

that is summed up in the phrase “the Kingship of Christ”) and/or the traditional liturgy, his Thomism is either truncated to begin with, or will eventually become corrupted. This can be seen in the many American adherents of St. Thomas who want to be faithful to their master, but who, by embracing political liberalism, end up simply abandoning *his* vision of social reality and, more worryingly, the Church’s *integral* social teaching. A kind of canker has been introduced, though it may take time to issue in some definitely obnoxious opinion. Similarly, a person who wants to be “traditional” but spurns or sleights St. Thomas will not be able to avoid contaminating and perhaps undermining traditional philosophy and theology; and once those foundations are gone, everything is gone—including the social incarnation of Christ in Christian culture and society.

The Corpus Christi Procession

The connection runs deeper still, if we examine the centermost point in each of the three. Let us begin with the most evident. As the Magisterium has repeatedly emphasized, the Holy Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Church’s very life¹²; it is the *raison d’être* of her sacred liturgy, the sovereign mystery to be celebrated, commemorated, worshiped, received. Since our Lord’s sacrifice on the Cross is the Alpha and Omega of the Christian economy, the Eucharistic sacrifice is the focal point of cosmic reality, in relation to which every intellectual creature stands. Every angel and every man stands in some relationship, whether of salvation or of condemnation, to the “bread of angels,” Jesus Christ in his flesh and blood. For this reason, the sign and measure of the health of the liturgy is nothing other than the vigor and intensity of the people’s devotion to the mystery of Jesus Christ really, truly, substantially present in the Sacrament of the Altar, a devotion that will make itself evident in a longing for communion, a love for adoration, a ready recourse to Confession in order to receive Communion worthily, and a plethora

12. The famous phrase comes from *Lumen Gentium* 11, but it echoes themes as ancient as the writings of the apostolic age.

of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, which are the most explicitly “Eucharistic” ways of life.

Already, however, our second theme comes into sight: St. Thomas Aquinas, the Doctor of the Eucharist *par excellence*. Has there ever been a great theologian of whose life and work it could *not* be said that this Sacrament, containing the very Person of Jesus Christ, was the source and summit? And of the great theologians (whose number is not immense), has not the Angelic Doctor exemplified this truth in the most admirable ways? He was and he remains, in the words of John Paul II, the “supreme theologian and impassioned singer of the Eucharistic Christ.”¹³ The mystery for which this Dominican master of theology provided a dogmatic analysis that surpasses in subtlety the metaphysics of Aristotle was the very same mystery before which he humbled himself daily in fervent adoration and to which he dedicated mystic verses whose tranquil beauty has warmed the hearts of Christians for centuries. No wonder the golden reliquary that holds his mortal remains beneath an altar in Toulouse depicts the saint standing alert and energetic, holding in one hand the flaming sword of the Word of God, and in the other hand a radiant monstrance proclaiming the Real Presence. The one leads to the other, and both to eternal life. Without the bread of the word and the bread of life, there is no life and no truth, no upward ascent to God at odds with fallen nature’s downward spiral.

All the goods we rely upon during our earthly pilgrimage: peace, good will, joy, the social virtues and graces that glue communities together—these weaken and disappear when their supernatural principle, charity, is cut off. And where do we encounter most intimately the charity of God? Where do we feast on this divine gift? In the *sacramentum caritatis*, as St. Thomas calls it: the sacrament that shows forth, embodies, communicates, and confirms the love of men for God and for each other. Without the Eucharist, then, we are utterly lost. We are lost as individuals, as families, as societies

13. “*summus theologus simulque Christi eucharistici fervidus cantor*” (Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 62). Note that this phrase was inaccurately rendered in the official English version.

and nations.¹⁴ Conversely, if men wish to be free men once more and not slaves, if families are destined to flourish and healthy societies spring into being, it will happen only when they are found gathered around the altar, on bended knee before the King of Kings. Even in our dark days there are communities like this, composed of faithful laity and clergy, often obscure and poor, but demonstrating in quiet ways the irrepressible vitality of the Gospel. *This* is where the future of the Church lies.

Let us consider more closely the salvation, the healing, of society. To the question "What are the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching?" many compelling answers can be given, for it is a rich area of doctrine. I think, nonetheless, that two of the great principles of this body of teaching as it has developed in the past 150 years are surely the common good and the dignity of the human person. In the twentieth century, there has been a tendency to view these two concepts as opposites conjoined in irreconcilable tension: the person, as person, has a kind of limitless worth, which makes him subordinate to no one; yet the community, as such, deserves the person's attentive service, indeed it may ask of him his very life. But to think along these lines betrays a superficial conception of both principles. In reality, the human person derives his great dignity from his capacity to be ordered to (and even more, from his *actual* ordering to) God, the infinite good; and God, precisely as this inexhaustible good, is the extrinsic common good of the entire universe, who is rightly loved when he is loved as infinitely communicable.¹⁵ In other words, what is most personal and worthy about the person is what is deepest in him, namely the goodness he receives as a gift, impelling him to communion with its Giver; and

14. Toward the end of his pontificate this was increasingly the message of Leo XIII. It is clear in his 1902 encyclical on the Eucharist, *Mirae Caritatis*, but also in *Tametsi Futura* (1900), *Annum Sacrum* (1899), and the retrospective apostolic letter *Annum Ingressi Sumus* (1902).

15. See Charles De Koninck's classic work *The Primacy of the Common Good*, in *The Writings of Charles De Koninck: Volume Two*, trans. Ralph McInerney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 65–164; St. Thomas, *De caritate*, article 2.

the good that is most of all common, and worthy of our absolute self-abandonment, is not any earthly, created good, but God alone, who made us and all things.

Now, what is the connection between these seemingly abstract principles and the "daily bread" of the Eucharist? There is complete overlap. As St. Thomas teaches, the common good of the entire universe is found in Christ,¹⁶ and the whole Christ is found in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is, therefore, the common good of all mankind, of all races and societies and nations. A people or a nation that does not actively order itself to Eucharistic worship, in all that this involves, both remotely and proximately—preserving orthodox faith and high morals, cultivating reverent worship, supporting sound education, producing good art and architecture, and so forth—is a nation with a deficient and dying common good, a nation splintering into factions, splintering further into envious, libidinous egos.¹⁷ There is a cure for this mess; it has worked many times in the past, and will work again as many times as it is tried. That cure is the medicine of immortality, the holy Eucharist. Once again, is it any coincidence that the theologian who offers us the fullest and soundest treatment of the common good—divine, cosmic, political—is none other than St. Thomas Aquinas, "supreme theologian and impassioned singer of the Eucharistic Christ"?

In my life, the most poignant symbol of the flowing together of the three treasures we are speaking of has been the public Corpus Christi procession in which I participated several times during the years I lived in rural Austria, where, by the mercy of God, many traditional practices still survive.

On this most splendid day, the pastor, clad in gold vestments, walking beneath an embroidered canopy, leads a public procession along the main street, within sight and hearing of the whole town, accompanied by the local marching band, acolytes carrying bells and incense, little girls scattering flower petals, and townspeople dressed in their traditional outfits. The civic leaders march in sec-

16. See *Super I ad Cor.*, cap. 12, lec. 3.

17. I have in mind here Augustine's notion of the *libido dominandi*, the power for control and manipulation that is at the root of social sins.

ond place (their *due* place), followed by the rest of the children, Christ's favorites, their families, and indeed everyone who has a heart to participate. No one is excluded; all are welcome, because it is an occasion for joy and feasting. The priest gives fourfold Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament at four stations festooned with freshly-cut branches from the surrounding forests, to bless the people and the place in all directions of the compass. This is a political act, not a private devotion; it symbolizes a city ordered to, and nourished by, the Word-made-flesh, the Savior's body and blood, which he delivered up in love for us, *to make us one with him and with each other*. But it is also a liturgical act—it springs from the Mass, where the host has been consecrated; it returns to the Mass, in the tabernacle at the high altar, where the monstrance is finally set to rest after hours of veneration. Even in a country succumbing to the lure of secularization, the Body of Christ still receives this treatment: all businesses and offices closed, the entire town process- ing on the street, intercity traffic forced to pause, the gilt mon- strance held high in clouds of incense.

Listen carefully . . . listen to the beautiful hymns of the day's Mass and Office, hear the prayers of the day. Who wrote them? None other than Saint Thomas. Polity, liturgical piety, and the prince of theologians, converge at the still point.

A Christian Ecosystem

From whatever angle one looks, the connections are there, and run deep; an inquisitive person sooner or later begins to ask why this should be so. Whether or not my reflections can lead to an adequate answer, the first step is just to see that they *do* belong together with a kind of necessity, forming, if I may hazard the analogy, a Christian ecosystem. Each thrives in the presence of the other; each suffers in the absence of the others. There is real danger of mass extinction if we are not careful to preserve the fundamental components of the supernatural environment. To shift metaphors, in this decisive age of the Church, when her enemies are more numerous and their stratagems more subtle than ever, we are not lacking weapons for battle, nor means of superior intelligence; and ultimately, in some mysterious way, the victory is won, because Christ has died and

risen. This much is certain: the Lord will not fail *us* (cf. 2 Tim 2:11-13). The question is: Will we fail *him*? (cf. Lk 18:8). That is the ques- tion all of us must ask ourselves as we try to do our part for the renewal of Catholic life in our day.

What, then, is to be done? Is there any hope? Is there any "plan" that could bring about a true religious renaissance, a true spring- time? There is only one safe path: to honor and to love the ever-liv- ing tradition of the Church; to stop pretending that we can invent a new tradition to replace the perennial one, the holy and beautiful tradition that is our Lord's wedding gift to his Bride on earth. Pope John Paul II apologized for all the crimes of sinners who dishon- ored the Church by their sins; he even went so far as to apologize for the crimes committed by the Crusaders and by Catholics during the period of the Inquisition. Is it not high time, then, to apologize to God with profound humility for all the crimes that popes, cardi- nals, bishops, priests, and laity have committed against the sacred tradition of the Church?

To the question "what is to be done," the lover of Catholic tradi- tion has an answer that is clear and reliable, with the added advan- tage that our shepherds can begin to implement it right away, provided they have the courage—namely, to heal the wounds exactly where the blows have fallen. The resurrection of the Church must consist of, or at least necessarily involve:

1. The restoration of traditional liturgy.
2. The proclamation of Catholic social teaching in its fullness.
3. The reestablishment of St. Thomas as Common Doctor.

Should one be tempted to say: "Easier said than done, now that we have had nearly fifty years of corruption," the right answer is: "We have vowed in baptism to be faithful to Christ no matter what, and so we must take up our cross and fight the good fight, to the very end." St. Thérèse of Lisieux once said that discouragement, too, is pride. What she meant is that discouragement indicates a lack of faith, a lack of trustful surrender to divine Providence. At such times, we are really saying "I know best what should happen, and it is not happening. I am angry about that." The crux is confidence in God, abandonment to his will. God "knows what He is about," as

Cardinal Newman said.¹⁸ God has a purpose for permitting the corruption, the chaos. He alone can bring forth good from evil. We do not know his purposes, but we know that he is wise, merciful, and just. “And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints” (Rom 8:28).

Moreover, it is not clear that these three goals are, in reality, so unattainable. Any bishop with vision and perseverance can re-introduce the study of St. Thomas among his seminarians, educate his clergy and people in Catholic social doctrine, and restore the sacredness of the liturgy in manifold ways, both negative (e.g., abolishing female altar servers, curtailing extraordinary ministers of holy communion) and positive (e.g., mandating the chanting of the Mass propers in Latin or English, or encouraging the use of incense, noble vestments, the pipe organ, and *ad orientem* worship). Indeed, under the pontificate of Benedict XVI, we saw numerous bishops do one or more of these things, often with tremendous vigor and catechetical fervor, and always with tangible fruits of authentic renewal.

And, taking the ultimate perspective—the one we need to have in mind if we wish to stay sane in this valley of tears—we cannot forget that God promises us, after the wearying pilgrimage of this life, after we have wandered long in the valley of the shadow of death, he promises us a share in his joy: “If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:17–18). “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn 6:54). “Enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21).

Fortunately, the heavenly liturgy never changes; one need not fear the promulgation of yet another *editio typica*, with new read-

18. From the *Meditations and Devotions*, “Meditations on Christian Doctrine,” March 7, 1848. The whole passage, entitled “Hope in God,” cannot be read too often. The text is available at www.newmanreader.org/works/meditations/meditations9.html.

ings and prayers. The heavenly city is eternally ruled by Christ the King, the Eternal High Priest. The wisdom that St. Thomas taught is, as he himself glimpsed at the end of his life, “straw” compared to the beatifying vision of God’s glory. If the Church on earth should seem to fail for a time, if even her leaders falter, how can we truly be surprised—especially if we are nearing the end times? “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8). “The charity of many shall grow cold” (Mt 24:12). Let it not be said of us, when we are standing before the throne of Christ, that *our* charity grew cold because we preferred the darkness of pessimism to the burning furnace of his Heart.

We have some short years in which to know, love, and serve God. Let us strive to know him better with the help of St. Thomas and all the great saints; let us strive to love him better by entering more deeply into the sacred liturgy and receiving more devoutly the ineffable gift of Christ’s Body and Blood; let us strive to serve him better as we live our lives in the world, guided by the integral social teaching of the Church. What matters here is not how much progress we make, but our perseverance in the way of truth. As Blessed Teresa of Calcutta said: “God doesn’t call me to be successful, God calls me to be faithful.”¹⁹ If we do *this*, there cannot be a moment’s doubt that we shall hear those longed-for words: “Enter into the joy of your master.”

19. This has been quoted in many different ways, but the point is always the same. The world’s standards of success are, not unexpectedly, worldly; God judges by another measure, that of the heart.