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DIVINE OMNIPRESENCE IN THOMAS AQUINAS

Harm Goris

1. Introduction

Thomas' discussion of the doctrine of God's omnipresence fits well into the context of this conference volume for three reasons. First, because it links up nicely with several themes that are addressed in this volume, in particular the doctrine of God, of creation, of grace and of Christ. Aquinas treats omnipresence within the context of the doctrine of God, and in all the major texts in which he discusses God's ubiquity, he discerns three modes of divine presence: a general mode by which God is present in all of creation, a specific mode of being present in the believers by grace, and a mode of existential identity unique to the hypostatic union in Christ.¹ Strictly speaking, omnipresence deals only with the first mode, but Aquinas regards it as a presupposition for the other two modes.²

Secondly, it can be argued that the threefold division into divine presence in creation, in human beings, and in Christ, reflects the basic structure of the whole *Summa Theologiae*, each corresponding to one of the *partes*.³ This means that the doctrine of divine omnipresence is a kind of hologram in which we can glimpse the whole of Aquinas' theology.

¹ Aquinas borrows this tripartition from Peter Lombard, but it has its roots in Augustine: see Adrian Fuerst, *An Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Omnipresence of God in Selected Writings between 1220-1270* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), pp. 6, 17-18. In his Letter to Dardanus (to which Augustine himself later refers to as *Liber de Praesentia Dei*), Augustine only distinguishes between *divinitatis praesentia* and *habitationis gratia* and does not mention the presence of the divine nature in Christ, which was added by Peter Lombard.

² Cf. *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 1 a. 2 ad 3, where Aquinas explains the relation between God's universal omnipresence, formulated by the traditional triplet 'per essentiam, praesentiam et potentiam' ('illi tres modi'), and his presence by grace and by the hypostatic union: 'Illi tres modi non sumuntur ex diversitate creaturae, sed ex parte ipsius Dei operantis in rebus: et ideo omnem creaturam consequuntur, et praesupponuntur etiam in aliis modis. In quo enim est Deus per unionem, etiam est per gratiam; et in quo est per gratiam, est per essentiam, praesentiam et potentiam.' For the historical origin of the triplet 'per essentiam, praesentiam et potentiam', see Fuerst, *Omnipresence*, pp. 17-18.

³ Cf. Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God. The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae*. Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 16-18. Te Velde argues that the structure of the *Summa* is determined by the distinction between three agents and their work *sub ratione Dei*: God and his work of creation and world government, the human being in his free movement towards God through grace, and Christ, our way to God, and his work of salvation. The two transitions between the *partes* are explained by human freedom and human sin, respectively.

The third reason is that God's omnipresence covers the general subject of this volume: divine immanence and transcendence, in a special way. After all, 'immanence' and 'transcendence' are originally spatial terms: *immanere* means 'to stay within' and *transcendere* 'to go beyond'. The question of in what ways space and spatial objects are said to be related to God is treated explicitly in the doctrine of divine omnipresence.

The fundamental problem that the doctrine of God's omnipresence raises, is: How can a God who is immanent in all creatures, in all spatial objects and in all places, at the same time not be part of them but transcend all things as their Creator? Or vice versa: how can a non-corporeal, non-spatial transcendent God be immanently present in all of creation? Each of the alternatives seems problematic.⁴ Either we focus on God's immanence and run the risk of ending up with a kind of pantheism,⁵ or, if we choose the other horn of the dilemma, *viz.* divine transcendence, we seem to end up with a distant, deistic God, with whom creatures, in particular we ourselves, cannot enter into a close relationship. My suggestion is that reflecting upon the doctrine of divine omnipresence can help us to reinterpret the opposition between immanence and transcendence as it is commonly understood.

In this paper, I want to show that Aquinas' doctrine of God's omnipresence is best interpreted in the context of Pseudo-Dionysius' well-known threefold way, as interpreted by Aquinas. We know and name God, first, by attributing to him all the perfections we find caused by God in creation (*via causalitatis*), second by negating all created modes of being (*via negationis*) and, finally, by reconfirming the perfections in an eminent mode (*via eminentiae*).⁶ Following this tripartition, I shall first discuss the reasons Aquinas gives in answering the question of whether God is present everywhere. Next, we shall take a closer look at what Aquinas says about how God is not present in created reality. The third section deals with the eminent mode in which God is said to be in all things. A summary and an

⁴ Luco van den Brom thinks that Aquinas' notion of God as a spaceless *Prima Causa* is not coherent and rejects, therefore, Aquinas' view on God's omnipresence: Luco van den Brom, *Divine Presence in the World: a Critical Analysis of the Notion of Divine Omnipresence* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), pp. 188-200, esp. pp. 199-200.

⁵ As e.g. in the view of Spinoza or in Grace Jantzen's idea of the world as God's body; cf. van den Brom, *Divine Presence*, pp. 126-148. According to Robert Oakes, the 'unacceptably intimate flirtation' with pantheism explains the uneasiness many theists feel with regard to the doctrine of divine omnipresence and, hence, the lack of academic discussion about the topic: Robert Oakes, 'Divine Omnipresence and Maximal Immanence: Supernaturalism versus Pantheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (2006), pp. 171-179, esp. 171.

⁶ For Aquinas' interpretation of the Pseudo-Dionysian *triplex via*, see e.g. Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God. Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington D.C.: University of America Press, 2004), pp. 49-74.

evaluation of Aquinas' discussion of God's omnipresence are given in a concluding section.

2. Via causalitatis

God must be present everywhere because he is the immediate cause of the being of all things. This is, in a nutshell, Aquinas' position. He bases his position on two arguments about creaturely causation, which he combines in such a way that both arguments mutually correct and supplement each other. The first one is borrowed from Aristotle and the second from Avicenna. Aquinas uses both arguments in all three major texts on God's omnipresence: *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 1 a. 1, *ScG* III, c. 68, and *STh* I, q. 8 a. 1.⁷

Aristotle supplies Aquinas with the idea that the mover and the thing moved must be together. Aristotle argues for this idea especially in *Physics* VII.2, 243a32-245b2. He claims that the thing moved and its proximate mover must be 'together' (σύν, *simul*). It is stipulated that here 'mover' does not mean the final but the efficient cause, and that 'together' means 'there is nothing between them' so that it clearly has a spatial meaning.⁸ And this is said to be true of any sort of movement, be it locomotion, alteration or increase-and-diminution. What Aristotle is denying here, is the possibility of action at a distance. Mover and thing moved, agent and patient, operator and the thing operated must be in contact, touch each other, be contiguous. Aristotle thinks the contact condition not only holds in the case of physical movement, but he also applies it to the soul's moving of the body and to the First Mover's moving of the first heaven. However, in the case of such incorporeal movers, the 'contact' between mover and moved is no longer symmetric. While bodies touch each other, the soul touches the body without in turn being touched, Aristotle says in *De Generatione et Corruptione*.⁹ This means that 'contact' cannot be said literally of the relation between an

⁷ The Avicennian argument is not explicitly mentioned in *ScG* III, c. 68, but the discussion on God's permanent conservation in being of everything in c. 65 is presupposed here. Cf. van den Brom, *Divine Presence*, p. 198 note 48.

⁸ Cf. Robert Wardy, *The Chain of Change. A Study of Aristotle's Physics VII* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 121-122. The textual differences between the two manuscript traditions of *Physics* VII have no bearing on Aristotle's main thesis. Other relevant passages are: *Physics* III.2, 202a6-9 and *De Gen. et Corr.* I.6. Aquinas follows Aristotle's argument closely in his commentary on the *Physics*.

⁹ Aristotle, *De Gen. et Corr.* I.6, 323a20-34. See Sarah Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency in Aristotle's Physics. A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 175. Sorabji thinks that the problem of incorporeal, non-extensive movers, in particular the self moving of living, animated beings, (temporally) motivated Aristotle to weaken the contact principle when writing *Physics* VII: Richard Sorabji, 'Body and Soul in Aristotle', *Philosophy* 49 (1974), pp. 63-89, esp. 85-86.

incorporeal mover and the body moved. Yet, the contact condition still holds for incorporeal movers insofar as it implies the attribution of a *where* to the incorporeal mover.¹⁰ Incorporeal beings, whether they are subsistent, like the First Mover, or not, like the souls of plants and animals, are, in themselves, neither spatially extensive nor spatially localized. But on the basis of the contact principle between mover and moved, incorporeal beings can be said to have a position in space when exercising causal power on a corporeal, localized patient.

The question of whether action at a distance is physically possible has haunted the history of natural philosophy and physics, ranging from discussions on magnetism, gravity, sunshine, electricity (the paralysing shock by a torpedo fish), to menstruating women clouding the mirror they look into, evil spells and the mediation of sensible species in sensory perception. The debate still continues today, as is shown by Einstein's denunciation of 'spooky actions at a distance', as he called the concept of quantum-mechanical non-locality, allegedly demonstrated by experimental verifications of the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen (EPR) paradox. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the details of the whole debate.¹¹ I shall only address the way in which Francis Kovach has criticized the contact principle. Kovach has argued that the inductive, *a posteriori* character of Aristotle's reasoning in *Physics* VII.2 does not really provide a convincing proof for the contact principle, or 'physical contiguism', as Kovach labels it. Moreover, according to Kovach, 'metaphysical contiguism', that is, extending the contact principle from corporeal to incorporeal movers so that the contact principle also accounts for the spatial presence of the intrinsically spaceless

¹⁰ Waterlow, *Nature, Change, and Agency*, p. 175: 'The agency of the [incorporeal, H.G.] agent presupposes that the agent has an *ubi*, although it has, in this case, no *locus*.' Waterlow also suggests rephrasing the contact metaphor in the case of an incorporeal mover as: 'the incorporeal agent "reaches to the patient but without the patient's in turn reaching to it".' (*ibid.*)

¹¹ Good historical surveys of the debates can be found in: Mary B. Hesse, *Forces and Fields. The Concept of Action at a Distance in the History of Physics* (London: Nelson, 1961) and William Berkson, *Fields of Force. The Development of a World View From Faraday to Einstein* (London: Routledge, 1974). Francis Kovach offers a highly systemized overview of standpoints in the history of natural philosophy in: 'The Enduring Question of Action at a Distance in Saint Albert the Great', in Francis Kovach and Robert Shahan (eds.), *Albert the Great. Commemorative Essays* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1980), pp. 161-235. A systematic analysis of Aquinas' rejection of action at a distance can be found in: Francis Kovach, 'Aquinas's Theory of Action at a Distance. A Critical Analysis', in id. (ed.), *Scholastic Challenges to Some Mediaeval and Modern Ideas* (Stillwater Okla.: Western Publications, 1987), pp. 149-177. I am grateful to Tom Osborne for providing me with a copy of this important text.

soul, or First Mover, in the body that is moved by them, is yet an other step that is unwarranted.¹²

However, apart from Aristotle's inductive argument, Aquinas also has an *a priori* argument of his own for the contact principle in physics. He does not mention this argument in the texts on God's omnipresence, as he apparently thinks that Aristotle's argument is conclusive enough by itself. It is found in *STh* I, q. 115 a. 1, which deals with the question of whether bodies act or not. Basically, the argument runs as follows. Acting follows the actuality of the agent. The form of a corporeal agent is determined by this concrete matter with these concrete quantitative dimensions. Hence, it acts only upon one other concrete body, and its acting is according to the concrete quantitative dimensions, i.e. by contact.¹³ Kovach thinks the (Neoplatonic) idea of the limitation of power is the basis of this argument and he dismisses it. But he seems to miss Aquinas' point here. Aquinas does not focus so much on the *limitation* of corporeal forms and agency, but he wants to argue positively for the agency of bodies by elaborating the connection and correspondence between their substantial being, which is determined by quantitative dimensions, and their acting, which is also determined by quantitative dimensions.¹⁴

Recently, Christopher Decaen has come up with a more benevolent reading of Aquinas' – and of Aristotle's – arguments for the contact principle.¹⁵ He proposes considering the principle in Thomistic terms as evident in itself (*per se notum*), but as not immediately evident to all, and only graspable by the learned. The inductive argument in the *Physics* must, then, not be seen as a demonstrative proof, but as a dialectical *manuductio* by which the mind of the student of physics gradually becomes disposed to gain insight into the principle. The metaphysical argument in the *Summa Theologiae* helps to bring out the intelligibility of the physical principle: it

¹² That the extension is not justified has been pointed out by, among others, Gabriel Biel and Suarez: cf. Francis Kovach, 'Action at a Distance in St. Thomas Aquinas', in: Leonard A. Kennedy and Jack C. Marler (eds.), *Thomistic Papers II* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1986), pp. 85-133, esp. 90.

¹³ *STh* I, q. 115 a. 1: 'Agere autem, quod nihil est aliud quam facere aliquid actu, est per se proprium actus, in quantum est actus, unde et omne agens agit sibi simile. Sic ergo ex hoc quod aliquid est forma non determinata per materiam quantitati subiectam, habet quod sit agens indeterminatum et universale, ex hoc vero quod est determinata ad hanc materiam, habet quod sit agens contractum et particulare. Unde si esset forma ignis separata, ut Platonici posuerunt, esset aliquo modo causa omnis ignitionis. Sed haec forma ignis quae est in hac materia corporali, est causa huius ignitionis quae est ab hoc corpore in hoc corpus. Unde et fit talis actio per contactum duorum corporum.'

¹⁴ Cf. also Christopher Decaen, 'The Impossibility of Action at a Distance', in: Lawrence Dewan and Peter Kwasniewski (eds.), *Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 173-200, esp. 190-193.

¹⁵ See the previous note.

manifests not so much *that* bodies act through contact according to the metaphysical principle that acting follows being, but *why* they do.

Decaen's reading of the Aristotelian and Thomistic arguments for the contact principle may be convincing, but as it stands, it remains limited to corporeal movers. The extension of the contact principle – which Kovach labelled 'metaphysical contiguism' – to incorporeal movers, like God, angels, or the soul, is not dealt with by Decaen. I think we can see the extension as an example of analogical reasoning. Turning from sensible reality, we can begin to say something about what is beyond that reality, but at the same time we must be aware of the transition, and deny certain aspects. That is what happens in the *via negationis*.

The Aristotelian contact principle is but one half of Aquinas' argument for divine omnipresence. The other half is derived from Avicenna's notion of God as the creating cause of being. God is not merely the cause of change (*motus*) or becoming (*fieri*), like Aristotle's Prime Mover, but is the Creator God, the giver of being (*esse*) as such.¹⁶ What is relevant to the discussion about omnipresence is not so much that motion (change, becoming) always presupposes a subject that is moved, and in this respect differs from creation, which is *ex nihilo*.¹⁷ The point is rather that, after the process of change, there is often no more need for the continuation of the activity of the mover. When the process of change is over, for example, when a house has been built, the activity of the mover, in this case the builder, is no longer necessary because the house can stand on its own. But this is not always the case. In nature, we see that some effected changes require the sustained – and sustaining – activity of the source of the change after the process of change has been completed.¹⁸ Boiling water gradually loses its heat when taken off the fire. An illuminated surface immediately turns dark again when the light source is extinguished. Aquinas explains these phenomena with reference to the nature of the subject that is changed in relation to the nature or form of the efficient cause.

¹⁶ *In I Sent*, d. 7, q. 1 a. 1 ad 3: 'Unde Avicenna dicit, quod agens divinum differt a naturali: agens enim naturale est causa motus; sed agens divinum est dans esse totum, sicut creator mundi.' *STh* I, q. 8 a. 1: 'Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus eius.' *ScG* III, c. 68 n. 4: '[...] Deus sit causa universalis totius esse [...].' The distinction between the cause of change and the cause of being is discussed in the Latin Avicenna in: *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina* (ed. van Riet. Leuven: Peeters, 1980), tr. 6, c. 1-2 (p. 296, l. 14 – p. 303, l. 62), cf. Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation. Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 177-185.

¹⁷ Cf. *STh* I, q. 45 a. 2 ad 2.

¹⁸ For this and for the next paragraph, cf. *STh* I, q. 104 a. 1. See also *De Ver*, q. 5 a. 8 ad 8, *De Pot*, q. 5 a. 1, *ScG* III, c. 65 n. 4-7.

If the subject in which the effect occurs has the natural capacity to receive the form according to the same *ratio* the form has in the efficient cause, then it has no need for the cause once the form has been actualized in it. This is what happens in univocal causation.¹⁹ Take for example the flame of a burning candle that lights a torch. The torch has a natural passive potency for sharing the same kind (*species*) of flame as that which lights the candle, and will therefore remain burning after the candle has been removed. The flame lights the torch according to the same *ratio* as it lights the candle, for in both cases the flame has the same specific form. This also means that the flame of the candle is not the cause of flame as such. If so, it would be its own (formal) cause. It is only the cause of a flame in one other concrete, individual subject, in this case the torch. However, Aquinas says, even in the case of univocal causality, it is possible that there be only a partial reception of specifically the same form. Water receives heat from a fire according to the same *ratio* heat has in the fire, but if it participates imperfectly in the form of heat, it will retain the heat only for some time and will gradually lose it.

It is different in non-univocal causation. In this case, the sustained and sustaining activity of the initial efficient cause is necessary for the effect to remain. The agent is not only the cause of the becoming of the effect (*causa fiendi*), but also of the being of the effect (*causa essendi*). Aquinas' favorite example is that of the light of the sun. When the sun starts to shine, it causes the air to become lucent. But air does not have a natural potency for receiving the light as *sunlight*, that is, according to the same *ratio* the light has in the sun. The form of the sun is the principle of light (*principium luminis*), but that form cannot be communicated to the air. Lacking a formal basis inherent in the air, light needs the constant causal activity and influx of the sun to remain. 'Therefore', Aquinas concludes, 'because it has no root in the air, light will stop at once, when the action of the sun stops.'²⁰

¹⁹ For a discussion on the distinction between univocal and equivocal (and analogical) causation in Aquinas, see the paper by Jennifer Hart Weed in this volume.

²⁰ *STh* I, q. 104 a. 1: 'Aer autem nullo modo natus est recipere lumen secundum eandem rationem secundum quam est in sole, ut scilicet recipiat formam solis, quae est principium luminis, et ideo, quia non habet radicem in aere, statim cessat lumen, cessante actione solis.' This text also suggests that the celestial bodies, being equivocal causes of sublunary animal species, not only cause the coming to be (generation) of animals, but are somehow also *causa essendi* of the continuation of their existence: 'Sicut caelestia corpora sunt causa generationis inferiorum corporum dissimilium secundum speciem. Et tale agens potest esse causa formae secundum rationem talis formae, et non solum secundum quod acquiritur in hac materia, et ideo est causa non solum fiendi, sed essendi.' For a more detailed discussion on the permanently required causality of celestial bodies, see: David Twetten, 'Back to Nature in Aquinas', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996), pp. 205-243, esp. 237-241.

Every creature is to God as the air is to the sunlight. Just as the sun is the permanent, extrinsic cause of being for light, so God is the permanent, extrinsic cause of being for being as such (*esse totum* or *esse simpliciter*).²¹ The creature receives being from God, but it does not receive it according to the same *ratio* as it is in God. For God's essence is identical with his being, he is subsistent being itself while creatures only participate in being, which means that their essence is not the same as their being.²² Being as such has, so to say, no formal root in the creature. There is not a kind of natural potency in the creature for being in such a way that being could be rooted in its essence after the initial creation, so that the creature could exist – at least for some time – on its own without God's causal influx. The creature's essence and being remain distinct. In fact, the creature's essence itself is nothing but the participation of being:²³ in and by itself, that is, apart from its relation to the influx of the Creator God, it is utterly nothing (*nihil*). A deistic God, who, as a mere *causa fiendi* brings everything into being at one time, sets the whole universe in motion, then withdraws from creation and lets it take its course by itself, is metaphysically impossible according to Aquinas.

While Aquinas adopts the notion of God as a cause of being (*causa essendi*) from Avicenna and elaborates on it, he also explicitly rejects one element of Avicenna's doctrine, *viz.* the mediation of God's creative agency. Avicenna thinks that the emanation of being from God to creatures is mediated by a series of created intelligences.²⁴ Aquinas maintains that God is the immediate creator of all there is, even down to the lowest beings. Only in the *Commentary on the Sentences* Aquinas allows for the metaphysical possibility that God could have created by the mediation of secondary, instrumental causes, but in his later works he argues that the power to create is, by definition, not communicable to a creature.²⁵ That is why in the *Commentary on the Sentences* Aquinas needs an extra, third, purely

²¹ *Causa essendi* as used in this context does not, therefore, belong only to God. Also in creation we find efficient causes of being, whose permanent activity remains necessary for as long as the effect exists. The sun, for example, is the cause of being for light. But God is the exclusive cause of being for being-as-such. See also footnote 49.

²² *Ibid.*: 'Sic autem se habet omnis creatura ad Deum, sicut aer ad solem illuminantem. Sicut enim sol est lucens per suam naturam, aer autem fit luminosus participando lumen a sole, non tamen participando naturam solis; ita solus Deus est ens per essentiam suam, quia eius essentia est suum esse; omnis autem creatura est ens participative, non quod sua essentia sit eius esse.'

²³ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, pp. 140-141.

²⁴ For more details on the theory of mediated emanation in the Latin Avicenna and Aquinas' rejection of it, see: John Wippel, 'The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics', in id., *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II*, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 31-64, in particular pp. 50-64.

²⁵ Cf. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, pp. 264-265, and nn. 23-25.

theological argument from faith for God's omnipresence in addition to the Aristotelian and Avicennian philosophical arguments. He adds that 'according to faith', that is on the basis of revelation, we hold that God's creative agency is actually unmediated.²⁶ As in his later works Aquinas thinks the impossibility of instrumental mediation by creatures in God's creative activity can be philosophically demonstrated and is part of the very concept of 'act of creation', he no longer needs this additional argument from faith.

We can conclude that, in arguing for God's omnipresence, Aquinas combines two distinct arguments, one from Aristotle, the other from Avicenna. Aristotle supplies Aquinas with the notion that the mover and the thing moved, the agent and patient, the operator and the thing operated must be together (*simul*) or in contact; any distance between the two has to be bridged by intermediary causes. Aquinas complements this argument with the idea he borrows from Avicenna that God is not merely a cause of change (*motus*) or becoming (*fieri*), like Aristotle's Prime Mover, whose causal efficacy is only demanded during the process of change, but that God is the Creator God, a cause of being that gives being (*esse*) as such and whose agency remains necessary throughout the creatures' existence.²⁷ At the same time, Aquinas rejects Avicenna's conception of God's creative agency being mediated through secondary causes. The conclusion is, then, that God must be 'together' with all things as the permanent efficient cause that gives their being as such.

But the way in which God is 'together' with all things, must be qualified.²⁸ That is where the *via negationis* begins.

3. Via negationis

We saw above that Aristotle already distinguished the mode of contact between two moving bodies from the contact between an immaterial mover and a moved body. In the latter case, the 'contact' is not symmetrical: the immaterial mover 'touches' the body, but not the other way around. The

²⁶ *In I Sent*, d. 7, q. 1 a. 1: 'Secundum est, quod esse cujuslibet rei et cujuslibet partis ejus est immediate a Deo, eo quod non ponimus, secundum fidem, aliquem creare nisi Deum.' Aquinas mentions the theological argument as second, before the Avicennian one.

²⁷ Cf. also *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 1 a. 1 ad 3: 'Unde Avicenna dicit, quod agens divinum differt a naturali: agens enim naturale est causa motus; sed agens divinum est dans esse totum, sicut creator mundi.'

²⁸ *In De Div Nom*, c. 5 l. 3 n. 673: 'Et licet dictum sit quod est praesens omnibus et ubique, tamen non est in aliquo existentium, eo modo quo unum creatum dicitur esse in alio.'

scholastics, including Aquinas, elaborated on this approach with the help of two notions: ‘circumscriptively’ and ‘definitively’.²⁹

‘Circumscriptive’ is a term used to describe the way in which bodies are said to be in a place. By its very material essence, a body is said to be contained by place because it is spatially delimited by the dimensions of quantity. The spatial extension excludes the possibility of another body being in the same place. As a consequence, in the case of corporeal causation, the ‘together’ (*simul*) of mover and thing moved consists in a contact by contiguity. Their outer surfaces touch and the two bodies are present next to each other.³⁰

In the case of spiritual substances, on the other hand, the ‘together’ of mover and body moved is different. Souls, angels and God are immaterial, and spatial qualifications do not apply to their essences. The only way spiritual beings can be in a place is by way of causality: by bringing about an effect in a body, they become located in space.³¹ This is so in virtue of the contact principle discussed in the previous section. Although there are important differences between the human soul as the substantial form of the human body, angels moving either celestial bodies or sublunar bodies that are miraculously created by God, and God, who creates, sustains and rules everything, there is also something these incorporeal movers have in common. The spatiality of every immaterial agent differs from that of a body

²⁹ The immediate source of the expressions *circumscriptive* and *definitive* is Peter Lombard: *Sent.* I, d. 37 n. 6 (Grottaferrata: Coll. S. Bonaventurae, 1971), p. 270. The term *incircumscriptus* as characterizing God’s presence was already used by Augustine and Gregory the Great: see Stanislaus Grabowski, ‘God “contains” the Universe. A Study of Patristic Theology’, *Revue de l’Universite d’Ottawa* 26 (1956), pp. 90-113, 165-187, esp. 175, 179. That the angel’s activity and presence is limited to one place at a time is mentioned by John of Damascus: see Fuerst, *Omnipresence*, pp. 10-11.

³⁰ *In I Sent.* d. 37, q. 1 a. 1: ‘Quia enim corpus per essentiam suam, quae circumlimitata est terminis quantitatis, determinatum est ad situm aliquem, non potest esse quod corpus movens et motum sint in eodem situ; unde oportet quod simul sint per contactum; et sic virtute sua immutat corpus quod immediate sibi conjungitur.’

³¹ *In I Sent.* d. 37, q. 1 a. 2: ‘Sed spiritualis substantia quae omnino absoluta a situ et quantitate est, habet essentiam non omnino circumlimitatam loco. Unde non est in loco nisi per operationem; et per consequens virtus et essentia ejus in loco est.’ See also *In I Sent.* d. 37, q. 3 a. 1. The teachings that angels are substantially spaceless and become spatial only causally (*per operationem*) were condemned in 1277: propositions 204, 218 and 219. It seems evident that the propositions refer to Aquinas’ views. For this and subsequent discussions about the location of angels, see: Henrik Wels, ‘Late Medieval Debates on the Location of Angels after the Condemnation of 1277’, in: *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry. Their Function and Significance*, ed. by Isabel Iribarren and Martin Lenz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 113-127. See also in the same volume: Richard Cross ‘The Condemnations of 1277 and Henry of Ghent on Angelic Location’, pp. 73-88.

in that the immaterial agent is not circumscriptively in a place; ‘being in a place’ is said analogically of a body and an immaterial agent.³²

It is important to note that Aquinas is talking here about real spatial presence of spiritual agents. Neither the idea that an essentially non-spatial, spiritual being only becomes spatial by causing something in a body, nor the analogical, non-circumscriptive character of its spatiality, take anything away from the reality of the spatial presence of the spiritual agent. It is the agent’s essence or substance itself which is present in the body moved and, hence, in the place occupied by that body. In other words, it is neither about merely virtual (in the sense of ‘having power or control over *x*’) nor merely intentional (in the sense of ‘knowing *x*’) presence.³³ It is about real presence in the literal, non-metaphorical sense of the word. That is exactly what the contact principle intends to affirm. It is true that the spiritual agent is not essentially spatial, for then it always has to be in a place, but when in a place, it is there with its whole essence. As an analogy, we can take my own presence now in this particular place behind my computer. Though I am essentially corporeal and, hence, spatial, my being-in-this-particular-place is not essential to me, for I can be in some other place, but as long as I am sitting behind my computer I am here with my whole substance. Likewise, being-in-a-place is not essential to a spiritual being, yet, when operating on a body, it is really and properly present in a place with its whole substance. This goes for the soul, for the angel, and for God.³⁴

³² *STh* I, q. 52 a. 1: ‘Aequivoce tamen dicitur angelus esse in loco et corpus’. In this context, the term *aequivoce* cannot mean *pure aequivoce* or *aequivoce a casu*, but must mean *aequivoce a consilio* or *analogice*. Cf. *In I Meta*, l. 14 n. 17.

³³ It is quite common to interpret God’s omnipresence in terms of control or knowledge, both of which can be at a distance. Cf. Edward Wierenga, ‘Omnipresence’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/omnipresence>. If, *per impossibile*, God did not have (mediated) providential control or knowledge of created reality, he would still be omnipresent. In Aquinas’ view, the exercise of God’s providential control (*gubernatio*) does not exclude the mediation by creatures. Therefore, the contact principle does not necessarily apply in the case of *gubernatio*. However, God’s creative causality, i.e. his giving *esse simpliciter*, does exclude mediation by creatures. Because of the immediacy of God’s creative causality, the contact principle does apply.

³⁴ This is obvious for the soul as substantial form of the body. But Aquinas also says that the essence of any spiritual substance is in the place of the body moved: *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 2 a. 1: ‘[...] Unde non est in loco nisi per operationem; et per consequens virtus et essentia ejus in loco est.’ Aquinas rejects the interpretation that God’s being in a place is only virtual: *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 2 a. 3 exp. txt.: ‘Et ideo dicebant, quod essentia Dei non proprie est in loco, sed dicitur esse per essentiam, in quantum omnis essentia ab eo est, et in quantum ipse per virtutem essentiae suae operatur. Sed hoc non sufficit.’ Cf. also *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 1 a. 1 (‘Deus essentialiter in omnibus rebus est’) and ad 2. In explaining the traditional, threefold division of God’s omnipresence ‘per essentiam, praesentiam et potentiam’, Aquinas explains the

Aquinas does not give a full and detailed definition of non-circumscriptive spatial presence, but from his texts we can glean that it means at least three things. First, unlike a body, of which each part is spatially extended and in a different place, the immaterial agent is not spatially extended by its parts but it is totally and indivisibly in the whole and in each and all parts of the body it is acting on. The soul, for example, is wholly in the whole of the human body and wholly in each part of the body.³⁵ Its spatial presence does not go beyond the confines of the body and, hence, of the place occupied by the body, so that the extent of the soul's place is determined by the size of the body.³⁶ However, the soul is not in that place in such a way that it could be measured by it (e.g. the soul is 0.08 m³), nor is one part of it in the head and another in the foot.

Second, the spatial presence of an immaterial agent does not exclude the simultaneous presence of a body at the very same place. In other words, the 'togetherness' of the immaterial agent and the body acted upon is closer, or more intense, than in the case of two bodies. Unlike a moving body that acts by contiguity, by touching the outer surface of the body moved, the spiritual agent is not *next to*, but *in* the body in which it produces its effect. Kovach's label 'metaphysical contiguism' is, therefore, a misnomer.

Third, the 'contact' between the immaterial agent and the body moved is not symmetrical. Aquinas adopts Aristotle's comment that an immaterial agent 'touches' the body it works on, but is not touched by the body.³⁷ The asymmetry seems to indicate that the body moved cannot, in return, exert causal influence on the agent and also that the change or motion is unilateral, i.e., it can occur only in the body moved, without a corresponding change in the agent itself. Such a change is also known as a 'Cambridge change'.³⁸ These two characteristics associate the asymmetry to Aquinas' well-known, but often criticized doctrine of mixed relations, according to which a relation of A to B can be real (*realis*), while it is only logical (*rationis tantum*) in the

phrase 'per praesentiam' as the presence of God's essence in each creature and each place: *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 1 a. 2; *STh I*, q. 8 a. 3 and ad 1; *In Joh* 1,5 § 134; *Comp Theol I*, c. 135.

³⁵ E.g. *STh I*, q. 76 a. 8.

³⁶ The spatial presence of the angel is confined to the dimensions of the body she works in: cf. *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 3 a. 3 ad 4: 'Et similiter, quamvis effectus angeli non recipiatur intra esse corporis cuius non est causa, recipitur tamen intra dimensiones ejus, ratione cuius angelus intrinsecus corpori dici potest'.

³⁷ Cf. e.g. *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 3 a. 1; *In VIII Phys*, l. 11 n. 3; *ScG II*, c. 56 n. 3; *STh I*, q. 105 a. 2 ad 1; *Quodl 2*, q. 7 a. 1 ad 1. Aquinas uses several expressions to distinguish between the contact of two bodies and the contact of a spiritual agent and a body: on the one hand, *contactus per quantitatem dimensionam* or *proprie* or *magnitudinis* and, on the other hand, *contactus per quantitatem virtualem* or *metaphorice* or *virtutis*.

³⁸ The expression 'Cambridge change' was coined by Peter Geach in order to refer to the views on change of Cambridge philosophers like McTaggart and Russell: Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge, 1969), pp. 71-72.

reversed order of B to A. Aquinas considers the relations between God and world, or between knower and thing known, as examples of mixed relations. I shall not go into a discussion about mixed relations, but I think that the non-reciprocity of causal influence and the unilaterality of intrinsic change are necessary, though possibly not sufficient, conditions for such a relation.³⁹ In other words, there might be more involved in the notion of an immaterial agent that touches a body without itself being touched by it than only non-reciprocal causality and Cambridge changes. It is interesting that Aquinas restores the symmetry between the immaterial, divine agent and the material, human patient, at least verbally, when he speaks about how God is present to the believer by grace, that is, as the object of faith and charity. Then the creature is said to touch (*attingit*) God's own substance.⁴⁰ Of course, also in the case of grace, God cannot be acted upon by a creature, nor does He become mutable. This suggests that there is more to the not-being-touched of the immaterial agent than just these two elements. Furthermore, talking about the believer 'touching' the divine substance, might hint at God being in some kind of real, and not only logical, relation to human beings who, by grace, become 'partakers in the divine nature' (2 Petr 1,4). However, pursuing these speculative questions further would take us far beyond the limits of this paper. For now, therefore, we may safely stick to Sarah Waterlow's more general paraphrase of the asymmetry: the incorporeal agent 'reaches to the patient but without the patient's in turn reaching to it'.⁴¹

While the expression 'non-circumscriptive' applies to both created spiritual substances and to God, Aquinas also indicates, with the expression 'non-definitive', a fundamental difference between the spatiality of the divine agent and the spatiality of created immaterial agents. The causal power of a created spiritual substance is limited and that is why, according to Aquinas, it can only cause one effect in a particular body at one time. The consequence is that a created spiritual substance can only be in one place at a

³⁹ For more discussions on mixed relations and for further references, see e.g: Ernest Muller, 'Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Thomas's Understanding of God's Relation to the World', *Theological Studies* 56 (1995), pp. 673-95; Michael-Thomas Liske, 'Kann Gott reale Beziehungen zu den Geschöpfen haben? Logisch-theologische Betrachtungen im Anschluß an Thomas von Aquin', *Theologie und Philosophie* 68 (1993), pp. 208-228; Thomas Ward, 'How Aquinas Could Have Argued that God is Really Related to Creatures', *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* 6 (2006), pp. 95-107. Aquinas states that God's ubiquity involves a mixed relation in: *In I Sent.* d. 14, q. 2 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 1: '[C]um dicitur Deus esse ubique, importatur quaedam relatio Dei ad creaturam, quae quidem realiter non est in ipso, sed in creatura.'

⁴⁰ *In I Sent.* d. 37, q. 1 a. 2: 'Secundo creatura attingit ad ipsum Deum secundum substantiam suam consideratum, [...] et hoc est per operationem; scilicet quando aliquis fide adhaeret ipsi primae veritati, et caritate ipsi summae bonitati: et sic est alius modus quo Deus specialiter est in sanctis per gratiam.' Cf. also *In II Sent.* d. 1, q. 2 a. 2 ad 4; *STh I.* q. 43 a. 3.

⁴¹ See note 10.

time: it is *definitively* in a place.⁴² This is denied of God. His causal activity immediately reaches all there is, in every, or any, place. God is non-definitively spatially present and only God is truly omnipresent.⁴³ In the next section, I shall discuss the question of why the angel's causal activity and, hence its spatial presence, is limited to one place at a time, while God's activity and presence extends over all that there is and, hence, over all places.

4. Via eminentiae

In the third step of the *triplex via*, the *via eminentiae*, God's spatial presence is reconfirmed but now with special attention to its higher, or eminent, mode, in comparison to the spatial presence of both corporeal and incorporeal creatures. The eminent mode was already partly indicated in the previous section, in the discussion on the difference between corporeal and incorporeal movers. The spatial presence of incorporeal movers like the human soul, angels or God is non-circumscriptive, which means – at least – (1) that the spatiality of such a mover exceeds the quantitative divisions and measurements of space (2) that, by being *within* the body moved, the spiritual agent is nearer to it than any other body ever can be, (3) that the spatial presence does not affect the incorporeal agent. However, in the case of the divine incorporeal agent, the eminent mode of spatial presence includes more than just these three aspects. I shall try to argue that this has to do with the proper effect of the divine agent, *viz.* being (*esse*).

In the previous section, we noted that Aquinas indicates the contrast between the spatiality of an angel or the human soul, and the spatiality of God, with the expression 'non-definitively'. An angel or human soul can be only in *one* place at a time (i.e., definitively), while God is always everywhere. The question of why a human soul can only be in one place at a time, is less urgent insofar as the human soul is also the substantial form of the human body and, therefore, intrinsically related to one particular body and place. This does not go for angels. The reason Aquinas gives as to why an angel is definitively in a place, is always the limited essence, and hence, the limited power of the angel as against the infinite essence and power of

⁴² *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 3 a. 2; *STh I*, q. 52 a. 2. The same issue also plays a role in discussions about the sacramental presence of Christ's body: *In IV Sent*, d. 10, q. 1 a. 3 qc. 2.

⁴³ Only God is *primo et per se* omnipresent, but Aquinas also considers how universals, prime matter, one infinite body, and the whole of material creation could be said to be omnipresent, though not *primo et per se*: *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 2 a. 2; *Quodl* 11, q. 1; *STh I*, q. 8 a. 4.

God.⁴⁴ However, the argument from the finiteness of angelic power seems inconclusive. It may suffice to show that an angel cannot be in all places simultaneously, but it does not explain why an angel can only be at one, and not at two or three places at a time. The sun, for example, has also a limited power, but it illuminates many places at the same time.

I would like to propose a different argument to explain why an angel is definitively in a place. This argument is not explicitly found in Aquinas, but it draws on some of his basic insights. In my view, the crucial reason for an angel being definitively in a place, has not so much to do with the plurality of effects, but with their concreteness, their individual particularity, their being here-and-now. The sun can only be the *universal* cause of a number of simultaneous *particular* effects at many different places because it is a mediated cause. Its effect is transmitted through the air until it reaches the ultimate effect: the illumination of this or that particular surface. The same goes for its generative power, which only results in the coming to be of an individual new plant or animal through the mediation of a particular proximate cause, *viz.* the generative power of this or that plant or animal. Or take the example of a queen, whose orders will only effectively be carried out throughout her kingdom through intermediaries, ranging from the prime minister down to the lowest official, like a rural constable, and only the last one will finally put the royal order concretely into effect at a particular place and time.

From the contact principle, which has been discussed in the section on the *via causalitatis*, it follows that some *immediate* cause is always needed for a particular, concrete, individual effect to take place here and now.⁴⁵ It is clear that if the immediate agent cause is a body, it can only realize one such concrete, particular effect at a time, because it can only be in one place at a time. Now, if we extend this to immediate *incorporeal* agents, it follows that

⁴⁴ *In I Sent*, d. 37, q. 3 a. 2: 'Ideo autem dico quod non potest esse in pluribus locis simul, quia est naturae finitae, et per consequens virtutis finitae. Impossibile est autem quod ab una virtute finita procedat nisi una operatio. Operatio autem una est quae terminatur ad unum operatum: et ideo oportet quod operatum Angeli sit unum, circa quod immediate operatur'; *In IV Sent*, d. 10, q. 1 a. 3 qc. 2: 'Et ideo omne quod habet quantitatem finitam, vel virtutem, oportet quod sit definitive in loco in quo est; et ideo Angeli definitive sunt in loco, non tamen Deus'; *STh I*, q. 52 a. 2: 'Virtus autem angeli, quia finita est, non se extendit ad omnia, sed ad aliquid unum determinatum', and q. 112 a. 1: 'Virtus autem angeli, cum sit particulare agens, non attingit totum universum; sed sic attingit unum, quod non attingit aliud.'

⁴⁵ Cf. *ScG III*, c. 68 n. 4: 'Oportet autem causam particularem proprio effectui particulari adesse simul.' That which is changed or moved, is, as such, something concrete, existing here and now: cf. *In De Trin*, p. 3 q. 5 a. 2 co. 2: 'Cum autem omnis motus tempore mensuretur et primus motus sit motus localis, quo remoto nullus alius motus inest, oportet quod secundum hoc aliquid sit mobile, quod est hic et nunc. Hoc autem consequitur rem ipsam mobilem, secundum quod est individuata per materiam existentem sub dimensionibus signatis.' Cf. also *ScG I*, c. 65 n. 8.

an angel can cause only one concrete, particular effect at a time and, hence, can only be in one place at a time. This argument is, I think, more convincing than the argument from the limitation of angelic power. However, I admit that extending the principle ‘one immediate cause can only have one particular effect’ from corporeal to incorporeal agents cannot be justified by means of some demonstrative proof. Furthermore, there is something circular in this argument. In a way, it assumes what needs to be shown, *viz.* that an angel can only be in one place at a time. But the circle need not be vicious. It can help us to get a better idea of what it is that God causes immediately, *viz.* ‘being’ (*esse*) as such.

It is not easy to determine what Aquinas means by *esse*.⁴⁶ It has different aspects. The *esse commune* is said to express the logical, indeterminate notion of being that is common to all creatures; the *perfectio essendi* focuses on being as ‘the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections’, (*De Pot* q. 7 a. 2 ad 9). More relevant for our discussion is a third aspect of being, which is usually associated with the expression the *actus essendi* and which stresses the individuality, singularity, unique incommunicability, subsistence and concrete here and now of every thing.⁴⁷ Often, Aquinas speaks of ‘proper being’ (*esse proprium*) to indicate the concrete, here-and-now existence of individual things.⁴⁸ God is the universal cause that gives being, but it is not a being that is subsequently particularized and individualized by intermediate causes; God gives immediately each creature its own, proper mode of being.

If we understand the being that God immediately gives, as the proper, concrete, here-and-now being of each individual thing, we can clarify two

⁴⁶ Cf. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 86: ‘Thomas may be a profound and systematic thinker, but as regards his conception of *esse* he proceeds rather intuitively without offering anywhere a systematically articulated justification. His way of dealing with *esse* exhibits a certain intuitive accuracy and directness.’

⁴⁷ Cf. Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 184-206 (incl. references). It was Etienne Gilson who rediscovered and emphasized the ‘existential’ aspect of *esse* in Aquinas.

⁴⁸ *ScG* I, c. 14 n. 2: ‘Habet enim res unaquaeque in seipsa esse proprium ab omnibus aliis rebus distinctum’; *ScG* I, c. 42 n. 14: ‘Item. Esse proprium uniuscuiusque rei est tantum unum.’; *De Ver.*, q. 2 a. 11: ‘[...] cum esse quod est proprium unius rei non possit alteri communicari [...]’; *De Ver.*, q. 22 a. 12: ‘Agere autem et moveri convenit rebus secundum esse proprium quo in seipsis subsistunt.’; *De Ver.*, q. 27 a. 1 ad 8: ‘[...] non enim subsistunt, ideo proprium esse non habent.’; *De Pot.*, q. 7 a. 3: ‘[...] quia nihil ponitur in genere secundum esse suum, sed ratione quidditatis suae; quod ex hoc patet, quia esse uniuscuiusque est ei proprium, et distinctum ab esse cuiuslibet alterius rei; sed ratio substantiae potest esse communis.’ Cf also: *In I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1 a. 1 ad 2: ‘[E]sse simpliciter non est nisi individuorum’; *De An.*, a. 1 ad 2: ‘Unumquodque secundum idem habet esse et individuationem.’

things.⁴⁹ First, it makes the non-definitive mode of God's spatial presence, as contrasted with an angel's being definitively in a place, more intelligible. Above, I formulated the principle that an incorporeal, immediate agent can have only one particular effect, and that this explains why an angel can be only in one place at a time. When we apply this principle to God's agency, we find that his immediate 'particular' effect is precisely the actual, proper being and, hence, the concrete particularity itself of the effect. God gives each creature its own mode of being and is present in each thing according to its particular mode of being.⁵⁰ Because God gives the *esse* that makes a thing exist here-and-now, his immediate agency is not limited to one place (here) at a time (now), but extends to all places at all times. This may become even more apparent if we take into account that in conformity with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the principle of individuation in corporeal beings, *viz.* matter, can only be caused by God, which principle also goes for the matter of the body that an angel assumes. We saw that the spatial presence of an immaterial, created agent does not exclude the simultaneous presence of a body at the very same place. But in the case of God, his spatial presence not only allows the presence of the body at the same place, but is absolutely necessary in order for the body to be there at all. Without God's giving of being, there would be no material bodies, no space, no places, no time.

The second element that can be better appreciated if we understand the being that God gives as the proper being of each individual thing, is the eminent mode in which God is present to each individual thing. As discussed above, an immaterial agent, such as a soul, or an angel, is more intimately present to a corporeal being than any other body because it is *in* the body itself. In some way, God's presence reaches even deeper, for he is where the innermost heart of every thing is: the thing's own being, its act of existence

⁴⁹ God is the immediate and unique cause of being as such (*esse simpliciter*) but this does not exclude the fact that created causes can give substantial being-this (*esse hoc*) or accidental being-such (*esse tale*), though only in virtue of God's causality. See e.g.: *ScG* II, c. 21 n. 4: 'Causa igitur propria essendi est agens primum et universale, quod Deus est. Alia vero agentia non sunt causa essendi simpliciter, sed causa essendi hoc, ut hominem vel album.'; *ScG* III, c. 66 n. 6: 'Primum autem in omnibus effectibus est esse: nam omnia alia sunt quaedam determinationes ipsius. Igitur esse est proprius effectus primi agentis, et omnia alia agunt ipsum in quantum agunt in virtute primi agentis.' Cf. John Wippel, 'Thomas Aquinas on Creatures as Causes of *Esse*', in id., *Metaphysical Themes II*, pp. 172-193 and te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp. 160-183.

⁵⁰ *De Ver*, q. 10 a. 11 ad 8. 'Quamvis [Deus, H.G.] autem creaturis omnibus communiter det esse, tamen cuilibet creaturae dat proprium modum essendi; et sic etiam quantum ad hoc quod in omnibus est per essentiam, praesentiam, potentiam, invenitur esse diversimode in diversis, et in unoquoque secundum proprium eius modum.'; *Quodl*, 11, q. 1: 'Sed Deus ita est ubique, quod est in quolibet et in toto; quia eius virtus habet efficaciam non solum in id quod est commune universo, sed etiam in id quod est proprium unicuique rei particulari.'

by which it is real and actual. We find some of Aquinas' most quoted phrases about being precisely in the context of God's omnipresence:

God is most intimate in everything, as the proper being of a thing is most intimate in the thing itself.⁵¹

Being is that which is more intimate in everything and which is more profoundly in all things, because it is formal with respect to all that is in reality [...] Therefore, God needs to be in all things, and intimately.⁵²

Because being is most intimate in everything, God, who gives being by working, works in things as a most intimate agent [...] Therefore, because the being of a thing is most intimate in everything, it is clear that God is in all things by his essence, through which he creates all things.⁵³

Spatial expressions fail to express God's innermost presence. He is in each creature at the deepest level, in its innermost core, at the foundation of its being. In a very qualified sense, one might even say that God is not only *in* each thing, but that he *is* each thing.⁵⁴ But at the same time, this apparently pantheistic statement has to be denied. Precisely in that in which the creature is like God, *viz.* in being, it also differs from God: the creature is composed of both being and essence, while in God they are identical. Aquinas also expresses the non-identity of being and essence in the creature with the notion of participation: The creature is by participation what God is essentially. However, the very notion of participation not only expresses the non-identity of being and essence in creatures, it also conveys the intrinsic relationship of created being with divine being, as Rudi te Velde has pointed out.⁵⁵ Aquinas can even say that every creature participates in divine being

⁵¹ *In I Sent*, d. 37 q. 1 a. 1: 'Deus est unicuique intimus, sicut esse proprium rei est intimum ipsi rei.' The Latin *intimus* is the superlative of *inter*. Lewis and Short give 'innermost', 'deepest' and 'most intimate' as English translations.

⁵² *STh* I, q. 8 a. 1: 'Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt [...] Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime.'

⁵³ *In Joh* 1,5 § 133: 'Cum ergo esse sit intimum cuilibet rei, Deus, qui operando dat esse, operatur in rebus ut intimus agens'; *ibid.* § 134: 'Unde, cum esse rei sit intimum in qualibet re, manifestum est quod Deus per essentiam suam, per quam omnia creat, sit in omnibus rebus.' Cf. also: *De Pot*, q. 3 a. 7: 'Ipsium enim esse est communissimus effectus primus et intimior omnibus aliis effectibus; et ideo soli Deo competit secundum virtutem propriam talis effectus.'

⁵⁴ *In I Sent*, d. 8, q. 1 a. 2: 'Deus est esse omnium', which is immediately qualified by the following 'non essentiale, sed causale'.

⁵⁵ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 140: 'From this it becomes clear that the finite cannot be simply divided over against the infinite. It expresses in itself a form of identity with the infinite, which may be formulated by saying that to be finite means to be the infinite in a finite (limited, particular) manner. And this is precisely what the notion of participation intends to convey.' On p. 141, te Velde gives an interpretation of the composition of essence

(*esse*).⁵⁶ Therefore, the notion of participation can make clear in what sense God is more intimately and eminently present to each creature, including each corporeal creature, than any created immaterial agent is to a body. The eminent mode of God's presence in material creatures must, then, also imply an eminent mode of being spatially present. Finally, considering that each thing is not identical with its being but *has* its being, some Thomists have even gone so far as to say that 'God is more intimately united to things than things are to themselves', thereby echoing Augustine's *interior intimo meo*.⁵⁷

5. Conclusion

Although God, being immaterial, is not essentially located in space, he is spatially present, with his essence, as cause of material, spatial beings. Aquinas explains this presence with two arguments taken from ordinary, created causality (*via causalitatis*). The first one, derived from Aristotle, says that mover and moved, agent and patient, must be together and that action at a distance is impossible. We see that a body only causes another body to move by immediate contact. The 'contact principle' is then transferred to immaterial agents: they must also be together so that the agent is where the patient is. The second argument is taken from Avicenna and states that if an effect is not rooted in the nature of the patient, the permanent presence of the cause is necessary. For instance, as being illuminated requires the constant activity of the sun, so God's giving of being, and hence his presence, must remain as long as the creature exists. God, then, must be present to all corporeal things, and all places, because he is the immediate and permanent giver of being.

At the same time, Aquinas denies that we have a clear concept of *how* God is spatially present (*via negationis*). He is neither circumscriptively present like bodies, nor definitively present, like incorporeal created agents. God is not spatially extended by parts, his presence does not exclude the simultaneous presence of a body at the same place, he is not affected by the

and being by means of the notion of 'participation': 'Participation qualifies the sense of the metaphysical composition: the essence has no determination of its own apart from the *esse* it participates, as if *esse* adds only the actual existence to the essence. The essence (or form) is, in itself, *participans esse*.' Cf. also p. 131.

⁵⁶ *In I Sent*, d. 8, q. 1 a. 2 s.c. 2 (the *sed contra* seems to render Aquinas' own view), *In II Sent*, d. 2, q. 1 a. 1 and d. 3 q. 1 a. 5; *STh* III, q. 57 a. 4; *In De Div Nom*, c. 2 l. 4 n. 177; *Comp Theol* I, c. 135. Te Velde remarks that 'the creature is never said to participate in God himself or in the divine being', except in the context of grace: *Aquinas on God*, p. 146, note 49. Unless he means by 'being' the Latin *essentia*, this is not correct.

⁵⁷ Cf. James Anderson, 'The Creative Ubiquity of God', *New Scholasticism* 25 (1951), pp. 139-162, esp. 161-162.

body or place in which he is present, and he is not limited to only one body and place at a time.

These negations are not meant to detract from his spatial presence. On the contrary, they indicate the profoundness and intimacy with which God is present (*via eminentiae*). As the giver of the particular, individual being (*esse*) of each thing, he is most intimately present in each thing; and insofar as he is in corporeal, spatial things, he is most intimately present in space.

Some of Aquinas' examples are less persuasive for us now because of developments in the natural sciences. Furthermore, not all of Aquinas' arguments are equally compelling. For example, the universality of the 'contact principle' and the impossibility of action at a distance in physical changes might be disputed on scientific grounds, as some quantum theorists do. The validity of expanding the 'contact principle' from corporeal to incorporeal agents is not immediately clear. The argument from the limitation of created power to account for the spatial presence of an angel being limited to one place at a time, is not convincing in itself. I have tried to improve the last one, but the justifiability of the first two arguments remains an open question. But maybe we should not look so much for independent and a priori proofs of religious truths in Aquinas. The Christian already believes that God is everywhere. In all the major texts that deal with omnipresence, specific quotations from Scripture play a crucial role, in particular Jeremiah 23,24: 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord', and Psalm 139,7-10:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.⁵⁸

Being a *magister in Sacra Pagina*, it is not Aquinas' task to prove its truth from non-theological arguments, but rather to explain how these biblical texts are to be understood. In this enterprise, conceptual elucidation, reasoning by analogy and generalization are as helpful as deductive proofs.

There are a number of issues I have not addressed in this paper. For example, the metaphysical status of space and places as distinct from bodies, the possibility of a void, the empyrean heaven as a place where the angels were created, and the angels' movement of celestial bodies. Also the comparison of Aquinas' views with those of his contemporaries might be helpful.⁵⁹ But in the limited space of this paper I have tried to express and

⁵⁸ Cf. *In I Sent* d. 37 q. 1 a. 1 s.c. 1; *ScG* III, c. 68 n. 7; *STh* I, q. 8 a. 1 s.c. and a. 2 s.c.

⁵⁹ Fuerst, *Omnipresence*, gives good summaries of the texts on God's omnipresence of Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Odo Rigald and Bonaventure. For later discussions, see the studies mentioned in footnote 31.

analyse the main elements of Aquinas' view on God's omnipresence. Precisely as the Creator God, who transcends space and time, he is most intimately and immanently present in the whole of his creation.