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Published in:
Jaarboek Thomas-Instituut te Utrecht

Publication date:
2007

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Schoot, H. J. M. (2007). Holy, Holy, Holy. A plea for the holiness of theology. *Jaarboek Thomas-Instituut te Utrecht*, 26, 7-33.

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Utrecht, 26 January 2007

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY,
A plea for the holiness of theology¹

Your Eminence, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We are familiar with the threefold repetition of the word ‘holy’, from the celebration of the Eucharist.² This hymn at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer marks a high point in the liturgy, and is very old, dating back at least to the end of the first century after Christ.³ The earthly liturgy combines with the liturgy of the angels in heaven: heaven and earth become one, just as they do in the person of Christ himself. The words of the acclamation are taken from different parts of the scriptures, and evoke various associations, of which I will mention two.

In the first place, the acclamation reminds us of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21). The ‘hosanna’ is followed by suffering and death, and that is also what is brought to the fore in the Eucharistic Prayer. It would be too much to say that this sequence also reminds us of the rise and fall of interest in the work of Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274).⁴ Nevertheless, it is so, that with the close of the period of textbook theology, that is to say, in the 1950’s, the influence of Thomas Aquinas, i.e. neo-Thomism, also fades. In fact, from the nineteenth century, Thomas was principally used in the battle against modernity and therefore acquired the exclusive image of philosopher and apologist. This function has led to a serious distortion of Thomas. If we ask for renewed attention for Thomas today, then it is for another Thomas: Thomas as bible scholar and theologian. In fact, remarkably enough it appears that over the last few years Thomas has again become a source of inspiration, principally for the Church, cultural critics, philosophers and ethicists, as a basis for discussing the current views and ideas of modernity. In this context I would mention the encyclicals *Veritatis*

¹ Translation of *Heilig, Heilig, Heilig. Een pleidooi voor de heiligheid van de theologie*, Tilburg 2007 (ISBN 978-90-78886-01-3). Translated by Bryony Lee-Goddard.

² “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest”.

³ Cf. Andrew Louth, *Theologische Realencyclopädie* 34 (2002) 121-124; David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook*, Oxford 1993, 161-165; Ad de Keyzer, *Om voor Gods Gelaat te Staan. Een expositio missae*, Baarn: Gooi & Sticht 1999, 147-148. The *Sanctus* should not be confused with the *Trishagion* or *Tersanctus*. The latter is an old Christian hymn that occupies a central role in, in particular, the Eastern Orthodox liturgy: “Holy God, holy Strong, holy Immortal, have mercy on us”. In the West this hymn is still found in the Reproaches, the *improperia*, in the Good Friday liturgy.

⁴ As abbreviations I use *ScG* for the *Summa contra gentiles*, *SN* for the *Scriptum super Sententiis*, *STh* for the *Summa Theologiae*. References to Thomas’ biblical commentaries are preceded by *In* (*Is*, *Jn*, *Heb* etc.). These and other quoted works of Thomas are available in the usual places and also on www.corpusthomicum.org.

Splendor and, in particular, *Fides et Ratio*, and I would point to important thinkers such as Alasdair McIntyre⁵, Jean-Luc Marion⁶, Jürgen Habermas⁷, John Milbank⁸ and the whole intellectual movement referred to as Radical Orthodoxy.⁹ Thomas is once again completely back in the focus of attention, as witness the enormous number of introductions and studies which have been dedicated to his thought.¹⁰ The great difference from the earlier situation, and I would like to emphasize this, is that those who are now interested in his work are, to an important extent, children of modernity: children of a secularized world and a secularized intellectualism. They ask themselves whether the dominant liberal ideas of how the world is structured really reflect the human experience and expectations of justice, truth and love.¹¹ We are warned by previous experience, but nevertheless, once again, hosanna.

In the second place, the threefold ‘holy’ reminds us of the calling of the prophet Isaiah.¹² Angels come from heaven with a glowing coal to touch the lips of the prophet. Now, in medieval theology, prophecy is the place where one discusses the revelational character of speaking about God. God has revealed himself, and where the Church Fathers and theologians speak from revelation, they follow in the footsteps of the prophets. Thus, the calling of the prophet automatically puts us on the trail of the calling of the theologian. The glowing coals that Isaiah mentions reminds me, in any case, of the dangers associated with the practice of theology. It is a dangerous, or, in the words of Ferdinand de Grijs, precarious enterprise.¹³ Isaiah says this too: “Woe

⁵ *After Virtue*, London: Duckworth 1985²; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, London: Duckworth 1988; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, London: Duckworth 1990.

⁶ ‘Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’Onto-théologie’, in *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995) 31-66, referring back to earlier interpretations of Thomas in *Dieu sans l’être*, Paris, various editions from 1982.

⁷ According to an Italian article by Habermas, reviewed by Kreuz.net. Habermas is impressed by the seriousness and clarity of Thomas’ theology which, on the other hand, he misses so much in the “lamentable thinking” of present-day theology (<http://www.kreuz.net/article.177.html>, 23 November 2004).

⁸ *Theology and Social Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell 1990; with Catherine Pickstock: *Truth in Aquinas*, London: Routledge 2001.

⁹ *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds.), London: Routledge 1998; *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, James K.A. Smith, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic 2004.

¹⁰ Fergus Kerr speaks of a ‘revival of interest’, *After Aquinas. Versions of Thomism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

¹¹ Theologians who belong to this ‘school’ have the common characteristic that they do not choose the correlation of revelation and experience, of theology and other disciplines, as their primary theological method, and are therefore not looking for a general agreement as the foundation of their theological approach, but are ‘nonfoundationalist’. They regard the traditional view of the theology of Thomas Aquinas, in which there is a sharp division between the natural and the supernatural, as incorrect, arising mainly from the Cartesian revolution in philosophy and, hence, theology. But the starting point is not ‘I think’ (*cogito*) but that God thinks of me. From the Catholic side it is principally the work of David Burrell (e.g. *Aquinas, God and Action*, Notre Dame IN: IND press, 1979) and Nicholas Lash that offers inspiration in this respect.

¹² Is 6,3 et seq. See also Rev 4,8

¹³ De Grijs distinguishes a fourfold precariousness of theology, with the emphasis on the fourth of the mentioned aspects: theology as a controversial discipline in the university, theology as a religious discipline associated with the Church, theology with a history associated with oppression, lack of

is me! I must be silent.....”(6.5). There is, actually, little in theology that lends itself to argumentation, to straightforward language. There is little in theology that can be developed independently of the person who reads, considers, interprets and, where necessary, communicates. The person who practices theology is part of what is being expounded, which means that he, or she, in all manner of ways, is risking his or her very self.¹⁴

These two associations of the threefold ‘holy’, that is, the place of Thomas in theology over the last few decades and the practice of theology as a precarious calling, lead to what I want to discuss today, that is, holiness: the holiness of the practice of theology, and the possible role of Thomas in it. In the first place I would like to go somewhat deeper into the generality or ordinariness of the calling to holiness. The calling to holiness, however difficult and anticultural that word may be¹⁵, applies to every Christian, and, in a certain sense, all Christians may be called holy. In the New Testament, it is sometimes used as a synonym for Christian. The discussion of Vatican II on this subject will lead us to Thomas’ analysis of holiness. I shall then discuss the source of all holiness, namely the person of Christ, who is referred to as the ‘Holy One’ in the New Testament, and is most especially made present in that holy act, the sacrament of the Eucharist. It will offer an opportunity to consider some aspects of Thomas’ theology of the name of Christ, a subject that is particularly dear to me. Thirdly, this will lead of its own accord to the three key words with which I wish to characterize Thomas’ concept of theology, namely, analogy, *auctoritas*, and *nexus mysteriorum*. I shall then show these in miniature using the concept of holiness. There are then two texts which I shall use to further elucidate Thomas’ conception of theology, namely the inaugural lecture given by Thomas himself in 1256, and the very first question of the *Summa Theologiae*, where Thomas presents theology as *sacra doctrina* or holy teaching. Finally, I shall try to show various links to the theology of today.

1. Holy and holiness

freedom, threats, torture and murder, and theology as dealing with the living God himself. “Het hachelijke van de theologie”, in: *Levenslang wachten op U. Teksten over de Godsvraag in deze tijd*, On the occasion of Professor J.T. Bakker’s farewell as professor at the Theologische Universiteit Kampen, G.W. Neven (ed.), Kampen: Kok 1988, 30-48.

¹⁴ Cf. *STh* II-II 45.2: The wise person teaches, but through love he also experiences what he teaches. Love unites him with God, and gives him a sympathy or connaturality that enables him to judge correctly about the things of God. Cf. I 1.6 ad 3.

¹⁵ Gavin d’Costa expresses a deep insight into the offence that holiness gives to many: “Being ‘holy’ has always been offensive for it touches our deepest fears, taboos, and fantasies, and calls into question the complex ways in which we construct our world.” D’Costa also demonstrates what he means with a study of the controversial holiness of Roop Kanwar, a Hindu woman who revealed herself as a *sati* (literally ‘virtuous woman’) on 4 September 1987 by willingly being burned as a widow, and of Saint Edith Stein, a Catholic nun and philosopher of Jewish origin who was murdered as a Jewess by the Nazis. *Theology in the Public Square. Church, Academy and Nation*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, quotation on page 147 et seq. Unlike Rudolf Otto or William James, D’Costa does not regard holiness as a ‘cross-religious’ concept, but as a word to be interpreted analogically, in which the differences in significance are much greater than the agreements. see 147, 167 et seq.

Someone answered the question of what a saint actually is with the statement: a saint is someone who has a successful relationship with God.¹⁶ Holiness can therefore be described as a life-long striving to achieve a successful relationship with God. It is the saints who know who God is, and in whom his mercy is visible. But in *Lumen Gentium*, the Vatican II constitution on the Church, a whole chapter is devoted to what is referred to as the ‘universal call to holiness’.¹⁷ All of those who are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are called upon to make their lives holy.

Here we see a classic reversal of the pattern of expectation. In the Catholic vision, man does not strive for holiness because he is not yet holy. On the contrary, man strives for holiness, because he has already received the spirit of holiness, the Holy Spirit, in baptism. Holiness is not a question, but an answer. Holiness is a way out of impurity and corruption, out of jealousy and untruthfulness, out of injustice and unfaithfulness, because the way has been received. It has been given. Only a few years ago, Pope John Paul II designated the striving for holiness, as a striving towards purity and renewal, as the central perspective and foundation of the Church of the third millennium.¹⁸

Fundamentally, ‘holy’ means little more than: ‘belonging to God’, ‘set apart for God’. Thomas says it in all sobriety when he explains the name of the Holy Spirit: “holiness refers to those things which have an ordering towards God”.¹⁹ And everything that belongs to God, everything that is holy, must not be touched, let alone defiled or damaged. For example, God, by the burning bush, says to Moses: “do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3, 5-6). Fundamentally, thus, holiness means that people come closer to God, and the possibility of such a life exists, because God has come closer to man, by revealing himself and making known his holy name.

Thomas refers to this fundamental holiness as *gratia gratum faciens*, the grace that makes the recipient pleasing in the eyes of God, or *gratia sanctificans*, the grace that

¹⁶ F.J.A. de Grijns, “Heiligen, wat zijn dat eigenlijk?” (Saints, what are they really?) in: R.E.V. Stuip and C. Vellekoop (eds.), *Andere structuren, andere heiligen. Het veranderende beeld van de heilige in de Middeleeuwen*, Utrecht: HES Uitgevers 1983, 13-32.

¹⁷ *Lumen Gentium* Chapter V: ‘The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church’. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, document of the II Vatican Council. Of the four characteristics of the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) *LG* places the main emphasis on holiness. The Church is holy because Christ, who alone is the Holy One, unites Himself with her, and has given Himself for her to make her holy. The Church is the body of Christ, who gives her the gift of the Holy Spirit. Every member of the Church is called to holiness: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Thess 4,3; cf. Eph 1,4). Thomas, explaining the adjective ‘holy’ with ‘Church’ in the Creed, says in his commentary that the Church is holy because the faithful are holy, sanctified by the blood of Christ, the unction of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of the Trinity, and by being called by God. The *Dogmatic Constitution* mentions a large number of sorts of people (bishops, priests, deacons, clergy, laity, spouses and parents, widows and the unmarried, those who do heavy work, the poor, the sick, the persecuted) but forgets to mention the theologians. This was put right in 1990 with the publication by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, *Donum veritatis*: “The commitment to theology requires a spiritual effort to grow in virtue and holiness” (nr. 9).

¹⁸ Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to the bishops, clergy and lay faithful at the close of the great jubilee of the year 2000; 30: “First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*.”

¹⁹ *STh* I 31.1 c: “Sanctitas vero illis rebus attribuitur, quae in Deum ordinantur.”

makes holy. It is the grace that no man can acquire for himself, and which has its origin in the suffering and death of Christ.²⁰ The suffering and death of Christ are the source of the sacraments, and the sacraments are simply holy signs that bring about holiness, according to Thomas.²¹

If we examine the significance that Thomas attaches to the words *Sanctus* and *Sanctitas* more closely, it becomes evident that their application can be divided into three: application to things, to men, and to God.²² Things can be called holy because they are intended for the service of God, such as the sacred vessels or a sacred building. People can be called holy; Thomas regards holiness in this sense as a virtue which people have to practice in order to direct their lives to the will of God. Two words are central to Thomas' explanation: purity, *munditia*, and constancy, *firmitas*. Here, Thomas directs himself towards two key passages in the scriptures.²³ He bases purity on Heb. 12, 14: "strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no-one will see the Lord". In order to unite itself with God, the human spirit has to withdraw from what is lower, and direct itself to what is higher; sin and guilt have to be washed away. *Firmitas* is an interesting word. Thomas relates it to the holy things that, in antiquity, were protected by law and must not be violated. Thus, *firmitas* stands for inviolability. But Thomas associates this *firmitas* with Rom. 8, 38-

²⁰ In addition to sanctifying grace, Thomas recognizes the *gratia gratis datum*, literally, the grace freely given. The most significant difference between the two is that man obtains the first for himself, but the second not for himself but for others. Everyone who receives the sacrament of ordination in the Church shares, in a special way, in God's grace. The grace is not for himself, but in the service of the congregation to which he is sent. The gift of grace may be the gift of preaching, the gift of prophecy, the gift of distinguishing between what is and what is not from the Spirit, to mention just some of the gifts listed by Saint Paul (1 Cor 12,8). No-one can or shall glory in the grace which is a gift of service, a gift of personal condition. Thus, it is not this type of holiness that is referred to when Lumen Gentium talks about the calling to holiness. Because all those who are baptized must follow Christ. They are called to be what they already are, namely children of God.

²¹ "Sacramentum autem simpliciter est quod causat sanctitatem", 4SN1,1,1,3 ad 5.

²² Cf. 1SN 15, 5, 1, 1 ad 1: "Ad primum igitur dicendum, quod sanctificari tripliciter dicitur: uno modo secundum quod sanctum dicitur mundum, prout sanctificatio dicitur emundatio a peccato per gratiam; alio modo secundum quod sanctum dicitur firmum, prout dicitur sanctificatio, confirmatio in bono per donum gratiae vel gloriae, et istis duobus modis est tantum in rationali creatura, et secundum hos tantum fit missio; tertio modo dicitur sanctificatio, secundum quod aliquid accommodatur ad usum divini cultus, quem decet omnis munditia, et hoc modo dicuntur templum et vasa sanctificari." Cf. *In Jeremiam* 1, lectio 3, "Ad aliud dicendum, quod sanctum dicitur uno modo cultui divino dicatum; et sic res animatae et inanimatae sanctificari possunt: aliquando autem sanctum dicitur firmum, vel mundum vel a peccato, vel a carnali actu; et talis sanctificatio est per gratiam, et tantum in hominibus possibilis." In 4SN 1.1.1.1 c Thomas makes a distinction between who is holy (*simpliciter et per se - homo sanctus*) and what is related to holiness (*secundario et secundum quid - chrism, altar*).

²³ *STh* II-II 81.8 c: "Nomen sanctitatis duo videtur importare. Uno quidem modo, munditiam: et huic significationi competit nomen graecum, dicitur enim *agios* quasi *sine terra*. Alio modo importat firmitatem: unde apud antiquos *sancta* dicebantur quae legibus erant munita ut violari non deberent; unde et dicitur esse aliquid *sancitum* quia est lege firmatum. Potest etiam secundum Latinos hoc nomen *sanctus* ad munditiam pertinere: ut intelligatur sanctus quasi '*sanguine tinctus*', eo quod antiquitus illi qui purificari volebant sanguine hostiae tingeantur, ut Isidorus dicit, in libro *Etymol.*" The pair of concepts *mundari, confirmari* appear frequently in Thomas: e.g. 1SN 10.4 ad 4; 3SN 3.1.1.c; 3SN 3.1.2.1.c; 4SN 7.1.2.1 ad 1;

39, so that it appears in a somewhat different light. In Thomas' shortened version: "For I am sure that neither death nor life will be able to separate us from the love of God". Thus, from a legal matter, *firmitas* becomes a fruit of the love of God, reaching beyond death. Just as love is directed towards eternity, and nothing of love may be lost, so is it equally valid for the holiness that people receive from God, and in which they direct their lives towards God and prepare for the divine worship.²⁴ Thomas speaks of constancy, because it is precisely in the unchangeable beginning and end of all things, God, that the greatest possible *immobilitas* is found.²⁵

And this brings us to holiness as a property, as a name of God. Those who want to discover what Thomas thinks about this, will find it difficult. Although there is absolutely no doubt that Thomas also regards holiness as a divine property, there is almost nowhere where he explains its significance. When Thomas explains the threefold holy in Isaiah, he does not discuss the significance of *sanctus*. Other theologians close to him state emphatically that God is called holy here, because he calls on people to lead a holy life.²⁶ However, nothing of this kind can be found in Thomas. Together with the rest of the passage in Isaiah, 'holy' forms part of a heavenly song of praise, raised by the angels who sing it to God.²⁷ It is unclear whether, for Thomas, this gives holiness an aspect of hidden-ness, sovereignty and inaccessibility, as holiness is often interpreted²⁸. However, there is, of course, one divine name that is very relevant in this respect, and that is the name 'Holy Spirit'. And it is precisely when Thomas explains this name that we find an explanation of divine holiness. According to Thomas, the Spirit is called Holy – but the Father and Son can also be called holy (Augustine) – because this expresses the purity of God's goodness.²⁹ This reminds us of the purity associated with human holiness. But the

²⁴ The question in which Thomas comes to discuss *sanctitas*, is that of whether *religio* is the same virtue as *sanctitas*. For Thomas, *religio* does not mean religion, but the virtue with which man fulfills his duty to give God reverence to which he has a right as creator and ruler. As a moral virtue this falls into the category of the cardinal virtue of *iustitia*. Thomas answers that the two are related, but that *religio* is principally ordered towards liturgical acts, while *sanctitas* is to do with directing all the virtuous acts of man towards God or the divine service (*ibidem*).

²⁵ Unchangeableness as a name of God – in this context I take *immutabilitas* and *immobilitas* as synonymous – does not refer to a condition, such as that of a rock or something similar. Unchangeableness is the antithesis of changeability, of decay, of unfaithfulness. In fact, Thomas teaches that people should not behave as if they know what it means, as if they could describe it. As soon as one attempts to do that, ascribing unchangeableness to God loses its significance and turns into its opposite. 'Nothing and nobody can separate us from the love of God' (Ro 8, 39) is in fact a wonderful, but also negative, indication of unchangeability and constancy.

²⁶ E.g. Hugh of St.-Cher († 1263), *Super Apocalypsum 'Vidit Jacob'*, ch. IV (to be found in the writings added by R. Busa as material for comparison to Thomas' *Opera omnia*; see www.corpusthomicum.org). Thomas himself might have felt more at home with Lev 11,44: "Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy."

²⁷ Thomas specified the song of praise as praise for the three persons of the Trinity (*trinitas personarum*), for the sublimity of the one divinity that has precedence over everything (*majestas unitatis*), and for the generosity of God's caring for the whole world (*liberalitas provisionis*); *In Is.* VI, 1,1.

²⁸ G.-L. Müller, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* ², Vol. IV, 1326, Heiligkeit.

²⁹ *STh* I 31.1 ad 1: "Per hoc vero quod dicitur sanctus, significatur puritas divinae bonitatis." Thomas also says something similar in *De Rationibus Fidei* caput 4: "In Deo autem amor materialis locum non

holiness referred to here must be of a very different nature in view of the fact that God knows no sin or guilt. When we investigate the expression *'puritas bonitatis'* in Thomas, it appears that we are not dealing with a moral expression, but with an ontological one. The expression is derived from the neoplatonic writing *Liber de causis*, that was recognized for the first time by Thomas as a compilation, by an otherwise unknown Arabic philosopher, of texts that go back to the philosopher Proclus († 485 A.D., *Elementatio theologica*). The expression refers to the unalloyed, utterly simple and pure actuality of the divine being.³⁰ God needs nothing, God is unchangeable, God is pure goodness, and from this single, pure goodness comes the diversity of creation. From the studies of David Burrell, we know that we must interpret such a statement about God, principally as a formal, negative statement. We do not know what we are saying when we say that God is pure act, or being itself, but we are saying with this that he is not like the created things that we know around us. Thus, the word 'holy' acquires a clearly negative, denying content: God, the Holy Spirit, is not as we know the world, and precisely because of this he can be the origin, creator and final goal of the world. This way, it appears that, for Thomas, holiness does indeed have a fundamental aspect of sovereignty, inaccessibility and immutability.³¹

2. Christ the holy one

If we now come to talk about Christ, it appears that it is precisely this aspect of inaccessibility and absolute transcendence that is at stake. Is it not so that in Christ God comes close to us, and can therefore no longer be called holy in this sense?

habet. Convenienter igitur amorem ipsius non solum spiritum, sed spiritum sanctum nominamus, ut per hoc quod dicitur sanctus, eius puritas exprimitur.”

³⁰ *ScG* I, 26: “Unde Commentator in Libro de Causis dicit quod causa prima ex ipsa puritate suae bonitatis ab aliis distinguitur et quodammodo individuatur”. Nothing can be added to the divine being, but this does not make it an *ens commune*. Because *ens commune* cannot exist without a specific addition. For example, animal nature cannot exist without the specific differentiation between rationality or irrationality, while God does exist without a specific addition. Thus, the divine being is ‘esse proprium absque additione et receptibilitate additionis’. Cf. *QD De Veritate* 21,4 ad 9. In his own commentary on the *Liber de Causis* says straightforwardly: ‘Bonitas enim pura dicitur bonitas non participata, sed ipsa essentia bonitatis subsistens, quam Platonici vocabant *ipsum bonum*’ (lectio 9).

³¹ In this text from the *Compendium Theologiae* (I, 47), dealing with the holiness of the Spirit, all the preceding comes together: “Considerandum est autem, quod cum bonum amatum habeat rationem finis, ex fine autem motus voluntarius bonus vel malus reddatur, necesse est quod amor quo ipsum summum bonum amatur, quod Deus est, eminentem quamdam obtineat bonitatem, quae nomine sanctitatis exprimitur, sive dicatur sanctum quasi purum, secundum Graecos, quia in Deo est purissima bonitas ab omni defectu immunis: sive dicatur sanctum, idest firmum, secundum Latinos, quia in Deo est immutabilis bonitas, propter quod omnia quae ad Deum ordinantur, sancta dicuntur, sicut templum et vasa templi, et omnia divino cultui mancipata. Convenienter igitur spiritus, quo nobis insinuat amor quo Deus se amat, spiritus sanctus nominatur.” When the name ‘holy’ is used of God, it refers to God’s transcendental goodness: either in the sense of a goodness that is immune to any deficiency, or goodness that is constant and immovable. Everything else that is called holy is called holy because of its ordering to God, in the sense of being derivative. That holiness is the highest good, and sets man’s love in motion. It is therefore fitting that the Spirit that wants to unite us with the love of God is called ‘holy’.

Jesus is already given the name ‘holy’ in the first chapter of Luke. The angel Gabriel actually says to Mary: “Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the son of God” (Lk 1, 35).³² Jesus is also called ‘the holy one of God (Mk 1, 24; Jn 6,69) and ‘our sanctification’ (1Cor 1, 30).³³ Here, the name ‘holy’ refers back directly to the Holy Spirit who the angel said would overshadow Mary. From his very conception, the Incarnate Son of God belongs to God; his holiness is that of God, and his name is a program: to bring salvation.³⁴ When Jesus has been anointed with the Holy Spirit, it is his mission to declare the good news to the poor and to proclaim release to the captives (Lk 4). Thus, Jesus is not holy in the first place because he belongs to the temple, or because he strives towards ritual purity, or keeps the law. His pure holiness comes from his directedness towards the poor, prisoners, blind, oppressed, and all those who are hoping for God’s mercy; a directedness that ends in death. This makes him different. This gives the name ‘holy’ a new significance when Luke uses it to refer to Jesus. But the name does not only get a new significance. The ‘holy one of Israel’ (e.g. in Isaiah) appears to be someone who is human, but is connected to God in a special, unique way, so that he can be called the son of God. His holiness is constant and unwavering, due to his sanctification and holy relationship to God, and as son of God³⁵.

³² It is interesting that Thomas uses this passage from Luke seventeen times in the course of his writings (but, remarkably enough, not once in the *Scriptum* or the *Summa contra Gentiles*), and principally to show that Christ, in and according to his human nature, was without sin and the Son of God from the beginning of his incarnation. It shows that Christ never *became* the Son of God, but that his human nature, living in the divine sense, was united with the divine Son from the beginning. Christ’s human nature received the grace of holiness right from the beginning or, in other words, because he was begotten by the Holy Spirit, he was holy from the beginning. It should be noted that this holiness was thought of as a property of Christ’s human nature, due to its personal unification with the son of God, but without the human nature becoming divine. On the other hand, the grace of the union of God and man in Christ is not grace through indwelling, as in people who believe, but personal and unique to Christ. On this basis, Mary can not only be called mother of (the man) Christ, but also Mother of God (*De Articulis Fidei*. 1, c). See *STh* 2.11 c; 27.2 ad 2; 32.1 c; 34.1 s.c. en ad 2; 83.3 ad 2; *In Jn* 3, l. 1; 14, l. 8; *In Heb* 7, l. 4; *In Ro* 1, l. 3.

Here, thus, when Christ is called ‘holy’, the word is used analogically, by analogy with human believers who are called holy. But no human being is begotten by the Holy Spirit, and no human being is united with the Son of God in his actual person. That characterizes the unique holiness of Christ.

³³ See also Acts 4,27 (Jesus, Your holy servant, cf. 3,14; 4,30), Heb 7,26 (Holy high priest), 1 Jn 2,20 (the Holy One), Rev 3,7 (the Holy One, the True One).

³⁴ The original lecture was in Dutch, where there is a close similarity between the words *heil* (Salvation, wellbeing) and *heilig* (holy). For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that there is no direct relationship between the Dutch words. In the Latin, too, there is a distinction, and two different words are used: *salus* en *sanctus/sanctificatio*. ‘Salus’ generally refers to wellbeing, health, preservation, deliverance, safety and, in particular, to the content of Christ’s preaching and work. The name ‘Jesus’ has the same meaning: God is salvation and help. But ‘holy’, when applied to people and things, is more of a word implying a relationship, because it applies to people and things in relation to God (dedicated to, reverence for). The two areas of significance come together when human beings participate in sanctifying grace, and therefore come within reach of salvation.

³⁵ This is how Thomas interprets Isaiah, as can be seen in his commentary, but also in e.g. 4SN 47.1.1.3 ad 1 and *STh* III 36.1. According to Thomas, the holiness on the basis of which Christ is called holy is not an uncreated but a created holiness (3SN 3.5.3 c; cf. 1SN 15.5.1.4 ad 2 and 3SN 34.1 ad 2. See also

‘Holy’ is a good example of the analysis that Thomas applies to the names of Christ. His semantic interpretation of what is said about Christ must be seen as a continuation of his analysis of what is said about God. In this, Thomas makes a distinction between metaphors and names that are used as analogy. Metaphors clearly show the traces of their referral to creatures, so that no-one could be tempted to apply them literally to Christ. For example we can think of names such as ‘the key of David’ or ‘the lion of Judah’. But other names express a certain perfection, in which we must realize that there is a shift in their significance when we apply them to God or to Christ: goodness, wisdom, justice. The very fact that God is the uncreated source of the created perfection changes the significance. Furthermore, for Thomas, God is not only good or wise, but *is* goodness and wisdom. There is no greater whole in which God shares, together with other participants. God falls outside every category.

Sanctus must be regarded as a word that is used in an analogous sense, and has to be interpreted. Holiness is, in the first place, a name that refers to Christ and all the rest only becomes relevant when it is derived from the holiness of Christ. In the words of the *Gloria* “you alone are the holy one”. Some people might expect that Thomas would give a trinitarian explanation for the threefold ‘holy’: Father, Son and Spirit. But this is not the case. Thomas’ vision of faith is centered on the person, and specifically the salvific significance of Christ, just as his vision of the liturgy is centered on the Eucharist. For him, *sanctus, sanctus, sanctus* refers to Jesus: the first part to his divinity (“Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory”), and the second to his humanity (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”)³⁶.

Now, if Christ as a person has both a divine and human nature, then some words have a double significance. And the significance cannot be equivocal or ambiguous, because this would jeopardize the unity of Christ’s person. So, for example, the words ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ have a double significance in Thomas’ vision, when they are said about Christ. There is reference to both divine and human knowledge and wisdom. The same is true of ‘holy’. Thomas makes a clear distinction between created and uncreated holiness. Uncreated holiness belongs to the divine nature, and has belonged to Christ from eternity. Created holiness, however, is worthy of some discussion. The discussion has to do with the nature of Christ’s conception and birth. From his conception, Christ has also been holy in his human nature, and thus possesses a created holiness. Thus, in his person, Christ unites holiness as sovereignty, inaccessibility and hidden-ness on one hand, and holiness as a connection with and dedication to God on the other. G.-L. Müller says, in all simplicity, that the Christian faith breaks through the heathen distinction between

In Jn 17, l. 4, where Thomas makes a distinction between holiness through essence and holiness through grace). This means that in the case of Christ the word ‘holy’ has a double significance, in which the word is also used in its human, analogical sense: on the grounds of his divine nature and of his human nature. In this case it is difficult to show a difference in significance, apart from the difference between uncreated and created, achieved holiness.

³⁶ *STh* III 83, 4 c., 4*SN*, 8, 2, 4, 3 *expositio textus* (Moos nr. 285). Because, as he makes clear elsewhere, Thomas regards the three-fold ‘holy’ in the scriptures as a reference to the mystery of the Trinity, he sees the Sanctus as a summary of the whole faith (*STh* II-II 171, 3 c; *In Isaiam* 6, lectio 1).

sacred and profane.³⁷ This breakthrough takes place in Christ. In him heaven and earth come together. “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity”, as the deacon prays when preparing the wine during Mass. This precisely expresses the holiness of Christ.

3. **Auctoritas, analogy, nexus mysteriorum**

The constitution *Dei Filius* (1870) of the first Vatican Council represents the first attempt to formulate this theological method.³⁸ It is referred to as the method of the *nexus mysteriorum*, the relationship between the mysteries of faith. The concept of holiness, as we have just seen, covers the whole content of faith. It is a concept that is able to comprise human acts, worship and sacraments, the Holy Trinity and Christ in one mental operation. Furthermore, it asks for an exploration of the connection between the mysteries of faith. Because, via this approach, we trace the various aspects of the significance of faith, enabling us to better understand and describe the mysteries of faith. Not only his interpretation of holiness, but Thomas’ whole theology consists, methodologically, of relating the large sections of the Christian creed. Later, these would be referred to as tracts, but Thomas concentrated on the actual subjects of the tracts, and called them the mysteries of faith.³⁹ In fact, and he says it repeatedly, Thomas considers that there are two fundamental mysteries of faith: the mystery of the Trinitarian God, and the mystery of the humanity of Christ, or in other words, the mystery of the Incarnation. These two mysteries of faith are dealt with in greater depth in the creed, and the approach and method of the theology consists fundamentally in explaining the relationships between these mysteries. This relationship is referred to in Vatican I as the *nexus*, and it is therefore appropriate to refer to the method as the *nexus mysteriorum*. If the resurrection of Christ is related to the resurrection of the bodies of the dead at the end of time, or more technically, when the relationship between christology and eschatology is studied, this results in a greater insight into each of the two mysteries of faith. Theology is not able to provide a generally acceptable proof for one of the two mysteries alone, but the detailed

³⁷ See *loc. cit.* in *LThuK* (footnote 28). For a similar thought, but from a protestant theologian, see John Webster, *Holiness*, London: SCM Press 2003.

³⁸ Denzinger-Hünemann, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Freiburg i.B. etc. : Herder, 1991³⁷, 3016: “Zwar erlangt die vom Glauben erleuchtete Vernunft (...), sowohl aufgrund der Analogie mit dem, was sie auf natürliche Weise erkennt, als auch aufgrund des Zusammenhanges der Geheimnisse selbst untereinander [*mysteriorum ipsorum nexu inter se*] und mit dem letzten Zweck des Menschen mit Gottes Hilfe eine gewisse Erkenntnis der Geheimnisse, und zwar eine sehr fruchtbare; niemals wird sie jedoch befähigt, sie genauso zu durchschauen wie die Wahrheiten, die ihren eigentlichen <Erkenntnis>gegenstand ausmachen. Denn die göttlichen Geheimnisse übersteigen ihrer eigenen Natur nach so den geschaffenen Verstand, dass sie, auch wenn sie durch die Offenbarung mitgeteilt und im Glauben angenommen wurden, dennoch mit dem Schleier des Glaubens selbst bedeckt und gleichsam von einem gewissen Dunkel umhüllt bleiben, solange wir in diesem sterblichen Leben ‘ferne vom Herrn pilgern: im Glauben nämlich wandeln wir und nicht im Schauen’ (2 Cor 5,6f).”

³⁹ See the first chapter of my dissertation *Christ the ‘Name’ of God. Thomas Aquinas on naming Christ*, Louvain: Peeters 1993.

examination of the connection between them can certainly make a contribution to the plausibility of one or both. Without the resurrection of Christ there would be no general resurrection of the dead, and no identity between somebody before and after death without – in some way or another – physical continuity. And without the general resurrection of the dead, there would be no resurrection of Christ. Here, of course, we can recognize part of the argumentation of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Thus it is an approach whose origins we can recognize in the scriptures themselves.⁴⁰

A theology based on the *nexus mysteriorum* is vulnerable. It has few pretensions to meeting the challenges posed to theology by modern science. Within christology, the *nexus mysteriorum* often takes the form of searching for conformity, for fittingness. For example, we accept that Christ was dead for three days, but how does this fit in with the other things that we know about salvation history, and if we see a connection, for example with Jonah's time in the belly of the whale, this connection can throw more light on the significance of the death of Christ. But, of course, these remain arguments for specific cases.⁴¹

In the eyes of the academic approach, theology is allowed little freedom. It also leads easily to misunderstandings. One of the misunderstandings is that when someone like Thomas is searching for connections, he is engaged in the development of a theological system. And a theological system is the impression that people have of Thomas' best-known work, the *Summa Theologiae*. It leads to the suspicion that Thomas and his associates know precisely everything about God, and in particular, about those who are not, or do not wish to be, with God. Mark Jordan has already pointed out that even a superficial familiarity with the *Summa Theologiae* can prevent people from making this interpretation, simply because every question, or *Quaestio*, is followed by another, and the whole *Summa* does not give a final answer, because we are dealing with a work that Thomas never completed. It is more important to observe that, for Thomas, theology is above all receptive. Theology receives its content from what is given to it. It does not construct, it does not systematize, it does not speculate, but what it does above all is to consider what has been given. Its most important method is described by the words *auctoritas* and analogy.

Auctoritas or authoritative statement or source, refers in the first place to the revelation of the scriptures, and their exposition by the Church Fathers. Analogy refers to the *nexus mysteriorum*. This is, in fact, an approach that searches for connections between the mysteries of faith, attempts to compare them with each other, aims at determining correspondences and difference, and is continually aware of the imperfection of the findings. It remains continually conscious of the linguistic nature of the practice of theology, and the special rules and discipline involved.⁴² And, the mysteries remain mysteries.

⁴⁰ A good example of a modern application of this type of theology can be found in Kathryn Tanner, 'Jesus Christ', in: Colin E. Gunton, *Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge: CUP 1997, 245-272.

⁴¹ See G. Narcisse, *Les Raisons de Dieu. Argument de convenance et Esthétique théologique selon saint Thomas d'Aquin et Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Fribourg 1997.

⁴² In his inaugural lecture as Lady Margaret Professor of Theology at Oxford University, John Webster pointed out how strained the relations are between an academic method based on authoritative statements and the modern scientific ideal. "Dennoch ist gerade dies – der Verzicht auf Zitation zugunsten eigener Forschung – dasjenige, was zum Kennzeichen der *wissenschaftlichen* Universität der Moderne geworden ist. Dort ist der Rückgang des Zitierens als einer Argumentationsweise und der

The analysis of the word *Sanctitas*, holiness, which I have just given is, therefore, in fact a good example of the theology of the *nexus mysteriorum*. It is a word, as I said, that can be applied to things, to people and to God. The analysis of the significance of that word is therefore a question which belongs in the doctrine of the sacraments, Christian anthropology, moral theology, the doctrine of grace, doctrine on God and the Trinity, and Christology, to mention the most important. Someone possessing the genius that Thomas has to obtain an overview of all of this, and to study and explain the connections, is also in a position to show the extent to which the holiness that people strive for in their lives is a holiness that is given as a gift; he can show how much created and uncreated holiness must be incorporated in an inaccessible unity in order to do justice to the mission of Christ and his Spirit. *Sanctitas* embraces a considerable number of mysteries of faith, that is a considerable number of aspects of theology, and thus represents a fundamental analogous concept. It gives us an insight into how it relates to our lives, and offers unexpected perspectives. The most important of these is that a sharp dividing line between what is holy and what is not holy, between the sacred and the profane, does not do justice to the revealed core of the Christian conviction that God became man, in order to bring man back to God. Now, what is the significance of this for the practice of theology? Should we applaud its ‘secularization’, to use an expression of Gavin d’Costa, or in other words, sharpen the distinction between philosophy and science in favor of the latter, or are we obliged to oppose it? We shall go through the oration held by Thomas himself, in order to look for traces of an answer to the question.

4. Thomas’ inaugural lecture: theology as philosophy

“You water the mountains from your lofty abode, the earth is satisfied and becomes fruitful”. These words from Psalm 104, 13, form the central theme in Thomas’ inaugural lecture as Master in Theology.⁴³ We are talking about Paris in the year 1256, when Thomas is about 32 years old and at the beginning of a career that will last no longer than some 18 years, before he dies at the age of 49 or 50 in 1274. Thomas’ lecture is, in any case, interesting because it is connected with a personal story. The writings of Thomas are notoriously impersonal and objective, and deliberately so. But the most recent biographer of Thomas, Jean-Pierre Torrell, is of the opinion that the story around this lecture is historical. According to the story, Thomas was filled with anxiety and despair when he was on the point of becoming Magister in Sacra Pagina, or Master of the Sacred Page. He was in despair, because he did not know what he should talk about. However, in his sleep, a Friar appeared to

generellere Rückgang des Sich-auf-Texte-Berufens mit einer Zurückweisung der Autorität als eines Mittels zur rationalen Überzeugung verbunden. In der Universität, so versichern wir uns selbst, argumentieren wir nicht von einer Autorität her, sondern auf sie hin, und dies als freie Forscher.” “Theologische Theologie”, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (97) 2000 238-258, 243. (The English original of this lecture, Theological Theology, held on 28 October 1997, is not available in the Netherlands, but can be found in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Publishers, 2005, first essay).

⁴³ Strictly speaking, I am restricting myself to one part of the lecture, also referred to as the *Principium*. Another part has been preserved of what could better be called a series of lectures, delivered over a period of several months. This part is known by the name *Commendatio sacrae scripturae*, and shows Thomas as *magister in sacra pagina*, providing an introduction to the whole of the Bible.

him who would later be identified as Saint Dominic himself, who gave him the verse of the Psalm I have just quoted. Even if this story is not historical, it nevertheless fits well with the content of the lecture because this is precisely about the wisdom that is given from above. The lecture has been described as “a brilliant exposition of the calling of a theologian”.⁴⁴ Is it possible that Thomas is providing a report on his own vocation, or at least, on the program that he has set himself for his own practice of theology?

The lecture deals with wisdom, *sapientia*, and as his starting point Thomas formulates a divine law that he has taken from Pseudo-Dionysius. The law states that whatever descends from God as a gift, descends with the aid of mediation. Thus, the image of rain being poured down upon the mountains, which then mediate by providing a route for the water on its way to the valley which then becomes fruitful, is a metaphor for the outpouring of the divine wisdom. Thus, there are three roles in the communication of wisdom: God, the scholar or teacher, and the listeners. The teachers are the mediators, who in the metaphor, are compared with the mountains.

The problem with the lecture is that Thomas uses so many different terms, both for the content of what comes down from God and is mediated by the teachers, and for the teachers themselves. The same wisdom is referred to by different terms such as divine wisdom (*sapientia divina*), spiritual doctrine (*spiritualis doctrina*), sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*), knowledge (*scientia*), study (*disciplina*), or science (*scientia*). What are we actually dealing with? Our difficulties here bear a strong resemblance to the continual problem of interpretation of Thomas’ use of the term *sacra doctrina*, in particular in the opening question of the *Summa Theologiae*. Is he referring to revealed knowledge, or to its interpretation by the Church Fathers, or the reflection on this knowledge that is the role of theology? Where does God’s wisdom end, and where does man’s share begin; to what extent can we talk about knowledge here? I shall come back to this later, but we should already note that the lecture provides no differentiation on this point: it deals with one communication of wisdom which begins with God and, via mediators, comes to man. It can certainly provide food for thought for all those who like to make a differentiation in Thomas between nature and grace, and between natural knowledge and inspired knowledge.

And now we come to the following: who are the mediators? Here we have the same image. Thomas speaks of *doctores*, scholars or teachers, but also of sacred teachers (*sacri doctores*) who wrote the Holy Scriptures, of doctors of the Church (*doctores Ecclesiae*) who have to defend the faith, and as an example he mentions such people as Saint Paul, or the elders of Crete to whom the letter to Titus is addressed. With respect to the latter, Thomas shows that their task can be defined as preaching, reading (providing commentaries), and disputation. These last three look very much like the threefold task of the medieval Master in Theology in general, and of Thomas in particular. So who is Thomas thinking of when it comes to the mountains that receive and pass on the water of God’s wisdom? The apostles and their helpers? The writers of the Bible? The Church Fathers as Church teachers? The Masters of his own

⁴⁴ Simon Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas*, Selected Writings, New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press 1988, 215. Pages 267 – 271 contain a discussion of the text, a translation of which is given on pages 353-360. The translation by Ralph McInerney follows the text-critical Leonina edition, which became available later, but has not yet been published: *Thomas Aquinas*, Selected Writings, Penguin Books 1998, 5-17. A (small) part of the problems dealt with in the lecture can be found in the (later) debate *De Magistro*, *quaestio* 11 of the *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*.

time? Or might he actually mean the Bishops, as defenders of the faith? There is one indication that Thomas, in any case, also includes himself among the doctors. At the end he prays: “May Christ grant this to *us*”. No-one, he says, has the ability to communicate God’s wisdom of his own accord, but he can be sure that God will give him the ability if he asks for it (2 Cor 3, 5; James 1, 5). I will leave this point for the moment, in order to come back to it later, but here again it appears as if Thomas refuses to make a difference in principle.

In addition to these two subjects of the content of the wisdom and the nature of the mediators, there are two other related points which I should like to bring to your attention. Thomas makes one other fundamental remark about the nature of the wisdom he is talking about. According to him, it is not about the wisdom that is available for everybody, or that can be achieved by some through their own power. It is about things that go beyond the whole of human reason, and are hidden from the eyes of the living. Only the Holy Spirit can teach this wisdom. In other words, Thomas places holy wisdom in a central position as the content of his teaching mission. That which he undertakes as Master, is to do with revealed knowledge and how this can and should be interpreted and proclaimed.

In the second place Thomas makes it very clear that the person of the theologian cannot be ignored. On the contrary, the theologian must despise the things that come from below, in order to direct himself towards the things from above. He shares in the first light, but is also obliged, like the mountains, to defend the country of faith against error. His life must be outstanding, and be in accordance with his preaching. Thomas finishes by summing up some other qualities: he must lead an irreproachable life, be intelligent, be fervent, and do the will of God.⁴⁵ It is not difficult to recognize Thomas’ vision of holiness in this: purity and constancy.

Finally, it is good to point out the fact that Thomas states twice that divine wisdom is centered on the name of Christ. He quotes from St John’s Gospel in order to show that the ultimate aim of wisdom is to live in the name of Christ: “All this is written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (John 20, 31). And the same Christ is referred to later as the *doctor doctorum*, the teacher towards whom all teachers should direct themselves, the pre-eminent teacher, in accordance with the words of Jesus as quoted by Matthew (23, 10): “Neither let yourself be called teacher, because you only have one teacher: the Messiah.”

Tugwell is right. The lecture is about Thomas’ vocation as theologian, and therefore about the vocation of the theologian as such. But what interpretation should we place

⁴⁵ John Webster sees it as follows: “Most of all, I have become aware that the demands of the office [of theology – hs], both intellectual and spiritual, are virtually unsupportable. For what must the theologian be? Holy, teachable, repentant, attentive to the confession of the church, resistant to the temptation to treat it with irony or intellectual patronage, vigilant against the enticement to dissipate mind and spirit by attending to sources of fascination other than those held out by the Gospel. In short: the operation of theological reason is an exercise in mortification. But mortification is only possible and fruitful if it is generated by the vivifying power of the Spirit of Christ in which the Gospel is announced and its converting power made actual. And it is for this reason that theology must not only begin with, but also be accompanied at every moment by, prayer for the coming of the Spirit, in whose hands alone lie our minds and speeches”, *Shaping a Theological Mind, Theological Context and Methodology*, Darren C. Marks (ed.), Aldershot: Ashgate 2002, 136.

on Thomas' rendering of the content of theology, and who its practitioners are; what does 'holy' mean in this context?

5. *Sacra doctrina* then and now

When, 20 years ago, I attended lectures by Ralph McInerny at the University of Notre Dame, I was amazed when he said that the importance of the first *Questio* of the *Summa Theologiae* cannot be overestimated. Now that I have taken 20 years to endorse this vision, I cannot expect you to do the same on my authority within the space of a few minutes. In fact, those minutes hardly remain to me. I shall therefore interweave what Thomas says about *sacra doctrina*, (in ST 1, 1) with some observations on the present-day practice of theology. According to Thomas, we need *sacra doctrina* in addition to philosophy, because the goal of human life exceeds what human reason can comprehend. The *sacra doctrina* has been revealed to man by God in faith. It has to do with a science which, by analogy with other sciences, works with established principles: in this case, the principles of the creed. It is one whole, although it may deal with various subjects such as God, creation, angels, human morals and so on, because the *sacra doctrina* has been revealed as such, and has one formal subject. That subject is God, and creatures in relation to God as beginning or end. *Sacra doctrina* is, as it were, the impression of the divine knowledge, the knowledge that God has himself. It is, above all, contemplative in nature, because it does not make the divine, but it is also practical. The law also belongs to what it reflects upon. *Sacra doctrina* is superior to all other sciences, due to its certainty and to the loftiness of its subject. It is the pre-eminent example of wisdom, because it is directed towards the plan behind creation. It is argumentative in nature, and works with arguments from authority which rest on the authority of God, and of the Church Fathers. And, indeed, it appears that Thomas uses the word '*doctrina*' in an analogical fashion. Now, it is one of the principle characteristics of words that are used analogically, that they do not lead to univocal or unequivocal meanings. Depending on the judgment of the person using the words, there are agreements, with simultaneous differences, in such a way that it is not possible to pin down the precise meaning. It is therefore not so remarkable that Thomas did not settle on a uniform use of words in his lecture.

Now, that is precisely what we can learn from Thomas. Thomas is well known for the many distinctions that he introduced into thought and teaching, but now we can learn a lack of distinctions from Thomas: learn that all forms of knowledge and teaching have something in common. *Sacra doctrina* not only comprises the knowledge that God has, but also the knowledge that God reveals to us, the knowledge that is summarized in the Creed, what science thinks about it, what we can learn from the scriptures and from the Church Fathers; both what theologians teach and what the Church teaches. No, it is not so that Thomas does not see the differences and distinctions; he recognizes most of them. But for him, *sacra doctrina* is, in the first place, the one tradition that emanates from God and the scriptures, tradition and knowledge via Christ in the Spirit, which reorients people on their way to God. One, large continuing tradition of holy teaching. I admit that it would be naive to behave as if time has stood still since the 13th Century. Many branches of knowledge have come into existence, in which the practitioners have become very specialized: both outside and within theology. At present, Godlessness is an important prerequisite for being

taken seriously, even in the area of academic theology.⁴⁶ But it seems to me that where one does not subscribe to the *duplex ordo* of secular and ecclesial theological disciplines, or a simple separation between them, but to the *simplex ordo* of all disciplines together, the synergy between them must be expressly promoted, and the secularization of the practice of theology must be opposed. I subscribe to Congar's statement that, for Thomas, *sacra doctrina* is primarily one continuing body of knowledge, and sincerely hope that those practicing theology in the Netherlands who are interested in the classical practice of theology, or in other words, theological theology, will share this view. Such a practice of theology is, it is true, mindful of the different demands of academic discipline and the Church, but is aware of the original and final unity of both.⁴⁷ It is, furthermore, a practice of theology that does not exclude the practitioner of the theology, but includes the practitioner in its self reflection.⁴⁸ It is, of course, not for nothing that I began this lecture with an analysis of holy and holiness, and Christ as the source of all holiness.⁴⁹ I should like to express the hope that, in the footsteps of the holy Saint Thomas, theology will once again start to include holiness more and more in its culture as a service to the sacred mystery of our faith: I hope that theology will become more theological. In recent decades, the secularization of the practice of theology has gone hand in hand with a secularization of the interpretation of Christ. Thus, renewal must begin with Christ as the pre-eminent Holy One: the source of holiness in all its non-sacramental and sacramental forms. In this way, theology can become holy theology.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, it only remains to me to express my thanks to the members of the board of the Stichting Thomasfonds. Quite apart from the actual person who now occupies the Chair, the wish for such a Chair is a wish that I have supported for many years. As far as we know, this is the only Chair in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas that has ever been created, anywhere in the world. I hope that I shall be able to make the expectations of this chair a reality. I also thank the board of the former Catholic Theological University of Utrecht, and of the University of Tilburg for their willingness to establish this Extraordinary Chair.

I should also like to thank my colleagues for their collegial support, in particular those working in the Thomas Instituut in Utrecht. I hope that the creation of this Chair will

⁴⁶ Marcel Sarot, *De goddeloosheid van de wetenschap*, Theologie, geloof en het gangbare wetenschapsideaal, Zoetermeer: Meinema 2006.

⁴⁷ "If theology is to be theology, it must be ecclesial", Gavin d'Costa op. cit., 216. For an approach that seeks a balance between academia and church, see: Adelbert Denaux, *Katholieke theologie in een context van (post)moderniteit*, Tilburg/Utrecht 2006.

⁴⁸ De Grijs op. cit. , 31: "Theology is (...) above all, the language of faith. This means that at this juncture in time theology should return to faith, to the act of believing. The way of rationalism in theology has reached its end. That way has given us much, but has nothing more to offer. Here, De Grijs quotes Schillebeeckx, who in 1958 wrote in the *Theologisch Woordenboek* (Dictionary of Theology) '...the basis of the academic approach to theology is nothing less than faith itself. Without faith there can be no academic theology.'

⁴⁹ *STh* III, 83.3 ad 2: "Quia enim sanctitas Christi fons est totius sanctitatis ecclesiasticae...". Thomas says the same of the Eucharist in 4*SN* 13.1.2.5 c: '*totius sanctitatis causa*'. See Eucharistic Prayer II.

contribute to the welfare of the Instituut that was founded 17 years ago, in 1990, by Ferdinand de Grijs. Herwi Rikhof is, and remains, the director of this Instituut, which has achieved so many important results over the years, that in the meantime, in a wide circle, people speak about the Utrecht approach.⁵⁰

When I started to study theology in 1976, one of the first things that I heard was that it would not be long before some sort of merger took place between the Theological Faculty of the State University of Utrecht and the Catholic Theological University. Of course, in 1970 the so called ‘gentleman’s agreement’ between the two institutes had been concluded. I could not have suspected that, 31 years later, I would be standing here, or that, standing precisely here in Utrecht, I would be occupying a Chair at the University of Tilburg, nor that I would accept my appointment in the same week that both our Catholic Theological Faculty (of the University of Tilburg) and the Protestant Theological University would officially begin.⁵¹ Not one theological stone remains upon another. Although, what I remember as if it were yesterday, is that I stood in the new Utrecht University campus in the area called the Uithof, at the foot of a massive new building, then known simply as Transitorium II. It stood in the former Johanna polder, bleak and empty with the exception of two other large buildings: Transitorium I and Transitorium III. I looked up, and thought to myself: just imagine spending your whole life working in a building like that. For this reason, and for other much more important reasons which I have just described, I also thank the Church in Utrecht that I am privileged to serve as a Deacon, and which calls upon me for a significant amount of my time for the training of Deacons. I see it as my task to provide a connection between both worlds.

The ‘holy, holy’ connects heaven and earth. On the basis of that faith, I would like today to express my deep gratitude to two ‘ordinary’ saints: my two parents.

⁵⁰ The attention to the mystery of God on the one hand (together with attention to language) and the interwovenness of all the mysteries of faith on the other is specifically ‘Utrecht’. In the last two years, four international publications have demonstrated the substantial contribution of Utrecht to the discussion: *Contemplating Aquinas. On the varieties of interpretation*, Fergus Kerr (ed.), London 2003, with contributions by Herwi Rikhof and Rudi te Velde; *Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-first Century*, a special issue of *Modern Theology*, also published as part of a book, with contributions by Henk Schoot and Pim Valkenberg, 2004/1; *Aquinas on Doctrine. A Critical Introduction*, Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating and John Yocum, London/New York 2004, with a contribution by Herwi Rikhof; *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (eds.), Notre Dame 2005, with contributions by Herwi Rikhof, Harm Goris, Rudi te Velde and Carlo Leget. From the Editor’s Preface: “Major locales for the study of Aquinas find representation in the volume: Fribourg, Utrecht, and Notre Dame, Indiana.” (p. xx). The core of the Utrecht contribution is the series of English-language publications: (*Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*, Leuven: Peeters, 11 parts), and the *Jaarboek van het Thomas Instituut te Utrecht* (24 parts). The introduction by Jozef Wissink, *Thomas van Aquino, De actuele betekenis van zijn theologie*, Zoetermeer: Meinema 2003², gives a comprehensive review of the Utrecht interpretation. Other important publications are the Latin-Dutch series (3 parts), the internet site (www.thomasinstituut.org), and the five-yearly international congress. A further international congress was held at the end of 2005, this time with the theme “Divine Transcendence and Immanence”.

⁵¹ In 2006 the former Catholic Theological University of Utrecht, merged with Tilburg University. As of January 1, 2007, a new Catholic Theological Faculty was established, based in both Utrecht and Tilburg.

Two days before the Church celebrates the feast of Saint Thomas I would like to refer once more to Thomas' own lecture: *Nobis Christus concedat*: May Christ grant this to us. And in the formal words used to close an inaugural lecture in the Netherlands: *Ik heb gezegd* – I have spoken.