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CAPITAL GRACE OF THE WORD INCARNATE ACCORDING TO SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

Saint Paul uses the image of a body's head and members to describe Christ's leadership, his grace, and the mutual respect that should exist among the members of the Church. During the Scholastic period, theologians developed this theme in the doctrine of capital grace. Capital grace is concerned with the place of the human nature of Christ in the giving of grace to the faithful. At first glance this seems simple: Christ satisfied for our sins and merited infinite graces for us, and thus he is the cause of our reception of grace. But capital grace describes how Christ is a source of grace for us, not just in the historical event of the passion, but in his very person. At the heart of this question we are confronted with a difficulty: how can Christ be a source of grace for us according to his human nature when only God can give grace?

Medieval theologians attempted to solve this problem by describing Christ's causing of grace in our souls dispositively, ministerially, and meritoriously. Saint Albert's description is striking: Christ is a cause "meritoriously, because he merits for us the influx of grace" and "by the mode of a mediator or a redeemer, because he removes the obstacle to the influx into us, which obstacle is the debt of Adam which he

took away.”¹ Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, and the young Thomas give similar explanations of Christ’s causality.²

In this article, after briefly noting what Aquinas received from his predecessors, we will trace the development of his thought, particularly noting how his arrangement of the arguments contributed to the development of the doctrine. We will show that Thomas’s stance on the place of Christ’s humanity in the giving of grace was much like that of his predecessors at the writing of his *Scriptum*, but that by the completion of the *De Veritate*, he espoused a view in which the human nature of Christ is an instrumental efficient cause of grace to his members. This view blossomed into a conception of Christ as one acting person with two natures, as shown in the his *Summa Theologiae* and *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.

Thomas’s Predecessors

The locus of the medieval debate over capital grace seems to be in Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*. Here headship is not addressed directly but only adverted to it in an explanation of Christ’s having the fullness

¹ Albert, O.P., “Scriptum super Sententiis,” in *Opera omnia*, ed. Stephen C.A. Borgnet (Paris: Vivès, 1894), III, d. 13, a. 3, <http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/albertus/searchAlbertus.cgi?browse=%3B+Lib.III%3B+dist.13%3B+art.2%3B+p.238a&chosenTexts=36&exclude=0&language=0&word=capitis&newstart=1&quantity=%28null%29&format=Edited>, accessed on March 24, 2016; hereafter *Sent*. This and all translations of Albert and Thomas’s *Scripta* by John Baptist Ku, O.P.

² See for example, Hales, III *Sent.*, q. 12, a. 3 (2), r. 3; Albert, III *Sent.*, d. 13, a. 2; Bonaventure, III *Sent.*, d. 13, a. 2, q. 2; Thomas, III *Sent.*, d. 13, q. 2, a. 1. Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologiae* (Colloniae Agrippine, 1622), https://archive.org/stream/bub_gb_Vi6kVcrf__UC#page/n3/mode/2up, accessed on February 14, 2016; hereafter *ST*. In this edition, note that there is an error in numbering. Membrum 2 on p. 73 is written as membrum 3, and article 3 on p. 76 is written as article 2. Bonaventure, O.F.M., *Opera Omnia*, vol. 4 (Paris: Vivès, 1864), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001935889>, accessed on February 21, 2016; hereafter *Sent*. Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Scriptum Super Sententiis*, ed. Roberto Busa, S.J. (Parma: Petrus Fiaccadori, 1858), <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp3013.html>, accessed on February 21, 2016; hereafter *Sent*.

of grace. Referencing Augustine's letter *Ad Dardanum*,³ Lombard notes that the head has all of the senses while the body only has one. Analogously, he maintains, Christ has all the graces while the members of the Church have "as it were, only touch."⁴

Commentators used this distinction as a starting point for the discussion of Christ's headship, his capital grace. As far as we are able to ascertain, beginning with Alexander of Hales, who was the first to use the *Sentences* as a lecture text,⁵ the argument took on a standardized form. Theologians noted how the physical head is related to the members, and then showed how these relations could be taken in a spiritual sense to explain the relationship between Christ and the members of the Church. For example, Hales clarifies that the term head is used metaphorically to describe a king's power, a lion's dignity, and a father's providence.⁶ Above all other aspects of headship, the Franciscan Master insists that the aspect of influence is the most proper to headship—the head influencing the members with its sense and motion, and Christ influencing his members with the sense of faith and the motion of love.⁷

³ Augustine of Hippo, "Letter to Dardanus," in *Letters*, trans. S. Wilfred Parsons, S.N.D., ed. Roy J. Deferrari et al. (New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1955), ch. 40, 253.

⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae* (Rome: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971), III *Sent.*, d. 13, ch. 1, n. 2.

⁵ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 40.

⁶ Hales, *ST III*, q. 12, m. 2, a. 1, obj. 1–3.

⁷ Hales, *ST III*, q. 12, m. 2, a. 1, ad op. and res. Here Hales references *De Spiritu et Anima*, a work attributed to Augustine, but later thought to be Alcuin of Clairvaux's. In this text, the author notes three kinds of influence (*vis*) in man: natural, having to do with the functions of the body, and not willed, vital by which the motion of the heart reaches the members, and spiritual (*animalis*) by which the body receives sense and motion from the head, and the last is voluntary. Hales concludes that because we are members of Christ in a way that is wholly voluntary, it follows that the influence exercised from the head to the members is most like the influence exercised by Christ toward the members of the Church. For more on the authorship of *De Spiritu et Anima*, see Gaetano Raciti, "L'Autore del «De Spiritu et Anima»," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, vol. 53, n. 5 (September–October 1961): 385–401.

Franciscan and Dominican scholars maintained the importance of the aspect of influence in describing Christ's headship; and although they had different approaches to the question of capital grace, both schools took great care not to blur the lines between the human and divine causality of the actions of Christ. Hales and Bonaventure's approaches focus on questions of grace itself, whether capital grace is created or uncreated, and how it is related to grace of union and habitual grace.⁸ Because grace is appropriated to the Holy Spirit, their treatments of capital grace tend to focus more on the giving of the Holy Spirit than on the person of Christ. In fact, Bonaventure, considering whether personal grace and capital grace are really distinct, goes so far as to appropriate capital grace to the Holy Spirit insofar as he is the efficient cause of spiritual sense and motion to the members.⁹ Albert and Thomas, on the other hand, discuss capital grace not as a metaphor for Christ's relationship with the members of the Church, as Hales does,¹⁰ but as something real in Christ.¹¹ And because of this focus,

⁸ Hales, *ST III*, q. 12, m. 1, a. 2 (page 73), q. 12, m. 2, a. 1, r. 3, Bonaventure, *III Sent.*, d. 13, a. 2, q. 1–2.

⁹ Bonaventure, *III Sent.*, d. 13, a. 2, q. 2, r.: “[U]no modo potest nominare principium effectivum sensus et motus spiritualis in membris Christi, et sic nominat ipsum Deum, et per appropriationem Spiritus sanctum . . .”

¹⁰ Hales, *ST III*, q. 12, m. 2, a. 1, r.

¹¹ Albert, *III Sent.*, d. 13, aa. 2–3; Thomas, *III Sent.*, d. 13, q. 2, a. 1; *DV*, q. 29, a. 4; *In Col.*, ch. 1, lect. 5 (nn. 47–57); *In I Cor.*, ch. 11, lect. 1 (n. 587); *In Eph.*, ch. 1, lecture 8; *ST III*, q. 8, a. 1. Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, trans. Robert W. Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdeVer.htm>, accessed on March 10, 2016; hereafter *DV*. And Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. Fabian Larcher, O.P. (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/SSColossians.htm#15>, accessed on March 10, 2016. And also Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, O.P. (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm#111>, accessed on March 10, 2016. Also, Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Commentary on Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb, O.C.S.O. (Albany: Magi Books, 1966), <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/Eph1.htm#8>, accessed on March 10, 2016. And also Thomas Aquinas,

they are eager to find how influence, being an efficient cause of grace, can really be attributed to Christ's human nature.

Thomas's Initial Work on Capital Grace in the *Scriptum* and *De Veritate* (q. 27)

In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Thomas attributes three main aspects of headship to Christ.¹² According to his divinity, Christ has dignity because he has the fullness of the deity,¹³ influence because he is the source of every spiritual grace in us, and order because he directs us to himself. As man, he has dignity on account of the grace of union and his saving work, which is the "noblest action in the Church;" influence because "through him we have received the sense of faith and the impulse of charity, 'for grace and truth are from Jesus Christ' (John 1:17);" and order because he directs us by his teaching and example.¹⁴ Although his position is like that of his predecessors, his arrangement of the argument sets him in a position to advance the doctrine.

Aquinas does this in two ways: first, by including the aspect of dignity (which is related to the grace of union and habitual grace) as an essential part of considerations of capital grace, and second, by constructing his argument in such a way that he gives equal place to Christ's human and divine natures, showing how the aspects of dignity, order, and influence can be applied to each.¹⁵ With regard to the first

nas, O.P., *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

¹² In Thomas's many treatments of capital grace, he is fairly consistent with the concepts which constitute Christ's headship, but he is not consistent with the use of words that describe these concepts. For the sake of simplicity, we will employ the terms used in the *De Veritate*: dignity, order, and influence, throughout this article.

¹³ This reference is to Colossians 2:9 which is the same passage that Augustine uses in his letter *Ad Dardanum*, n. 40, and that Lombard quotes in his *III Sent.*, d. 13, ch. 1, n. 2.

¹⁴ Thomas, *III Sent.*, d. 13, q. 2, a. 1.

¹⁵ The title of the article is "Utrum Christus sit caput Ecclesiae, secundum quod homo," but in his analysis Thomas gives equal weight to both the human and divine natures.

way, Thomas's linking of these two other kinds of grace to capital grace makes what he will say about the instrumental efficient causality of Christ's human soul possible: it is *because* Christ is a divine person acting through a human nature that is perfectly conformed to the divine will by its fullness of grace that he can be an instrumental efficient cause of grace in his human nature.¹⁶ In the second way, in which Aquinas affirms that the divine and human natures are like a physical head in these *same* three ways, Thomas advances toward the understanding of Christ's being one acting person with two natures. This will soon enable him to say that Christ's human nature is an efficient cause of grace as an instrument of his divinity, but as his replies to objections prove, here in the *Sentences Commentary* Aquinas only allows for ministerial and dispositive causalities to be attributed to Christ's human nature.¹⁷

According to Jean-Pierre Torrell, "the passage to a true instrumental cause in [Thomas's] thinking only happens between question 27 and 29 of the *De veritate*; from that point on in Thomas's work, Christ's humanity concurs in reality with the production of grace and leaves its mark upon it."¹⁸ Torrell can pinpoint this time so exactly because in q. 27, which asks whether "any creature can be the cause of grace," Thomas's position clearly differs from his stand in q. 29. In the third article of the earlier question, with regard to capital grace, Thomas argues that Christ imparts grace efficiently by his ministry, and that he

¹⁶ As Thomas Joseph White, O.P., points out, the beatific vision (part of Christ's having the fullness of grace) "alone permits the Lord as man to know immediately his own divine will, being moved by it and cooperating with it at each instant. This in turn permits his human intellect and will to function *instrumentally* with his divine, personal will as the two wills of one subject," Thomas Joseph White, O.P., "The Voluntary Action of the Earthly Christ and the Necessity of the Beatific Vision," *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 526.

¹⁷ Thomas, III *Sent.*, d. 13, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1 and ad 3.

¹⁸ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 128, n. 16.

is the head of the Church because his ministry is higher than any other minister's:

He had a higher ministry than the others inasmuch as we are justified by faith in Him, we undergo the influence of the sacraments by calling upon His name, and by His passion the whole of human nature is cleansed of the sin of our first parent; and there are many other such marks of pre-eminence that are peculiar to Christ.¹⁹

Instrumental Causality

The change in Aquinas's thought was caused by a deeper reading of Saint John Damascene's work. Before proceeding to Thomas's mature position, it seems best to pause to examine Damascene's text and some further considerations of efficient causality. In *De Fide Orthodoxa*, Damascene wished to show how Christ's human and divine natures are both at work, not mixing, but at the same time both present and active. He writes:

But also [as Maximus the Confessor says in his *Disputation with Pyrrhus*] just as "in the unmistakably fiery sword" the natures "of both fire and steel are preserved," so also are both actions and their effect (that is, the perfections of this work) preserved. For steel has cutting power but fire has burning power; and the cut is the effect of the action of the steel (that is, the perfection of the work), but burning is the effect of the fire. And the difference between these is preserved in the burning cut and in the cutting burn, although "after the union, the burning will not come about without the cut, nor will the cut come about without the burning; nor on account of the twofold character of the natural action do we say that there are two fiery swords; nor on account of the mo-

¹⁹ *DV*, q. 27, a. 3, ad 6.

nadic character (that is, the singularity) of the fiery sword do we produce confusion over their substantial difference.”²⁰

Damascene’s work was instrumental in the development of the doctrine of capital grace because it made it possible for Aquinas to see how instrumental efficient causality can be attributed to the human nature of Christ without sacrificing the efficient causality that belongs to God alone.

Within the area of instrumentality Aquinas must clarify what kind of instrument most resembles the way that the human nature of Christ is related to his divinity in the giving of grace. In his expositions which describe the human nature of Christ as an instrument of his divinity, Thomas adverts to three main examples: an inanimate instrument, such as an ax, which is acted upon but does not act; an animate instrument, such as a slave, who is acted upon by the command of his master and acts by his own free-will; and a conjoined instrument, such as a hand, which carries out the will of a man. For the sake of clarity, we would also like to add the “vicarious” instrumentality of ordained ministers. In confecting the Eucharist, a priest speaks the words of Christ in the person of Christ; and through the priest, by the power of his ordination, God acts to accomplish what the priest has expressed.²¹ At first glance, it might seem that the role of a priest at Mass is most fittingly applied to Christ’s human agency, but this vicarious instrumentality goes too far to the side of God to explain Christ’s human instrumentality in causing grace. Vicarious instrumentality is not materially hindered by the unworthiness of a priest but the holiness

²⁰ John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa: Versions of Burgundio and Cerbanus*, ed. Elgius M. Buytaert (St. Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1955), ch. 59, n. 13 (Migne III, 15), 234 (trans. John Baptist Ku, O.P.). See also Dominic Legge, O.P., “The Trinitarian Shape of the Mystery of the Incarnation According to Saint Thomas Aquinas” (S.T.D. diss., University of Fribourg, 2014) for more on instrumental efficient causality and Thomas’s reading of Damascene.

²¹ My thanks to John Baptist Ku, O.P., for this idea of “vicarious” instrumental causality.

of Christ's soul, his dignity, is an essential aspect of the doctrine of capital grace because it makes him an apt instrument and because by grace he makes us like himself, the exemplar of graced humanity.

Similarly, the ax's instrumentality would also give too little regard to the operation of Christ's human nature. While the sharpness of the ax plays a role in the effectiveness of the efficient cause (the carpenter cannot carry out his work if the ax is not a good instrument), the ax is passive in the operation of the carpenter.²² The idea of Christ's humanity being like a conjoined instrument of his divinity is useful for explaining his role in bestowing grace through the sacraments,²³ but the notion of a conjoined instrument does not sufficiently describe Christ's human nature. The conjoined instrument of a hand, though completely obedient to the commands of the mind, is not rational, and does not choose to act. Indeed, Thomas does not use this image in reference to capital grace either in the *De Veritate* or in the *Summa Theologiae*. In the former Thomas compares Christ's instrumental causality to that of a slave, and in the latter he explains that Christ's humanity is "an instrument animated by a rational soul, which is so acted upon as to act."²⁴ It is necessary for Christ to have habitual grace because his actions are those of a divine person. When Christ's grace is viewed in this way, his humanity is understood to be fully active. His human intellect and will are working in union with his divinity to accomplish the work of our salvation.

²² As we will see below, Thomas does make use of the ax analogy to describe the interplay between the human and divine natures of Christ when considering Christ's operation in *ST III*, q. 19. The ax analogy is helpful in this regard because the proper action of an ax can be easily separated from the action of a carpenter, while it is more difficult to separate the operations of a diving person, having an intellect and will, from those of his assumed human nature, also having its own intellect and will.

²³ See *ST III*, q. 62, a. 5 and q. 64, aa. 3–4.

²⁴ See *ST III*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 3.

***De Veritate* (q. 29): The First Articulation of Thomas's Mature View**

In the center of question 29 of the *De Veritate*, surrounded by considerations of Christ's personal grace and merit, Aquinas puts forth his mature view of capital grace, strongly influenced by Damascene's work on the instrumentality of Christ's human nature. Article 4 follows the familiar format used by Thomas's contemporaries of examining the relationship between the physical head and members then applying this relationship in a spiritual way to Christ and the members of the Church. But here Aquinas's masterful approach signals a change in his thinking.

Instead of showing how each aspect applies to Christ as God and then how the same applies to him as man, as he did in the *Sentences*, Thomas subtly replaces this language by drawing our attention to the head's relations of distinction from and conformity with the members—distinction on account of his divinity and conformity on account of his humanity. He then arranges these six criteria by joining each criterion of distinction with a criterion of conformity, and shows how each of these elucidates headship. A lion is in conformity with all animals in animal nature but is head by dignity, since it has all of the senses that the other animals have distributed among them.²⁵ A prince is called the head of his people by government because he rules them, but he is in conformity with them by a "union of order, being ordained to one end."²⁶ And a spring is in continuity with a river because it is the same water which flows from the spring into the river, but it has influence over it as its head by causing an influx of fresh water into the flowing stream.²⁷ By momentarily removing the ever-present necessity to dis-

²⁵ Although Aquinas does not assert this explicitly, it is the implication of his comparison. He offered a bit more detail to the analogy in the *Scriptum*: "Therefore by reason of the first property, namely perfection, anything that is most perfect in any nature is called the head, as the lion among animals" (III *Sent.*, d. 13, q. 2, a. 1).

²⁶ *DV*, q. 29, a. 4.

²⁷ Thomas first uses these metaphors in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, but they seem to have their origin in Hale's work, as noted above.

tinguish what applies to the human and what applies to the divine nature of Christ, this masterful teacher allows us to grasp the idea of one subject with a double relation.

It is only now that Thomas turns to the considerations of how headship applies to Christ according to his human nature. First, Christ has conformity of nature with men, but also headship by dignity because “grace is found more abundantly in him”²⁸ in a way similar to a lion’s being the head of the animal kingdom by his excellence. Second, Christ rules the Church as her head, whose members share an order with him in that they “are of service to each other and are ordained to God.”²⁹ Third, Christ is the head by influence because of an inflow of grace from him, as a spring is the source of a river, but he has continuity with the members of the Church as the water of a river is the same water as that which comes from the spring; his soul is filled with grace and he gives grace, or the Holy Spirit, to his members: “We also find in the Church a certain continuity by reason of the Holy Spirit, who, being one and numerically the same, fills and unites the whole Church.”³⁰ It is one Spirit who is in Christ and flows from him into the members of the Church. Now Thomas is ready to show how influence applies to Christ according to each nature:

In causing spiritual sensation and motion a thing can be understood to be operative in two ways: (1) As a principal agent. In this way it belongs to God alone to pour grace into the members of the Church. (2) Instrumentally. In this way the humanity of Christ also is the cause of that in-pouring. For as Damascene says, “just as iron burns because of the fire joined to it, the actions of Christ’s humanity were salutary because of the divinity united to it, of which the humanity was like an instrument.”³¹

²⁸ *DV*, q. 29, a. 4.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*, ad 1.

Christ's human nature is not an instrument that is merely acted upon but is one which is both acted upon *and* acts.³² For this reason Thomas argues strongly for the necessity of habitual grace in the soul of Christ in the first article of this question.³³ His human actions as man have a certain nobility because they are the free actions of a human nature united to the person of the Word in a bond closer than the bond between our body and soul.³⁴

It is due to this bond that Aquinas makes his boldest statement on the subject of capital grace.³⁵ After citing Pseudo-Dionysius's notion that the nearer a thing is to the goodness of God, the more it participates in his goodness, Thomas notes that Christ's soul must have the fullness of (habitual) grace if he is to give grace to others:

As a result there was a fitness in this humanity not only to have grace but also to communicate it to other beings, as the most shining bodies transmit the light of the sun to others. And because in some sense Christ communicates the effects of grace to all rational creatures, this is why He is in some sense the source of all grace in His humanity, just as God is the source of all being. Then, as all the perfection of being is united in God, in Christ the fullness of all grace and virtue is found, and because of

³² *Id.*, a. 1, ad 9.

³³ In *id.*, a. 1, Thomas asserts that Christ had to have habitual grace in order to enjoy the beatific vision, that is, for operation, and he strongly rejects the view that the grace of union can account for the graced operation of Christ's human soul: "This shows the inanity of a certain opinion which affirmed that the higher part of Christ's soul did not have habitual grace but was united immediately to the Word and from this union grace flowed into the lower powers. For if it refers to personal union, then not only the higher part of Christ's soul but the whole soul is united to the Word. But if it refers to union by operation, then habitual grace is required for this kind of union, as has been said."

³⁴ *ST III*, q. 2, a. 9.

³⁵ See Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 66: "The way in which he speaks of grace in the *Summa* supposes a path that has passed from the *Sentences* through the *De veritate*. In the domain of Christology, the way in which he speaks of Christ-the-head as being in his humanity the cause of all grace, somewhat in the way in which God himself is the cause of all being shows the progress that he has made since an early, overly strict vision of the instrumentality of that humanity."

it He not only is capable of the work of grace Himself but can bring others to grace. For this reason He has the headship.³⁶

Now Saint Thomas's momentous advance in the doctrine of capital grace becomes clearer. The young Thomas's attribution of ministerial causality to the humanity of Christ gives Christ a dignity like that of an ordained minister, but this does not confer on him the exalted status of head under the aspect of influence.³⁷ Being the meritorious cause through his saving work certainly gives Christ great dignity, and perhaps this is why Albert and his more famous student leaned heavily on this aspect to describe Christ's headship in their respective *Scripta*, but meritorious causality is distinct from efficient causality and is only tangentially connected to influence.³⁸ With the advance inspired by Damascene's work, Thomas is able to present Christ's human nature as an instrumental efficient cause of grace, one which is acted upon and acts. The whole of humanity is accorded a greater dignity by being given to participate in its own redemption. Christ as man is acted upon by grace and acts according to his own human intellect and will as an instrument of his divinity, and by the power of that divinity working through him, he gives us grace. This gift is nothing less than God himself conforming us to himself and drawing us into his own life.

Christ as One Acting Person

We would like to conclude by briefly examining a few passages from the Common Doctor's mature works that illustrate the breadth of

³⁶ *DV*, q. 29, a. 5.

³⁷ *DV*, q. 27, a. 3, ad 6: "The reason why Christ in His human nature is called the head of the Church in preference to all the other ministers is that He had a higher ministry than the others inasmuch as we are justified by faith in Him, we undergo the influence of the sacraments by calling upon His name, and by His passion the whole of human nature is cleansed of the sin of our first parent; and there are many other such marks of pre-eminence that are peculiar to Christ." These kinds of causality do not properly belong to being a source of the influx of grace that is proper to the aspect of influence.

³⁸ In *ST III*, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1, Thomas clearly separates these two kinds of causality as regards Christ's giving us grace.

this conception of Christ's human nature being an instrumental efficient cause of grace. From the *Summa* we will further document the interplay between the action of the mover and the instrument, and from his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* we will draw out the awe-inspiring reality that the mover of the human instrument is the Eternal Word himself.

The concept of the two natures of Christ each working according to its own operation, but also in unison, is explored in *ST III*, q. 19, a. 1, where Aquinas asks whether there is only one operation of the Godhead and the manhood of Christ. Using the example of an ax, whose proper operation is to cut, Thomas explains that an operation that belongs to a thing's form is proper to it and does not belong to its mover. In other words, it belongs to the ax to cut, not to the carpenter. But the operation of the thing as moved is not distinct from the operation of the mover; for instance, the proper operation of the ax as moved is to make a bench. In the same way, the human and divine natures in Christ have their proper operations: "The Divine Nature makes use of the operation of the human nature, as of the operation of its instrument; and in the same way the human nature shares in the operation of the Divine Nature, as an instrument shares in the operation of the principal agent." Thomas is very clear. Although the human nature of Christ has its own proper operation, its operation "as the instrument of the Godhead, is not distinct from the operation of the Godhead; for the salvation wherewith the manhood of Christ saves us and that wherewith His Godhead saves us are not distinct."³⁹ The Son assumed a human nature and acts through it to carry out his saving work.

Perhaps the richest exposition of this doctrine is found in Thomas's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. The Angelic Doctor brings his readers' attention to the reality that it is the Word Incarnate speaking and acting in these passages. Christ's human nature is always acting as the instrument of the Word.

³⁹ *ST III*, q. 19, a. 1, ad 2. See also Torrell, *Spiritual Master*, 130–131.

As noted earlier, an essential part of Thomas's teaching on capital grace is the inclusion of considerations of Christ's dignity, his fullness of grace, because it is grace that makes Christ's human nature a perfect instrument of his divinity. Commenting on John 3:34, "God does not bestow the Spirit in fractions," Aquinas identifies three reasons why it should not be said that Christ received habitual grace in any limited measure: because of the one receiving grace, because of the grace received, and because of the cause of the grace. Concerning the third reason, namely the cause of grace, Thomas supplies the illustration of a man who owns a fountain that can produce an infinite amount of water. The man is said to have infinite water because he owns the fountain; just so, "the soul of Christ has infinite grace and grace without measure from the fact that he has united to himself the Word, which is the infinite and unfailing source of the entire emanation of all created things."⁴⁰ As a corollary to this third reason, Thomas notes that Christ's capital grace is infinite in influence. Christ pours out graces without measure "so that the grace of Christ is sufficient not merely for the salvation of some men, but for all the people of the entire world . . . and even for many worlds, if they existed."⁴¹

Thomas's work on the Last Supper discourse emphasizes the person of the Word acting through his human nature. Commenting on the passage "No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6), Thomas compares the way that we reveal what is in our hearts by the use of words with the way that God reveals himself to us through his Word:

And just like one of us who wants to be known by others by revealing to them the words in his heart, clothes these words with letters or sounds, so God, wanting to be known by us, takes his Word, conceived from eternity, and clothes it with flesh in time.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, O.P., *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint John*, trans. James A. Weisheipl, O.P. (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1998), ch. 3, lect. 6, (n. 544), <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SSJohn.htm>, accessed on February 21, 2016; hereafter *In Ioan-nem*. See also *ST III*, q. 7, a. 9.

⁴¹ *Id.*, ch. 3, lect. 6 (n. 544).

And so no one can arrive at a knowledge of the Father except through the Son.⁴²

And it is this person, who is both God and man, who sends us the Holy Spirit: “Note that it is the same person who asks that the Paraclete be given and who gives the Paraclete. He asks as a human being, he gives as God.”⁴³ We see here the full flowering of the doctrine of capital grace: the Word Incarnate acts as a divine person through the means of a human nature, full of grace and truth, to bring men to God.

Conclusion

In this article we have traced the development of Thomas’s thought as it relates to the doctrine of capital grace. Like his predecessors, the young Thomas held for Christ’s human nature being a cause of grace ministerially, meritoriously, and dispositively. Thus Christ as man made it possible for man to receive grace, but he could not be an efficient cause of grace because this must be the agency of God alone. After deeper reflection on the work of Saint John Damascene, Aquinas was able to see his way to attributing instrumental efficient causality to Christ according to his human nature. This view ennobles the place of man in salvation, which includes not only the suffering of one man for all but the giving of grace through that same man. Thomas’s mature view of instrumental causality also makes it possible to understand Christ as one acting person in two natures. This is not only important for analyzing the actions of Jesus in theology, but more importantly it helps us to know the person of Christ as he is: the Word made flesh.

⁴² *Id.*, ch. 14, lect. 2 (n. 1874).

⁴³ *Id.*, ch. 14, lect. 4 (n. 1910).

**CAPITAL GRACE OF THE WORD INCARNATE
ACCORDING TO SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS****SUMMARY**

The doctrine of capital grace was developed during the Scholastic period and bears on many areas of theology including ecclesiology, Christology, sacraments, and Trinitarian theology with regard to the missions of the Word and the Holy Spirit. Viewed from a Christological standpoint, capital grace sheds light on how Christ in his human nature can be said to be a source of grace to the members of the Church. Following his contemporaries, the young Thomas Aquinas espoused a view in which Christ is a meritorious, ministerial, and dispositive cause of grace according to his human nature, and an efficient cause according to his divinity. After a deeper reading of John Damascene's treatment of Christ's humanity being an instrument of his divinity, Thomas was able to articulate a view in which Christ's human nature is an instrumental efficient cause of grace. This view undergirds Aquinas's strong conception of Christ as one acting person in two natures.

KEYWORDS: Jesus Christ, capital grace, habitual grace, instrumental efficient causality, human nature, divine nature.