language of spiritual eating makes at least three critical appearances among those commentaries. The first is in his exposition of the Last Supper and institution narrative in his *Lectura*

¹¹ Speaking of Thomas's work as a commentator on scripture, Torrell writes: "Though long overlooked in favor of the *Sentences* or *Summa*, this kind of biblical teaching was nevertheless Thomas's ordinary labor. [...] If we wish, therefore, to get a slightly less one-sided idea of the whole theologian and his method, it is imperative to read and use in much deeper fashion these biblical commentaries in parallel with the great systematic works" (1996, p. 55). Several overviews of Thomas's exegesis commend themselves to study. They include Prügl (2005, pp. 386-416), Healy (2005, pp. 1-20), Elders (1990, pp. 132-52), and McGuckin (1993, pp. 197-213). For studies that speak to the function of scripture in Thomas's theology generally, see Valkenberg (2000). A recent and energizing movement loosely called "Biblical Thomism" has contributed much to the field of Thomas's scripture commentaries. See especially Roszak & Vigen (Eds.) (2015; 2018). Prügl defines the relationship between Thomas's systematic and exegetical works thus: "The difference between a 'systematic' *Summa* and an 'exegetic' commentary is therefore modest. Both aim at the 'manifestation of truth,' and both deal with the rational understanding, order, and permeation of the revealed word. The 'advantage' of the *Summa* lies in the fact that its endeavors are not tied to the continuous text of a biblical book; its topics are instead 'freely' arranged according to the requirements of the theological discipline (*secundum ordinem doctrinae non secundum quod requirebat librorum expositio*). On the other hand, the commentary possesses the advantage of being able to uncover within the biblical text 'more' than is necessary for the systematic description of a theological subject" (2005, pp. 403-04).

¹² This count includes commentaries on all of Paul's letters. See Torrell (1996, pp. 337-341) for listings of Thomas's biblical commentaries. This count does not reflect the fact that Thomas clearly commented on parts of the Pauline corpus more than once.

*super evangelium Sancti Matthaei*¹³. Importantly, the commentary itself on Matthew 26 offers a comprehensive effort to situate teachings on the Lord's Supper both in the wider setting of Matthew's gospel as well as the church's Eucharistic doctrines¹⁴. Spiritual eating and discernment arise in two vital instances. With the first, Thomas exegetes Jesus' command in Matthew 26:26 "Take and eat; this is my body", and his *divisio textus* states: "first he exhorts them to receive; second, to eat; third, he announces the truth" (SM, 2180)¹⁵. Working from the words "take and eat", Thomas introduces the difference between spiritual and sacramental eating; he writes:

[Christ] says "take and eat". And when he says "take", it ought to be referred to spiritual reception (*spiritualem receptionem*), because it ought not to be received except through faith and charity; thus John 6:55 "the one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him". (SM, 2180)

No one can in good conscious receive Christ's body and blood, under his command *take* apart from a disposition of faith and love. Faith disposes the recipient to believe that the sacrament is Christ's flesh and blood, and love constitutes the proper response to the love of God in Christ's passion signified by the sacrament itself as well as its offering as a sacrifice¹⁶. Thom-

¹³ The commentary is his only extant treatment on the synoptic gospels. Most likely offered during the academic year 1269-1270 during his second stay at Paris. Though extant versions, which come to us as *reportationes*, are interpolated, most of the text is intact including the discussion of the Last Supper. Torrell explains that Thomas's commentary on Matthew, as presently transmitted in official editions, is both incomplete and erroneous. He writes: "It lacks Thomas's commentary for a good part of the Sermon on the Mount, which his first editor, Bartholomew of Spina (1527) replaced with part of the commentary of Peter of Scala, who was a Dominican at the end of the thirteenth century. The interpolated passages extend in Matthew from 5:11 to 6:8 and from 6:14 to 6:19. The labors of the Leonine commission have allowed the discovery of a new manuscript that contains the complete text of Thomas's commentary" (1996, p. 339). For a helpful overview of the dating and manuscript tradition for the commentary, see Holmes (2005, pp. 73-97).

¹⁴ Thomas's commentary on Matthew 26 comprises seven lectures with lectures 3-4 focused on the words of institution.

¹⁵ Translations are mine and taken from S. Thomae Aquinatis (1951). The commentary will be referred to as SM, and all citations will be noted according to paragraph number as found in the Marietti edition.

¹⁶ Earlier in the commentary, for example, Thomas reminds his students that Christ appears under the remaining accidents of bread and wine precisely to exercise Christian faith; he writes: "And why not under its proper species [of flesh and blood]? On

as immediately subjoins spiritual eating with sacramental eating under the second part of the command: “eat”. He writes: “Likewise he induces them to eating, ‘eat,’ not only spiritually but also sacramentally; thus Song of Songs 5:1 ‘eat, o friends, and drink’” (SM, 2180). By situating the discussion of spiritual eating prior to sacramental eating, Thomas distinguishes between the acts, noting that sacramental eating –as commanded by Jesus– remains ineffective without a corresponding disposition. Nevertheless, he reminds his audience that spiritual eating is ordinarily experienced through sacramental eating; thus Jesus commands both “take and eat”¹⁷.

Following a lecture on the words of institution for the bread, Thomas begins a new lecture addressing the words of institution for the chalice. He fields an initial question about the consecration of wine, noting that it could seem redundant if Christ’s body and blood are fully present in the consecrated host. Thomas introduces a discussion of the *res et sacramentum* to demonstrate the fittingness of consecrating the wine. He first sets down the teaching:

One reason is that there are three things in this sacrament: one which is the sacrament only (*sacramentum tantum*), another which is the reality only (*res tantum*), and another which is both sacrament and reality (*res et sacramentum*). The species of bread and wine are the *sacramentum tantum*; the spiritual effect is the *res tantum*; and the body contained is both *res et sacramentum*. (SM, 2191)

Important in Thomas’s taxonomy is the value of all three categories. It is not merely that the *res* supersedes the *sacramentum*. The sacramental sign is itself conducive of grace inasmuch as it signifies something. Thus Thomas argues:

reason is the rationale of the merit of faith because faith does not have merit where human reason provides evidence” (SM, 2174).

¹⁷ During this *excursus* in the text Thomas briefly affirms that the sacrament is also perfect in itself; he writes: “Also, in the other sacraments the sacrament is not received (*percipitur*) in the blessing but in the application (*infusione*), because oil and water, which are inanimate, do not contain grace; whence, since grace is the end of the sacrament, it is not able to be received through the reception of the sacrament. But in this sacrament, the one who is the fullness of grace is contained; and for that reason it is not perfected in us but in the consecration of the matter. Wherefore, given that no one received it, it would be no less a sacrament because its use follows from [its perfection] and is not necessary” (SM, 2182).

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If therefore we consider that which is *sacramentum tantum*, it is quite fitting that the body be signified under the species of bread and the blood under the species of wine, because [they are] signified as indicating spiritual refreshment; but refreshment is properly in food and drink. (SM, 2191)¹⁸

Thomas draws here on the earlier contention that the Eucharist refreshes and nourishes the recipient, and this effect is properly signified under the sacramental species of bread and wine together. Even with the doctrine of concomitance, the absence of a chalice less fittingly captures the *sacramentum tantum* of the Eucharist because the sacrament ought to refresh as food and drink naturally does. Speaking of the *res et sacramentum*, Thomas argues that the body and blood of Jesus –present together but under both species on the altar– appropriately commemorate Christ’s passion. He writes: “And it could not signify better than in this way, [namely] that it signifies blood poured out and separated from the body” (SM, 2191). Recall the value of approaching the sacrament in faith and love. Thomas stresses that a recognition of the *res et sacramentum* together remind the recipient of Christ’s passion as the source of all grace and remission of sins, and in doing so, it edifies faith and stirs up love. The *res et sacramentum* effectively infuse the habit of faith and press the recipient to greater love. Lastly, Thomas argues that the *res tantum* is effectively communicated by the chalice inasmuch as human health depends on blood as its life source. Only together do the bread and wine most aptly signify the *res* of the sacrament, “because the bread is offered for the health of the body and the blood for the health of the soul” (SM, 2191). At one level Thomas’s discussion of the *res et sacramentum* of the Eucharist supports a fittingness argument for Christ’s consecration of bread and wine by arguing for the appropriateness between the sacramental signs and their effects. An arguably more compelling dimension of this teaching, however, has to do with properly discerning the body and blood of Christ. Thomas reasons that the significance of the Eucharist is manifold: it refreshes the soul as food and drink (*sacramentum*); it signifies Christ’s passion and the forgiveness of sins (*res et sacramentum*); and it conveys grace which gives life to the recipient (*res*)¹⁹. When one begins to appreciate the

¹⁸ Speaking of the consecration of the bread, Thomas also adds: “For the common food of people is bread and the common drink is wine; therefore, bread and wine are the principal foods” (SM, 2175).

¹⁹ At other points in the lecture, Thomas will unpack other effects of the sacrament as well such as its power to unite recipients into the mystical body of Christ (SM, 2177), to

rich significations and corresponding effects of the sacrament, one cannot but grow in faith and approach in love. The theological distinction thus cultivates greater devotion.

John 6: “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him”

The Gospel of John’s Bread of Life discourse (6:22-59) is rich with meaning. The narrative includes Jesus identifying himself as the Bread of Life who can feed believers; it speaks of eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood; and it marks the struggles of Jesus’ followers to understand the teaching. Within a field of meanings, Thomas understands the bread of life pericope as a preeminent teaching for properly perceiving the body of Christ so as to eat spiritually and receive its fully effects. To be sure, he does not treat the entire discourse as primarily Eucharistic. Rather, he views it as progressively integrating the revelation of Jesus as the eternal Word of God who through the Incarnation comes down from heaven to teach and feed humankind and who ultimately gives himself as food and drink in the Eucharist. His *Lectura super iohannem*, dating to 1270–1272, devotes five lectures to the Bread of Life discourse with the final lecture addressing the Eucharist and spiritual eating in particular²⁰.

Thomas engages Christ’s admonition that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you will not have life within you” as having clear textual resonance with the Eucharist²¹. Christ’s teaching re-

purify sinners (*SM*, 2193), and to build up thanksgiving or gratitude (*SM*, 2196).

²⁰ Set alongside the estimated dating of Matthew (1269-1270), Torrell suggests that Thomas commented on biblical texts in canonical order. He writes: “To all appearances, Thomas took the books of the New Testament in their canonical order. In passing directly from Matthew to John, he must have thought that Matthew took the place of the two other Synoptics, while John had something special to say” (1996, p. 199). Importantly, the Matthew and John commentaries parallel the composition of the *Summa theologiae*. Torrell places the rough dates of the *Summa* as *Prima pars* (up until September, 1268 in Rome), *Prima Secunda Pars* (1271 in Paris) *Secunda Secunda Pars* (1271–72 in Paris) and the *Tertia Pars* (1272–73 beginning in Paris and being left unfinished in Naples); (1996, pp. 43-45; 333-34). Note that the text of Thomas’s *Lectura super iohannem* comes as a *reportatio* edited by Reginald. For a series of essays on theological topics addressed in on Aquinas’s John Commentary, see Dauphinais & Levering (Eds.) (2005).

²¹ Dauphinais makes the argument that Thomas does not collapse the bread of life discourse into a purely Eucharistic exposition; rather, Thomas gives much of the initial four lectures to the ways in which Christ is the bread of life as eternal and incarnate wisdom itself; it is only at vv. 6:53-60 that Thomas shifts to an explicit discussion of

quires that his followers discern and understand what is meant by Jesus (1) as the bread of life and (2) who gives his flesh and blood as food and drink. Thomas reasons that eating and drinking Christ's body and blood are fundamentally geared toward the spiritual life, and to that end he Thomas deploys his spiritual versus sacramental distinction. He writes:

If [Christ's words] refer to spiritual eating, there is no doubt about the meaning. For the one who eats the flesh of Christ and drinks his blood in a spiritual way, participates in the unity of the Church, and this is accomplished by the love of charity; Rom: 7:5: "you are one body in Christ". (*SJ*, 969)

First and foremost, receiving Christ happens inwardly, through grace, and it is facilitated by a charity which unites those who consume Christ's body and blood. Thomas argues, not unlike he did in the Matthew commentary, that those who lack charity are spiritually dead or "do not have life within them". Speaking of sacramental reception, he admits that a difficulty appears inasmuch as Jesus commends that everyone eat his flesh and drink his blood. How can the unbaptized eat sacramentally, that is, under the sacramental species of bread and wine? Thomas notes that Christ's teaching in John 6:54 seemingly supports the Greek practice of communing the baptized immediately. He concludes, however, that those without the use of reason

Eucharist as the natural and sacramental extension of Word's self-disclosure and saving action. He writes: "First, in his exegesis of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, St. Thomas shows how Jesus' teaching comes as spiritual food. Second, St. Thomas discerns in Jesus' initial teaching about the bread of life the necessity of the Incarnation in order for us to receive wisdom from on high. Third, St. Thomas teaches that the Eucharistic flesh must be received as divine wisdom to lead to eternal life" (2005, p. 314); In his commentary on John 6:35, when Christ identifies himself as the bread of life for the first time, Thomas outlines the multifaceted ways in which this can be true of Jesus; he writes: "Therefore, because every word of wisdom is derived from the only-begotten Word of God, 'the fountain of wisdom is the only-begotten of God' (Sir 1:5), this Word of God is principally called the bread of life, and for that reason Christ says, 'I am the bread of life'. And because the flesh of Christ is united to the Word of God, it is also vivifying; and therefore his body, sacramentally received, is vivifying; for through the mysteries that he accomplished in the flesh, Christ gives life to the world. And thus, the flesh of Christ, because of the Word of the Lord, is bread not in the ordinary way [of life] but in way of life which does not die. And for that reason, the flesh of Christ is called bread" (*SJ*, 914). Translations are mine and taken from Sancti Thomae Aquinatis (1972). The commentary will be referred to as *SJ*, and all citations will be noted according to paragraph number as found in the Marietti edition.

cannot rightly discern the body of Christ, and therefore sacramental eating is unfitting for infants or others lacking reason; he concludes: “[Sacramental eating] is true for adults, but not for infants, because receiving the Eucharist should be done with actual reverence and devotion” (SJ, 970)²². The language of *reverentia et devotio* to describe the disposition of the recipient is telling. It naturally extends Thomas’s consistent stress on the necessity of faith and love for proper reception. Earlier in the commentary, Thomas reasons that one cannot understand the way in which Jesus is the bread of life apart from a robust faith made perfect in love²³. He writes:

And this is what he says: “amen, amen, I say to you: he who believes in me”, namely with a faith perfected by love (*fide scilicet formata*), which not only perfects the intellect but also the affections (for things of faith are not sought unless they are loved), “has eternal life”. (SJ, 950)

The reverence and devotion which make spiritual and sacramental eating possible follow from a faith in Jesus as the Word of God who sustains all things and a consequent love that draws believers to him in action²⁴. Thomas thus manages the challenges of understanding what it means to consume Christ’s flesh and blood through his stress on spiritual reception, and he orders the timing of that eating into the Christian life of grace –following baptism– by explaining how sacramental eating depends, first, on sacramental regeneration in baptism.

Thomas continues his exposition by speaking of the primary effects of eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood. He reemphasizes the parallel between material and spiritual food; just as material food nourishes and re-

²² Thomas also repeats the possibility of spiritual reception by desire; he writes: “But the sacrament of the Eucharist is necessary for adults only, so that it may be received in reality (*re*), or by desire (*voto*), according to the guidelines of the Church” (SJ, 970).

²³ Thomas writes: “[Christ’s] teaching is to show that he is the bread of life. But bread vivifies insofar as it is received. But it is plain that one who believes in Christ receives Christ into himself, according to Eph. 3:17; ‘Christ dwells in our hearts through faith’. Therefore if the one who believes in Christ has life, it is clear that he is vivified by eating this bread” (SJ, 950).

²⁴ Thomas adds: “But Christ is in us in two ways, namely in the intellect through faith, insofar as there is faith, and in the affections through a love which forms faith; thus I John 4:16, ‘the one who remains in love remains in God and God in him’. Therefore, the one who believes in Christ so that he approaches him has Christ in his affection and in his intellect” (SJ, 950). Note that Thomas here again speaks of faith being perfected by charity as *fides formata*.

freshes, so does Christ's body and blood as spiritual food. And unlike material food, Christ's body and blood convey eternal life²⁵. Such an outcome nevertheless depends on receiving the *res* of the sacrament:

But the person who has eternal life eats and drinks, as it is said, not only in a sacramental way but also in a spiritual way. One eats and drinks sacramentally, or in a sacramental way, when one receives the sacrament, but one [eats and drinks] spiritually when one penetrates to the reality of the sacrament. (*SJ*, 972)

Having set out the basic distinction, Thomas adds that sacramental and spiritual eating involve two vital dimensions: the thing contained in the sacrament and the things signified by it. Christ's real flesh and real blood are contained and given as spiritual food under the sacramental species; moreover, the Eucharist points to the mystical body of Christ into whom the recipient is increasingly incorporated; Thomas writes:

One is contained and one is signified, and this is the whole Christ, who is contained under the species of bread and wine. The other reality is signified but not contained, and this is the mystical body of Christ, which is in the predestined, the called, and the justified. (*SJ*, 972)

Under this theme, Thomas exegetes Christ's words that the one who eats his flesh and drinks his blood "remains in me and I in him". That which the sacrament contains feeds and sustains the spiritual eater, and that which the sacrament signifies illustrates the way in which the eater is in Christ and Christ is in him.

Having affirmed that one can indeed receive Christ's flesh and blood in such a way that mutual indwelling is possible, the question now becomes: how does one receive these fruits? Thomas insists that they are available to the predestined, called, and justified. These adjectives indicate that those in

²⁵ He writes: "Thus there is great utility in eating this [sacrament] because it gives eternal life; whence it says 'the one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life'. For this spiritual food is similar to bodily food because without it there can be no spiritual life just as there cannot be bodily life without bodily food, as was said above. But this food has more than the other because it produces unending life in the one who receives it which [bodily] food does not do, for not all who eat [bodily] food live" (*SJ*, 972).

a state of grace may receive these fruits²⁶. Yet not all in a state of grace may be fully refreshed. As Thomas notes in the *Summa theologiae* and his Matthew commentary, spiritual eating may be diminished when the recipient fails to discern fully the body of Christ. Again, this is the stumbling block for Christ's followers in the bread of life discourse: "The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying: how can this man give us his flesh to eat" (6:52). Thomas responds that one must eat and drink with the right disposition. He writes:

Therefore, concerning Christ contained and signified, one eats his flesh and drinks his blood in a spiritual way who is united to him through faith and love, and so one is transformed into Christ and becomes his member: for this food is not converted into the one who receives it, but it converts the one who takes it into itself [...] And for that reason this is a food capable of making a person divine and inebriating him with divinity. (*SJ*, 972)

Approaching the sacrament in faith and love makes it possible for the sacrament instrumentally to deify and gladden the recipient. Those dispositions are in potency in a state of grace, and they can be actualized by perceiving who is contained and what is signified in the Eucharist. The one who reaches to the *res* of the sacrament (*qui pertingit ad rem sacramenti*) is stirred up in faith and love. The charity of the Eucharist, properly discerned, *presses* the recipient who in turn is divinized and incorporated through the sacrament.

In the same lecture, Thomas further specifies the manner of divinization through the *missiones ad extra* of the Son and Holy Spirit. Stressing again the roles of faith and love, he writes: "For just as we said above, one who eats and drinks in a spiritual way is sharing in the Holy Spirit, through whom we are united to Christ by a union of faith and charity, and through him we become members of the Church" (*SJ*, 973)²⁷. Spiritual eating effectively increases the

²⁶ Thomas here references a causal sequence that precedes the cooperation of the individual recipient. God first predestines in love; this predestination yields election, and such election unfolds through gifts of operative grace that move the sinner from a state of sin into a state of grace. Once in a state of grace –as healed and potentially elevated– the believer can freely respond –in love– to God's grace. This free cooperation –exemplified by proper disposition for receiving the Eucharist– is cooperative in such a way that it merits increases in habitual grace an auxilium. See Colberg (2016, pp. 181-82).

²⁷ See Spezzano on the notion of "Christ's Grace as Principle of Participated Perfection" as well as her explicit discussion of "Christ's Sacraments and Participation in the

habits and actions of faith and love in recipients because it unites them to the Spirit who in turn unites them more fully to the Son. Thomas concludes that this is what it means for believers to remain in Christ and Christ in them; Christ remains in the recipient through sacramental eating and the power of the Holy Spirit, and recipients remain in Christ through progressive incorporation into the mystical body²⁸. Spiritual reception is vital:

For, as was said, the one who eats in a spiritual way, in comparison to what is signified only (*rem signatam tantum*), is incorporated into the mystical body through a union of faith and love; for through love God is in the person and vice versa; thus 1 John 4:16: “the one who remains in love remains in God and God in him”. And this is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes; whence I John 4:13: “we know that we remain in God and God in us, because he has given his Spirit to us”. (*SJ*, 976)²⁹

Love acts as the connective tissue that allows for *mutual remaining* or *mutual inhering*. While Thomas celebrates the divinizing potential of consuming Christ’s body and blood in charity, he also observes a warning. It is possible to miss completely incorporation into the body of Christ when one fails to discern his body. He writes:

And there is another way by which those who eat do not abide in Christ nor Christ in them: that is those who approach with a false heart, for this sacrament has no effect in the insincere (*ficto*). For there is insincerity when the interior [disposition] does not correspond to the exterior. But in the sacrament of the Eucharist what is signified exteriorly is that Christ is incorporated into the one who receives it and the one who receives it into

Divine Nature” (2015, pp. 179-92).

²⁸ See Sabra (1987) for a lucid treatment of the ways in which the Son and Holy Spirit, in their external missions, serve respectively as the constitutive and motive dimensions of the church in Thomas’s theology.

²⁹ Thomas adds another level of detail to spiritual eating in this passage with his reference to the *res significata*; the term here underscores the polyvalency of the ways in which Christ’s body can be signified in language; this is particularly vital in the bread of life discourse where Thomas affirms the diverse yet related ways in which Jesus can be understood as “bread of life”. For a treatment of the technical development of the terms *res significata* and *modus significandi*, see Rocca (1991, pp. 173-97) and Ashwort (1991, pp. 39-67).

Christ. Thus the one who does not desire this union in one's heart, nor tries to remove every impediment to this union, is insincere. And for that reason Christ does not remain in him nor he in Christ. (*SJ*, 976)

While Thomas consistently stresses the positive effects of approaching the sacrament in charity, he supplements his positive teaching with its inverse. Those who approach without an intellect trained on union with God and a will desiring such a union fail to receive the full effects of the sacrament. They do not discern the full signification of Christ's body and blood under the sacramental species, and, so, their spiritual eating is diminished. Proper charity seeks to remove all obstacles to union with God; this provides a helpful metric. Does one approach the sacrament while still seeking private or lesser goods at the cost of an unobstructed relationship with Christ? This question ought to train one's charity –shaping and directing the will's affection toward God as ultimate end–. Thus Thomas trains his students to understand that sacramental and spiritual eating can illumine and effect the full signification of the Eucharist. A belief in Jesus as the bread of life –fully and perfectly present in the sacrament– reveals God's love made manifest in the passion as well as the promise of full incorporation into the body of Christ.

I Corinthians 11: "A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup"

Even as the bread of life discourse refracts proper reception of the Eucharist through the language of discerning the body of Christ, Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians makes proper disposition explicit. His admonition "A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself" (11:28-29) occasions Thomas's careful reflection on proper and improper reception³⁰. His commentary on discerning the body

³⁰ Thomas comments on I Corinthians as part of a comprehensive commentary on the Pauline corpus. That commentary, as it has been received, likely joins two separate cycles of commentary on Paul. Attempting to date and collate the extant versions of Thomas's commentary on Paul's letters is difficult. Current scholarship suggests that Thomas commented on Paul in at least two discrete teaching periods, somewhere between 1265-68 and again between 1271-73. Torrell summarizes: "Thomas could have taught Paul in two stages, first in Italy (perhaps in Rome between 1265 and 1268), then in Paris and Naples. It is, however, not at all probable that he would have given the

of Christ comes near the culmination of seven lectures on I Corinthians 11 which includes Paul's account of the Last Supper and the institution narrative. As Thomas comments on the supper itself, he reasserts that Jesus gives the Eucharist as spiritual food that nourishes and refreshes³¹. Moreover, the sacrament is perfect in itself³². With these foundational stipulations in hand, Thomas then expositis Paul's warning first against unworthy eating and then against failing to discern the body of Christ. Under the first point, Thomas resumes his warning against a lack of devotion in receiving the Eucharist. This deficiency may arise out of venial sin through which the mind "is distracted

same courses in their entirety two times" (1996, p. 340). For a more complete treatment of the dating and authenticity of the Pauline commentary, see Torrell (1996, pp. 250-257). Also see Prügl (2005, pp. 387-91). I Corinthians marks the point where the two stages of commentary are joined into one. Keating writes: "An exegetical 'fault-line' runs through the extant manuscript (i.e. an early and late edition appear to be combined), and a significant strata of the text is simply missing (commentary on 1 Cor. 7.15-10.33). The leading hypothesis for this state of affairs is the following: Aquinas appears to have commented on the Pauline epistles early in his career (either from 1259-65 or 1265-68). Then towards the close of his life (either at the end of his time in Paris, 1271-72, or during his period in Naples 1272-73), he undertook a revision of his commentary on Paul's letters, but only completed Romans through 1 Corinthians 10. Finally, in the process of collecting and handing on his commentaries, the portion from 1 Cor. 7.15-10.33 was lost, and a commentary on these verses from Peter of Tarentaise was inserted as a substitute in order to complete the commentary" (2005, p. 127). The commentary that includes 1 Cor. 11 and continues through the Letter to the Hebrews comes from a *reportatio* by Reginald. A revised edition of the *Expositio super Epistolas Pauli* is presently in progress by the Leonine Commission. Torrell makes the following important comment on the assembled parts of the commentary on Paul's epistolary corpus, which in edited volumes is referred to as *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*: "Despite the diversity of these pieces, it is nevertheless certain that Thomas thought of his commentary as a whole, as the Prologue placed at the head of this group of texts shows" (1996, p. 340).

³¹ Speaking of parallels between the corporal and spiritual life of human beings, Thomas affirms the Eucharist as food; he writes: "Third, food is required for the corporal life by which a person's body is sustained, and similarly the spiritual life is nourished [refreshed] through the sacrament of the Eucharist, according to Psalm 23:2: 'he makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters'" (*SEP*, I Cor., 651). Translations are mine and taken from Sancti Thomae Aquinatis (1953). The commentary will be referred to as *SEP*, and all citations will be noted according to paragraph number as found in the Marietti edition.

³² After describing the difference between the Eucharist and other sacraments as the difference between perfection in consecration versus use, Thomas concludes: "But this sacrament is perfected in the consecration of matter itself, in which Christ himself is contained, who is the end of all sanctifying grace" (*SEP*, I Cor., 660).

by worldly affairs" (*SEP*, I Cor., 690). Under these conditions, spiritual eating and its effects are impeded, but for Thomas, the person who receives in this state is not condemned inasmuch as she still approaches in the habit (if not the act) of devotion. If a person approaches either conscious and unrepentant of mortal sin or with the intention of sinning mortally after reception, she consequently falls under divine judgment because she lacks the charity or love that properly follows in a state of grace. Thomas concludes:

Moreover the Eucharist is the sacrament of charity and ecclesial unity, as Augustine says in *On John*. Since, therefore, the sinner has lost charity, and merits separation from the unity of the Church, if she approaches the sacrament, she commits a falsehood, since she signifies that she has charity but [actually] does not have it. (*SEP*, I Cor., 691)³³

The metric for eating or drinking judgment falls back on the disposition of charity. If the believer approaches in love for God and desiring union with God and the mystical body of the church, then she may eat sacramentally and possibly spiritually without any danger, but if she approaches with malice or awareness of having fallen from a state of grace, then it is possible to eat and drink condemnation onto herself.

Thomas makes this metric explicit as he completes his commentary. If a lack of charity brings condemnation, then the fullness of charity lets those who eat live because of Christ. This point is expressed through the distinction between sacramental and spiritual reception. He writes:

It should be said that there are two ways of receiving the sacrament, namely, spiritually and sacramentally. Therefore, some eat sacramentally and spiritually, namely, those who receive the sacrament in such a way that they participate in the reality of the sacrament (*rem sacramenti*), namely, charity, through which there is ecclesial unity. (*SEP*, I Cor., 698)³⁴

³³ Interestingly, Thomas further argues that a sinner who still has faith may look at the sacrament without receiving it because doing so properly fits the habit of faith that lacks its perfection in charity: "Nevertheless because a sinner sometimes has faith in this sacrament, it is licit for her to look at the sacrament, which is totally denied to unbelievers" (*SEP*, I Cor., 691).

³⁴ Here again Thomas adds the converse: "But those who eat sacramentally only (*sacramentaliter tantum*), namely, those who perceive the sacrament in such a way that they do not have the reality of the sacrament (*rem sacramenti*), that is, charity, and to such

The *res tantum* of the Eucharist –which according to Paul allows one to live in Christ– is effected through the disposition of love while also cultivating further habitual and active effects of love. It not only shapes and presses the properly disposed recipient; it causes her to live. For some, this same effect builds up more and more affection for the sacrament: “Therefore, from the fact that those who receive this sacrament spiritually acquire life, some are attracted to receive this sacrament frequently” (*SEP*, I Cor., 699). Thomas balances this desire for union with Christ against those who receive spiritually but, out of reverence for the sacrament, also limit their reception. He honors both positions because both are grounded in reverence and devotion. Ultimately, however, Thomas offers this conclusion:

Because nevertheless love is preferred to fear, strictly speaking, it seems that it is more commendable to receive more frequently than more rarely. Yet because something that is more desirable is able to be less desirable in regard to this person or that, one ought to consider in oneself which effect frequent reception of the sacrament would have. For if someone feels that it leads to progress in the fervor of her enjoyment (*dilectionis*) of Christ and in her fortitude for resisting sin, then she ought to receive frequently. (*SEP*, I Cor., 699)

Love is the final and best measure of devotion. Frequency of reception should correlate to its effect on the recipient’s love for God and sense of mystical incorporation. Even in this act, then, careful discernment is warranted. Approaching the sacrament in the Spirit of Paul’s admonition demands not only examination of conscience for sin; it thrives on examination of one’s charity.

Conclusion

The foregoing study of Thomas’s systematic and scriptural works illumine remarkable integration and consistent teaching on reception of the Eucharist and its effects. Three concluding observations affirm the vital fruits of Thomas’s work, particularly, the ways in which his biblical commentaries advance and contextualize his theological insights. First, Thomas’s *Summa theologiae* account of Eucharistic reception maintains three vital claims about

people the words said here are understood: ‘he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgement to himself’ (*SEP*, I Cor., 698).

the sacrament: (1) it is perfect in itself through the consecration of matter; (2) its effects depend on sacramental and spiritual eating in order to gain access to its *res et sacramentum*; and (3) the habits and acts of faith and charity correlate to successful reception. At first glance one could regard all three claims as technical outcomes of speculative doctrine on the Eucharist far removed from the kerygma of the scriptures and the primary signification of the sacrament. "Perfect in itself" and "sacramental v. spiritual eating" may seem more like theological jargon than scriptural or first-order discourse. The biblical commentaries, however, reveal that Thomas uses these three claims to interpret and unpack persistent quandaries posed by the scriptural text itself. The struggles of Paul's audience in Corinth or the doubts of Jesus' followers in John 6 illustrate that it can be practically difficult to perceive Christ's real flesh and blood so as to grasp their signification and receive their effects. Thomas's three tools train the believer to understand and discern the body of Christ so that Christ can remain in recipients and they in him. Second, Thomas's stipulation that faith and love are central to proper reception advances his larger doctrine of grace and account of the Christian life. God has created human beings as rational and free, and the perfection of human nature by grace will include the on-going sanctification of human knowing and loving. For Thomas, God's initial offers of grace are not prompted or initiated by human beings; they are operative and given as gifts (Colberg, 2016, pp. 196-200). The Eucharist as perfect in itself is such a gift. It contains Christ and offers further growth in grace by virtue of its consecrated matter. This gift, however, may be cooperatively received through the free expression of faith and love. In that sense, the sacrament demands a cooperative response from human beings. They must approach in faith and love, and in turn, the sacrament infuses those same gifts into recipients while pressing them into action. In this sense the proper reception of the sacrament really facilitates its effects as *viaticum* –food for the journey which draws the cooperative recipient ever deeper into the mystical body of Christ³⁵. Third, the scriptural passages explored in this study each convey commands. Christ says "Take and eat, this is my body" (Matthew 26:36) and "I say to you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have

³⁵ Speaking of the sacrament as *viaticum*, Thomas writes: "The Eucharist has a third signification in respect to the future, namely, insofar as the sacrament prefigures the enjoyment of God, which will be in the heavenly homeland. And according to this it is called *viaticum* because it shows to us the way of progressing to that homeland" (*ST* III:73, 4 c).

life within you" (John 6:53). Likewise, Paul says "A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup" (I Cor. 11:28). Scripture insists on Eucharistic reception and on recognizing Jesus' body and blood in the sacrament. And yet, practically, Christians can find this difficult. The difficulty sometimes results from a lack of knowledge about the sacrament, yet in these passages Jesus speaks to his closest followers, and Paul addresses those already baptized. More often, then, the difficulty in discerning and receiving Jesus' body and blood stems from underlying struggles of concupiscence and temptation by private or disordered goods. Thomas sees these challenges as ones that confronts Christ's earliest and most intimate disciples, and it is no less daunting for his follows across time and space. Thomas offers a fundamental and pastoral insight in his commentaries that Eucharistic reception and spiritual eating flow from the steady cultivation of faith and love in habit and act. The practice of discerning Christ's body and blood develops faith that acknowledges the sacrament as perfect in itself and exercises love which sees the Eucharist as the sacrament of charity. The efforts required for successful sacramental and spiritual eating parallel and edify the life of discipleship. To that end, Thomas receives and elaborates a doctrine of Eucharistic reception aimed to making possible the reality of human beings remaining in Christ and Christ in them.

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