Thomists at War: Pierre Mandonnet, Étienne Gilson, and the Contested Relationship between Aquinas's and Dante's Thought (1879–2021)*

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At the turn of 1921, the French Dominican Pierre Mandonnet (1858–1936) helped to launch a new historical institute for Thomistic Studies at the Dominican study house of Le Saulchoir in Belgium. One of the pressing purposes of the foundation of the *Institut historique d'études thomistes* was to provide a properly historical approach to Aquinas's doctrine which would defend its integrity and authority, and refute the alarming assertations of those outside the Dominican order who were, on the view of its founders, abusing the historical method to undermine the true sense of Aquinas's thought.[1] The founders singled out Étienne Gilson (1884–1978), whose *Le Thomisme, introduction au système de saint Thomas*

* I am grateful to the Aquinas Institute and the Thomistic Institute, Blackfriars, Oxford, for inviting me to give a lecture on Aquinas and Dante in 2021. As will become apparent, I was mindful of a series of anniversaries: the 800th anniversary of St. Dominic's death and of the first establishment of the Blackfriars in Oxford (in 1221); the 700th anniversary of Dante's death (in 1321); and the 100th anniversary of the launch of the *Institut historique d'études thomistes* at the Dominican study house of Le Saulchoir in Belgium, and of the Oxford Dominican priory on its current site (in 1921). I am also grateful to Simon Gilson, Patricia Kelly, and the peer reviewer and the copy editor of *Nova et Vetera*, for their constructive suggestions.

1 Antoine Leomonnyer, "Memorandum," Archives O.P., Paris, III-L-545, cited in André Duval, "Au origines de l' 'Institut historique d'études Thomistes' du Saulchoir [1920 et ss]: Notes et Documents," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 75, no. 3 (1991): 423–48, at 433.

was published a couple of years earlier (in 1919); according to Mandonnet, Gilson's volume distorted the very nature and pedagogy of Thomist philosophy.[2] Mandonnet and Gilson would become principal antagonists in the famous debates about Aquinas's thought in the 1920s and 1930s. Less known, however, are their parallel skirmishes in the field of Dante studies. In this article, I suggest that we need to consider the battles in Thomism and Dante studies together, as part of a wider intellectual war that would question the very nature of Catholic theology and philosophy. I first survey the main battlefield—the debates about Aquinas's thought—with specific reference to the controversies in the 1920s and 1930s about Gilson's "Christian philosophy" and about Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990)'s *Une école de théologie*. In the second part, I turn to the skirmishes in the field of Dante studies between scholars such as, on the one hand, the French Dominicans Mandonnet and Joachim Berthier (1848–1924), who presented Dante as an essentially Thomist and Catholic poet, and, on the other hand, the lay historians Gilson and Bruno Nardi (1884–1968), who deconstructed the "myth of the Thomist Dante" and saw a fundamental disharmony between Aquinas's and Dante's thought, a view which profoundly influenced post-war Dante scholarship to the present day. In light of this intellectual history, in the third part, I reappraise constructively eight alleged points of divergence between Aquinas's and Dante's thought. I demonstrate that these key points of apparent divergence—as on the natural desire for the beatific vision, on the doctrine of two final ends for man, or on the relationships between philosophy and theology and between nature and grace—have as much to do with these scholars' interpretations of Aquinas's works as with their interpretations of Dante.

Mandonnet, Gilson, and a Civil War in Thomism

The Institut historique d'études thomistes*: Maintaining the "Authority" and "Integrity" of Aquinas's Doctrine*

Having entered the Dominican order in 1882, Mandonnet was professor of history at the University of Fribourg from 1891 to 1918; on retirement, he continued to research and teach at Le Saulchoir.[3] Author of significant research on Siger of Brabant and St. Dominic, he collaborated on the critical edition of Aquinas's works commissioned by Pope Leo XIII as

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[2] Pierre Mandonnet, O.P., Review of Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction au système de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (1923), *Bulletin thomiste* 1 (1924–1926): 132–36.

[3] Le Saulchoir was the Dominican house of studies for the French province, in exile in Belgium between 1904 and 1939 due to the laws separating church and state.

editor, for example, of Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences* and was one of three founders of the *Revue thomiste* in 1893.[4] At Le Saulchoir, Mandonnet was also instrumental in the founding and mission of the *Institut historique d'études thomistes* from its inception in 1921 to his death in early 1936.[5] One of "the giants of medieval studies," and founder (also in 1921) and honorary president of the Société Thomiste (which published the *Bulletin Thomiste* beginning in 1924), Mandonnet's name became "synonymous with fundamental research into the thought and writings of Thomas Aquinas."[6] For Mandonnet, the historical method facilitated a greater penetration into the thought of Aquinas and his contemporaries, and historical research, in this way, enriched and complemented the institutional teaching of Thomism as Scholastic theology and a perennial philosophy.[7] But, like other founders of the institute, Mandonnet believed

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4 See R. F. Bennett, "Pierre Mandonnet, O.P., and Dominican Studies," *History* 24, no. 95 (1939): 193–205. On Siger, see Pierre Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIIIme siècle: Étude critique et documents inédits* (Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1899). Mandonnet subsequently brought out a second revised edition in two volumes: *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIIIme siècle*, pt. 1, *Étude critique* (Leuven: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1911), with the second volume an edition of selected texts used for his study, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIIIme siècle*, pt. 2, *Textes inédits* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1908). Mandonnet's study of St. Dominic, revised and edited after his death, has been translated into English: *St. Dominic and His Work*, 2 vols., trans. Mary Benedicta Larkin, O.P. (St Louis: Herder, 1944). An example of his scholarship on Aquinas is *Des écrits authentiques de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Fribourg: L'oeuvre de Saint-Paul, 1910).

5 Leomonnyer wrote in a memorandum: "For the organization and implementation of these courses, the institute would benefit from the exceptional experience and competence of Mandonnet who, in turn, would find useful collaborators for his own work and research projects amongst the younger fathers" (cited in Duval, "Au origines," 433). Unless otherwise attributed, English translations throughout this article are my own. Mandonnet was specifically entrusted with a course on the development of Aquinas's thought. See also Bennett, "Pierre Mandonnet," 193–94.

6 See Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 108; 91.

7 This is clear, for example, from the *ratio studiorum* prepared by Ambroise Gardeil and Leomonnyer: the study of philosophy and theology is the standard curriculum *sine qua non*, to be taught according to the doctrine of Aquinas "who, under the supreme authority of the Holy Church and after the documents of the Faith, is the rule and final object of all our studies. The same applies to all other schools outside the order" (cited in Duval, "Au origines," 432–33). The specialization in historical studies is referenced as complementary, and is not intended as a substitute or alternative mode of formation (433: "The Studium generale of the province of France may legitimately aspire to organize these complementary courses in Patristic theology and the historical sciences"). The prophetic concern that historical studies would come to take too central

that some recent scholars were using the historical method to undermine Aquinas's doctrine, and thus by extension Catholic theology and philosophy.

Gilson was one of three scholars singled out for criticism by Antoine Leomonnyer (1872–1932), the Dominican regent of studies at Le Saulchoir since September 1911, the others being the physicist and historian of medieval science Pierre Duhem (1861–1916) and Jean Durantel, whose *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis*, like Gilson's *Le Thomisme*, had been published in 1919.[8] Professor of ecclesiastical history at Le Saulchoir (1904–1014), and subsequently Mandonnet's successor at Fribourg (1916–1937), the Dominican Mannès Jacquin (1872–1956), in his 1920 review of scholarship in medieval studies over the previous seven years, had found Durantel, Gilson, and Duhem particularly wanting in their interpretation of Aquinas.[9] Durantel's otherwise "remarkable" work on Aquinas contained a "radical flaw," a fundamental misreading of Aquinas's understanding of being, while Durantel's understanding of creation is "more Neoplatonic than Thomist."[10] Leomonnyer appears to have found this exaggerated emphasis on neo-Platonism and Plotinus alarming in Gilson as well: "less brilliant" but a "surer guide" than Durantel, Gilson's contentious thesis of the spirit of Christian philosophy is nonetheless

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a place is, nonetheless, already registered at this early stage in the planning (434). In relation to philosophy, Mandonnet himself differentiates between three complementary forms of introduction: (1) pedagogical, (2) historical, and (3) critical. The first includes a clear definition of the proper object or field of philosophy, the division and subdivision of its parts, the logical order of their study, the method proper to each part, and finally the doctrinal content of each science. The second includes accounts of the texts, contexts, and intellectual issues informing Aquinas's thought; how, with the material at his disposal and in relation to disparate views, Aquinas organized his own thought; the relationship between Aquinas's thought and that of his contemporaries; and finally the historical reception and fate of Thomist doctrines. The third addresses comparatively the systematic ideas of leading modern philosophers with those of Aquinas, demonstrating that a true account of the philosophical method and of our faculties of knowledge is to be drawn from Aquinas (Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 133–34).

8 See Duval, "Au origines," 433.

9 See Mannès Jacquin, "Philosophie Médiévale," in the "Bulletin d'histoire de la philosophie," section of *Revue de sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 9, no. 4 (1920): 620–38. As Duval notes, the specific allusion to Duhem, Durantel, and Gilson suggests that Leomonnyer had read Jacquin's review, or had discussed these works with him.

10 On Jean Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1919), see Jacquin, "Philosophie Médiévale," 626–32.

already evident in germ.[11] Duhem meanwhile was berated by Jacquin for an intellectual myopia: overly concerned with the disparate sources of Aquinas's thought, he failed to appreciate Aquinas's power of synthesis.[12]

In 1921, Gilson was still only in his mid-thirties, and "although the resurgence of Thomism [in the 1920s] exercised an immense influence over Gilson, he was not really party to its development." Nonetheless, with his publications and his prominent and influential role in the national universities, Gilson would become an extremely influential "non-scholastic Thomist" and historian of the medieval period as a whole.[13] And yet Leomonnyer, Jacquin, and Mandonnet were right to be aware of the potential threat posed by Gilson to at least their tradition of Thomism. For Gilson, the teachers of early-twentieth-century Catholic philosophy and theology misunderstood central features of their preferred primary authority, Aquinas. Furthermore, the relationship between Aquinas's thought and Thomism was less one of organic development than of fundamental divergence: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Western Europe, in the teaching of Catholic schools and among scholastics who considered themselves Thomists, the true meaning of the philosophy of Saint Thomas had been lost. . . . The truth of the case is that, ever since the end of the thirteenth century, which was the century of Saint Thomas himself, this evil has been endemic to the teaching of Christian philosophy."[14] In short, Thomists, and Dominican Thomists in particular, failed to understand Thomas's thought. Reflecting back at the beginning of the twenty-first century on the debates of the 1920s and 1930s, Ralph McInerny highlights Gilson's "generalized attack on the Dominican Order, the great

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11 On Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Strasbourg: A. Vix, 1920), see Jacquin, "Philosophie Médiévale," 632–34.

12 On Pierre Duhem, *Le systèm du monde: Histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon a Copernic* (Paris: Hermann, 1917), see Jacquin, "Philosophie Médiévale," 634–36.

13 See Laurence K. Shook, *Étienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 116. Shook situates the "high-powered Institut Historique d'Études Thomistes" at Saulchoir within a broader Catholic revival in Thomist and neo-Scholastic research in the 1920s, noting also, for example, the parallel establishment in 1921 of the Albertus Magnus Akademie in Cologne. Shook comments: "Gilson's contribution to the thomist renaissance lay in the momentum provided by his books and by his presence as a defender of St. Thomas within the national universities. Significantly, when the *Bulletin thomiste* reviewed his work along with that of his students Gouhier and Koyré, it entitled the review "Le thomisme et les non-scholastiques" (2[1925]: 317). Gilson was probably pleased by the distinction" (115–16).

14 Étienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. by Cécile Gilson (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2020), 135.

commentators, and the *école thomiste* as it existed both prior to and after Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*. . . . The history of Thomism will become a history of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, Sylvester of Ferrara, Capreolus—off with their heads! As for his contemporaries, Garrigou-Lagrange is demonized by Gilson."[15]

Mandonnet's Defense of Thomist Philosophy against Gilson's "Christian Philosophy"

The Dominican Mandonnet's defense of the sacred vine of Thomism against the thorns of Gilson is particularly evident in the famous controversies about "Christian philosophy" in the 1920s and 1930s. In the first volume of the *Bulletin Thomiste* (1924), the organ of the Société Thomiste of which he was president, Mandonnet reviewed the second revised edition (1923) of Gilson's *Le Thomisme: introduction au système de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (first published in 1921), as well as its first English edition, translated by Edward Bullough and published as *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (1924).[16] Mandonnet's review embodies in miniature a founding purpose of the *Institut historique*: namely, to demonstrate—in relation to Aquinas's own works and by the same historical method—why some historians "outside the Dominican order," such as Gilson, in appealing to the "primitive Aquinas," actually mistake and misrepresent his doctrine, undermining also, thereby, the Catholic philosophical and theological curriculum of the present day.

In his review, Mandonnet welcomes Gilson's modifications of certain judgments in the first edition of *Le Thomisme*, "of which he himself had seen the inconsistency," and he also states his preference for the English

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15 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 40; 53. For example, in relation to Gilson's polemical attack on Cajetan's interpretation of Aquinas, McInerny comments that it is "painfully clear that [Gilson] is out to make a case against Cajetan and fairness to the great commentator will not characterize his criticisms. . . . It is embarrassing to read this needling and ambiguous attack on one of the giants of the Thomistic school [Cajetan]. But of course it is this school that Gilson will ultimately repudiate." McInerny notes, for example, that "Gilson would say of the thought of Garrigou-Lagrange that 'it is the very negation of that of St. Thomas' (*L'être et l'essence* [Paris: 1948], 176)" (121n22). McInerny concludes, not unreasonably, that "the effect of [Gilson's] scorched earth policy is to turn our attention more and more to the one operating the flamethrower. It is just possible that the man who finds everyone else wanting has himself misunderstood Thomas. It is possible that those he criticizes got it right and that he got it wrong" (53).

16 Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*; Étienne Gilson, *Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough (Cambridge: Heffer, 1924).

title over the French: "Thomism" and "the system of Aquinas" are ambiguous, as they may refer either to the discipline of theology or to that of philosophy, while what Gilson is apparently attempting to provide, albeit in summary fashion, according to Mandonnet, is a pedagogical introduction, or rather "initiation," into "the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas." But—and here lies Mandonnet's more serious reservation about a "fundamental question"—Gilson does so back to front, erroneously deducing from the order of Aquinas's synthesis of theology in the *Summa theologiae* the order for what might have been, had he provided one, Aquinas's synthesis of philosophy, or *Summa philosophiae*.[17] For Mandonnet, this is plain wrong: Aquinas frequently spells out in his Aristotelian (and purely philosophical) commentaries the correct ordering of philosophical study—(1) logic; (2) mathematics; (3) natural philosophy; (4) ethics; and finally (5) metaphysics—as well as the pedagogical and conceptual principles which underpin such an ordering, such as that, in the progress of human learning, it is appropriate to move from what is easier to what is more difficult.[18]

Pedagogically, by placing first metaphysics and theodicy, which exceed the intellectual capacity of many students, Gilson is leading them into confusion and error.[19] Conceptually, Gilson is ignoring Aquinas's explicit prescription that philosophers and theologians proceed in opposite directions: philosophers move from the study of creation to the Creator; theologians move from the study of God to the knowledge of creatures.[20] By transporting the theological order into philosophy, Gilson fundamentally undermines, moreover, the truth content of philosophy by presenting it as a deduction from a given a priori: the existence of God and his attributes.[21] Moreover, while from creation one can come to knowledge of

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17 Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 134.

18 Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 135. In substantiating this view, Mandonnet cites *Sent. Eth.* VI, lec. 7 and *Super librum de causis expositio*, lec. 1.

19 Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 134, 136.

20 Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 134, 135. Mandonnet cites *Summa contra gentiles* [*SCG*] II, ch. 4, n. 6.

21 See Francesca Aran Murphy, *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 61: Mandonnet argues "that 'transporting' the theological order into philosophy turns the arguments for the existence of God into a priori deductions." See also, on this point, Murphy, "Gilson and Chenu: The Structure of the *Summa* and the Shape of Dominican Life," *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 997 (2004): 290–303, at 295: "Gilson offended the sensibilities of contemporary Thomists by beginning his book on Thomas with God, rather than cosmology or logic. And he stuck to it, despite a stern admonition from a Thomist journal that he would do better to present Saint Thomas the other way up. That came from the Dominican Pierre

the Creator, the existence of God does not imply, as the neo-Platonists wrongly thought, God's creation of the world. Mandonnet therefore berates Gilson's attempt to situate Aquinas's philosophy as effectively internal to, and dependent upon, his theology: as, in Gilson's terminology, a "Christian philosophy." Mandonnet also disagrees strongly with Gilson's insinuation that Aquinas's philosophy cannot be defended critically: while Gilson claims that Aquinas's "philosophy is not a critical philosophy," Mandonnet counters that it does, in fact, "presuppose a critical point of view, very conscious, very solid, and perfectly scientific."[22]

Mandonnet also strongly critiques Gilson's confusion of the theological and philosophical orders in *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (1923), which he reviewed in 1926.[23] The "fundamental idea" of Gilson's volume (which, Mandonnet claims, runs against the scholarly consensus) is that, "in Saint Bonaventure, we encounter not only a philosophy, but also a systematic and unified philosophy."[24] However, for Mandonnet, there was no such thing—properly speaking—as "the philosophy of St. Bonaventure," a criticism which must have been rather galling for Gilson, as it was the very title of his study.[25] As Laurence Shook comments, "Mandonnet had long taken Bonaventure to be a neo-Platonic Augustinian who, in his failure to distinguish the object of theology from the object of philosophy, was not a philosopher at all."[26] For Bonaventure, "philosophy inevitably requires faith, and nature grace," and Gilson "presents the philosophy of Bonaventure by suspending it from his theology, his

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Mandonnet, who thought that Gilson must be *deducing* the world of the senses from God, by putting God first. . . . Mandonnet defended the philosophical exposition of the *Summae* on the grounds that Thomas conceived it 'natural' for human knowledge to progress from 'posterior analytics,' to sense knowledge to ethics to the metaphysical."

22 Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 134.

23 Pierre Mandonnet, "L'Augustinisme Bonaventurien," *Bulletin Thomiste* 3 (1926): 48–54. Mandonnet first briefly reviews Leonard de Carvalho e Castro, *Saint Bonaventure, Le Docteur Franciscain* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1923), and Boniface Luyckx, *La doctrine de la connaissance chez saint Bonaventure* (Münster: 1923), before turning at more length to Gilson's *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1924). Shook also references this review (which he dates to 1924) in *Étienne Gilson*, 198.

24 Mandonnet, "L'Augustinisme Bonaventurien," 52.

25 Gilson may even have seen his subsequent *Dante et la philosophie* (1939), a book-length deconstruction of Mandonnet's presentation of Dante *as a theologian* in *Dante le théologien* (1935), as fitting scholarly retribution for Mandonnet's deconstruction of Gilson's presentation of Bonaventure *as a philosopher* in *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* in his review of 1926.

26 Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, 127–28.

mysticism, and, indeed, from the final beatitude of man."[27] Although Gilson ostensibly represents Bonaventure as a philosopher, then, Bonaventure is not a philosopher at all, but solely an Augustinian theologian.[28] As Shook notes, Gilson's "presentation of Bonaventure as an anti-Thomist Christian philosopher . . . was unacceptable," and Mandonnet insists that, if there were to be a model for a Christian philosopher, it would be St. Thomas.

The controversy about Christian philosophy came to a head at a famous debate of the Société Thomiste in 1933 in which Mandonnet and Gilson locked horns as principal antagonists. As McInerny relates, "the morning [of 11 September, 1933] ends with these two great historians having established themselves as opposite poles on the question before them."[29] For Mandonnet, a Christian may be a philosopher but the unity is in the subject alone—to think or argue from faith is to do theology; to argue from reason (and the natural world) is to do philosophy—there may be, in an individual, a de facto union of philosophy and faith, but *de iure* [by right] there is not. For Mandonnet, then, Gilson's historical recovery of (and advocacy for) a "Christian philosophy" is an essentially retrograde step to the state of medieval thought prior to Aquinas, and to the kind of confusion between theology and philosophy that Mandonnet identified in Bonaventure. As McInerny puts it, "[Christian philosophy] involves neglecting the profound work realized by Thomas in discriminating reason and faith and clarifying their interrelations. And it would effectively cut Christian philosophers off from the rest of the thinking world."[30] Mandonnet's fellow Le Saulchoir Dominican Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges (1863–1948), author of a two-volume study of Aquinas's philosophy in 1910, similarly distinguishes the order of discovery from the order of demonstration: "The influence of Christianity can be assigned to the order of discovery; but in the order of demonstration, either the argument is good or it isn't."[31]

For Gilson, by contrast, the Christian faith had a material effect on philosophy not only in the order of discovery but in the order of demonstration, such that philosophy (in this tradition) is objectively dependent

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27 Mandonnet, "L'Augustinisme Bonaventurien," 52.

28 Mandonnet, "L'Augustinisme Bonaventurien," 52.

29 See McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 96.

30 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 103.

31 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 105. In Gilson's view, Sertillanges is just another example, albeit an "outstanding example," of Thomists failing to understand "the authentic meaning" of Aquinas (see Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, 134).

on the Christian faith.[32] Gilson "believed that Christian theologians . . . had created a philosophy that was Christian both in its form and in its content." Gilson's doctoral work had led him to the conviction that, in the early modern period, Descartes—but also later enlightenment philosophers such as Malebranche, Leibniz, and Kant—had built philosophies dependent upon their, more or less explicitly acknowledged, Christian faith. Gilson then applied this question—"were not many modern philosophers also guilty of building their philosophies on some degree of faith"—to medieval as well as modern philosophical speculation.[33] Developing his notion of "Christian philosophy" for the Gifford Lectures (1931–1932) at Aberdeen's then "militantly Protestant university," Gilson's approach, despite its positive immediate reception by Protestants and some Catholics, threatened both "the autonomy of neoscholastic philosophy" and "the autonomy of Protestant theology."[34] It would subsequently lead to the relativism of Thomist (classical-realist, or Aristotelian) philosophy as a mere competing tradition of philosophy, as, for example, in the subsequent Gifford Lectures (1988) of Alistair MacIntyre (published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* in 1990).[35]

Chenu's Gilsonian Programme for Le Saulchoir and Its Rebuttal

While Gilson and Mandonnet remained essentially fixed in their opposing camps in the "Christian philosophy" debates of the 1920s and

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32 See Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, 199.

33 Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, 202.

34 Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, 203.

35 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). Even within Thomism, MacIntyre sketches a dubious "line of descent" and "progress": "The greatest names in this line of descent are those of Grabmann, Mandonnet, Gilson, van Steenberghen, and Weisheipl, a list in which those who appear later have sometimes had to correct as well as to supplement their predecessors' scholarship, but in which a real progress appears" (77). Intriguingly, MacIntyre here also suggests that the resolution to the inevitable conflict between his three rival versions of moral enquiry might be provided by Dante: "So the encyclopaedic, the genealogical, and the Thomistic tradition-constituted standpoints confront one another not only as rival moral theories but also as projects for constructing rival forms of moral narrative. Is there a way in which one of these rivals might prevail over the others? One possible answer was supplied by Dante: that narrative prevails over its rivals which is able to include its rivals within it, not only to retell their stories as episodes within its story, but to tell the story of the telling of their stories as such episodes." For a critique of MacIntyre's appropriation of Dante, as of the Thomist tradition as a whole, see George Corbett, "MacIntyre, Dante and Modernity," *New Blackfriars* 96, no. 1063 (2015): 345–60.

1930s, one notable conversion, as Francesca Murphy notes, was that of Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P. (1895–1990), Mandonnet's junior colleague and "disciple in the historical method," to whom he had handed over the presidency of the Société Thomiste in 1932, but who came to embrace Gilson's understanding of and approach to Aquinas.[36] Although in his review of the third edition of *Le Thomisme* (1927), Chenu apparently defended the Le Saulchoir position of Mandonnet that Aquinas "composed a 'pure philosophy,' 'autonomous' from faith,"[37] by the conclusion of the September 1933 debate, Chenu was squarely in Gilson's camp: "At the last 'Christian philosophy' debate, Chenu and Yves Congar literally sat down alongside Gilson."[38] Chenu ultimately came to see Gilson's *Le Thomisme* as "the working tool of his whole generation:" Gilson understood well, Chenu comments, "that the philosophy of Saint Thomas was internal to his theology. It was then that I struck up a friendship with Gilson that never wavered"; from then on, he notes, "we were always on the same path."[39] It was Chenu, indeed, who advocated in the mid-1920s for Gilson's closer involvement at Le Saulchoir, dismissing the concerns of Mandonnet and Jacques Maritain about Gilson's orthodoxy as the "little rivalries of Thomism" and "not a cause for concern."[40] And, despite himself being denounced directly to Pope Pius XI in 1932 for residual modernism by two of his students, alongside three other lectors at Le Saulchoir (and

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36 Chenu remained president for over fifty years, from 1932 to 1984 (see Adriano Oliva, "La Société thomiste," Commissio Leonina, April 4, 2014, commissio-leonina.org/2014/04/la-societe-thomiste/).

37 See Murphy, "Gilson and Chenu," 295n29. See also Marie-Dominique Chenu, Review of Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction au système de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, *Bulletin thomiste*, 1928, 242–45, at 245: "St Thomas was a Christian teacher, but his philosophy is a pure philosophy: he affirmed its autonomy, fixed the method, and explicitly set out its plan of study." Chenu also specifically refers to Gilson's own responses to Mandonnet's critiques in the third edition (see, e.g., 243n1).

38 Murphy, "Gilson and Chenu," 296.

39 See *Jacques Duquesne interroge le Père Chenu: "Un théologien en liberté"* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1975), 50. In his letter to Gilson of 1923, Chenu offered to put Gilson in touch with the lay Dominican Edward Bullough, whom he had recently met in Cambridge, and who would subsequently invite Gilson to Cambridge and translate *Le Thomisme* for an English readership (Murphy, "Gilson and Chenu," 295n28). Bullough references Étienne Gilson's lecture in Cambridge on "L'Esprit de la Renaissance et St. Thomas d'Aquin," in Edward Bullough, *Italian Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 45.

40 Chenu, cited in Duval, "Au origines," 443. Despite some misgivings as to his orthodoxy, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964) nonetheless remained in favor of a further relationship with Gilson (446).

despite the confidential enquiry by the Holy Office which followed), Chenu's appointments as master of theology the very same year (aged just 37) and as regent of studies the following enabled him to pursue his own Gilsonian agenda.[41]

Nonetheless, it was only after the deaths of the three Dominicans he consistently referred to as his masters—Ambroise Gardeil (†1931), Leomonnyer (†1932), and Mandonnet (†1936)—that Chenu would launch his contentious history of, and manifesto for, Le Saulchoir as, in effect, an alternative "school of theology." On March 7, 1936, the feast day of St. Thomas, Chenu gave the speech which he subsequently developed into *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir*, published at the end of 1937.[42] Strongly influenced by Gilson, Chenu's new programme was not just an alternative proposal to the Dominican school in Rome, but arguably to the deep convictions of his predecessors, including Mandonnet, and many of his contemporaries at Le Saulchoir.[43] Chenu adopted Gilson's

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41 See Étienne Fouilloux, "Première alerte sur le Saulchoir (1932)," *Revue des sciences philosophique et théologiques* 96, no. 1 (2012): 93–105, and "L'affaire Chenu 1937–1943," *Revue des sciences philosophique et théologiques* 98, no. 2 (2014): 261–352. I am very grateful to Patricia Kelly for sharing with me her English translation of these two articles, which are forthcoming in Étienne Fouilloux, *Le Saulchoir on trial (1932–1943)*, trans. by Patricia Kelly (Adelaide, Australia: ATF). Page references to Fouilloux are to the French edition while citations are, with grateful permission, from Kelly's forthcoming translation. In the 1920s, Réginald Omez, O.P., characterized Gilson's aim in seeking close relations with Saulchoir as to direct its studies specifically towards the history of "primitive Thomism": "It appears that Gilson wants to establish closer ties with the Dominican community at Le Saulchoir; he seems to want to direct their studies particularly towards the history of primitive Thomism" (cited in Duval, "Au origines,"446).

42 Fouilloux, "L'affaire Chenu," 263. Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Kain-Lez-Tournai, France: Le Saulchoir, 1937); see also the Italian edition, with an introduction by Giuseppe Alberigo and foreword by Chenu, *Le Saulchoir una scuola di theologia*, trans. Natale Federico Reviglio (Monferrato: Marietti, 1982), as well as the updated French edition, with a series of essays, *Une école de théologie: le Saulchoir, avec les études de Giuseppe Alberigo, Étienne Fouilloux, Jean Ladnère et Jean-Pierre Jossua* (Paris: Cerf, 1985). The third chapter of Chenu's book, "Theology," is set within its broader context, with English translations of other important contributions to the debate, in Patricia Kelly, *Ressourcement Theology: A Sourcebook* (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

43 Fergus Kerr comments: "To what extent Le Saulchoir ever was, even in 1937, '*une* ecole,' as if all the Dominicans on the teaching staff at the time had a single vision, is disputable. Some of his colleagues, at least, were infuriated by Chenu's magisterial exposition of what they stood for, collectively. Moreover, in retrospect, *Une école de théologie* was needlessly polemical. For example, Chenu derided the curricula at

scandalous claim that the Enlightenment rationalism of "the German Lutheran theologian Christian Wolff (1679–1754)" had infiltrated the Thomism of the Angelicum, and of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange in particular.[44] He also adopted Gilsons's Bergsonian creative evolutionism and the conviction that the theologian's "'given' is not in the nature of things, it is *events*. . . . The real world is here, and not [in] the philosophical abstraction."[45] And, just as Gilson eroded the distinction dear to the traditional Thomist school between philosophy and theology with his novel understanding of "Christian philosophy," so Chenu undermined the place of Aquinas's philosophy in the training of theologians: two of the ten propositions Chenu was asked to accept in Rome, for example, concerned the autonomy of philosophy and theology and the necessity for the theologian of philosophical study.[46] As Fergus Kerr puts it, "in effect, Chenu was

seminaries and colleges (no doubt including the Angelicum): neoscholastic philosophy and theology textbooks were pervaded by 'Wolffian rationalism.' He peppered his text with insults" ("Marie-Dominique Chenu," in *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007], 17–33, at 23). Kerr postulates that the views of three influential Dominicans in Rome—Garrigou-Lagrange, Mariano Cordovani (1883–1950), and Michael Browne (1887–1982)—were "certainly representative of the majority of Chenu's fellow Dominicans at the time" (20). See also the letter of Martin Gillet to Chenu (2 February, 1939), cited in Fouilloux, "L'affaire Chenu," 298: "There are credible rumours that the Dominicans are divided, with the younger fathers abandoning Thomist positions, wanting to modernise philosophy, theology, dogma and . . . St Thomas himself of course; that positive theology must supplant speculative theology, the problem must expel scholasticism." Fouilloux asks: "Was it only Chenu and his methodology which were the targets, or Le Saulchoir as a whole, where very different opinions on this methodology co-existed more or less happily?" (329).

44 See Kerr, "Marie-Dominique Chenu," 30–31, citing, on this question, Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange* (South Bend, IN: St. Austin's Press, 2005), 103n70.

45 Murphy, "Gilson and Chenu," 297. Murphy cites Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Position de la théologie," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (1935), reprinted in *La parole de Dieu: La foi dans l'intelligence* (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 128.

46 Proposition 8 reads, "Although St. Thomas was properly a theologian, he was also properly a philosopher; consequently in its intelligibility and truth his philosophy does not depend on his theology, and it enunciates absolute, not merely relative truths"; proposition 9 states, "it is especially necessary for the theologian in the scientific process to apply the metaphysics of St. Thomas and diligently attend to the rules of dialectic" (McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 110–11). For the broader context, see McInerny's chapter "The Chenu Case" (108–25). Although Fergus Kerr dismisses the propositions Chenu was compelled to sign as "poppycock . . . symptomatic of the theological pathology of those days" (19), he does at least acknowledge the arched polemicism of Chenu's *Une école*: "The message of Chenu's manifesto lies, most provocatively, in the layout: the chapter on philosophy comes after the one on theology. In effect, Thomas Aquinas is to

denying the need to master Thomistic philosophy before being allowed to enter into Aquinas's work as a whole. Older colleagues at Le Saulchoir, as well as Garrigou-Lagrange, were dismayed at what seemed to them neglect of speculative theology in favour of ('mere') historical scholarship, the slippery slope to relativistic notions of truth and thus to modernism."[47]

Ironically, then, the institute established in 1921 to provide a properly historical approach to Aquinas's thought which would enrich, complement, and defend the integrity and authority of Thomism, and that would refute the alarming views of the "non-Scholastic" Gilson and others who were undermining it, was taken over by Chenu, himself a Gilsonian convert. Thenceforth, and until Chenu's dismissal in 1942, the Institute and Le Saulchoir came under the dominant influence of Gilson.[48] Notably, when Chenu was deposed as regent in 1942, one of the first measures introduced by Fr. Paul Philippe, O.P.—the "visitor" and new regent of studies at Le Saulchoir who had been tasked, as Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange's effective deputy and replacement, with the investigation which had deposed Chenu—was that "university professors, such as Gilson, cannot inform us on particular points: they must not become our masters."[49] And Martin Gillet, who had perhaps imprudently raised Chenu at such a comparatively young age to master of theology and regent of studies, would compose in 1942 a 103-page encyclical on the "teaching of St. Thomas at the present

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be read as a theologian from the outset. There is no need to be able to defend the Twenty-four Theses before one is allowed to pass into theological studies" (24). Moreover, theological systems are relativized by Chenu to historically conditioned spiritualities: "A theology worthy of the name is a spirituality, which finds the rational instruments adequate to its religious experience" (cited in Kerr, 24). As Kerr comments, "Thomist theology would be the expression of Dominican spirituality, Scotism that of Franciscan spirituality, Molinism that of Ignatian spirituality" (15).

47 Kerr, "Marie-Dominique Chenu," 19.

48 Fouilloux, "L'affaire Chenu," 265; see also 268: "the return to the medieval substrate based on the authority of the university professor Étienne Gilson"; "It was this programme, laid out in an occasional booklet with a tiny print run, which would be seen as a manifesto. Chenu was clearly subordinating philosophy to theology, granting theology a modest role which was clearly distinguished from the dogma from which, according to him, it drew its reformable formulations. He also pleaded for an inductive approach starting from the personal history of humanity (a theology worthy of the name was 'a spirituality which has found rational tools appropriate to its religious experience') or their shared history (theology as a gathering of 'theological "tropes" *in action*' provided by current events). Such a discussion of methodology ran deliberately counter to a scholastic definition of theology with its speculative and deductive nature."

49 The measure was stated in Paul Philippe's opening lesson of the 1942–1943 academic year (Fouilloux, "L'affaire Chenu," 330).

moment," reminding Dominicans that, while it was necessary to cultivate positive theology, "it is not enough to be a good historian to be a good theologian. Theology needs history, but history is not sufficient."[50]

We have therefore seen that Mandonnet and Gilson—although both committed to the historical method—disagreed in fundamental ways about Aquinas's thought and about the nature of Catholic theology and philosophy. Gilson's approach influenced much twentieth-century Catholic thought, whether as developed by Chenu at Le Saulchoir in terms of an alternative curriculum for theology (the "new theology," as it was termed by its adversaries), or, in a different context, in the writings of Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) on the relationship between the natural and the supernatural orders, as in *Surnaturel*.[51] Likewise, Gilson came to be influenced by both Chenu and de Lubac in his subsequent polemics regarding Mandonnet's interpretations of both Aquinas and Dante.[52] Although there is increasing interest in and reappraisal of these early-twentieth-century debates about Aquinas's thought, scholars have not heretofore considered the parallel disagreements in the 1920s and 1930s about Dante.[53] And yet, as we shall see, Mandonnet's and Gilson's irreconcilable interpretations

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50 Fouilloux, "L'affaire Chenu," 335.

51 Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1946); de Lubac, *Le mystère du surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1965).

52 In *Praeambula fidei*, McInerny discusses the interrelated friendships of Gilson, Chenu, and de Lubac and the mutual influences on their respective works, drawing attention also to the unedifying personal motives between their attacks on their predecessors and teachers: "And what prompted Marie-Dominique Chenu to spend most of his essay on Dominican education trashing the tradition in which he stands? That personal grievance of an extraordinary kind is in the background is an unavoidable realization when we consider the running commentary de Lubac gives on the nineteen letters Gilson wrote him over the space of some two decades, from 1956 to 1975" (125). See also Fouilloux, "L'affaire Chenu," 323–24.

53 On the Christian philosophy debates, see, for example, the "Bibliography of Works on the Christian Philosophy Debates and Their Issues" in *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France*, ed. and trans. by Gregory B. Sadler (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 283–312. The extant scholarship on Gilson's Dante tends to take his view of Dante as authoritative. See, for example, Roberto Di Ceglie, "Dante Alighieri e la filosofia Christiana nell'interpretazione di Étienne Gilson," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scholastica* 97, no. 4 (2005): 627–49: "a great historian of philosophy, recognized almost universally as the most authoritative with regard to the medieval period" (627–28). Di Ceglie also approvingly cites Inos Beffi: "To Gilson is given 'the merit not only to have expertly initiated the rediscovery of medieval philosophy, but to have contributed decisively to returning its history back to the appropriate levels of scientific and academic rigour'" (631). But this assessment (which is normative in the scholarship) fails to situate adequately Gilson's apparent

of Dante provide a privileged insight into their conflicting approaches to Aquinas's thought and to Catholic philosophy and theology as a whole.

Mandonnet, Gilson, and a Civil War in Dante Studies

Pierre Mandonnet, Joachim Berthier, and the Thomist Dante

Having published short articles on Dante throughout his academic life, Mandonnet published *Dante le théologien* in 1935, shortly before his death on January 4, 1936.[54] Mandonnet's dual interest in Aquinas and Dante paralleled that of a Dominican colleague at Fribourg ten years his senior, Joachim Joseph Berthier, O.P. (1848–1924).[55] An accomplished medieval historian and Thomist, Berthier translated Dante's *Commedia* into French and published a two-volume edition of the *Inferno* in Italian "with scholastic commentary" in 1892, as well as a series of articles on the poet.[56]As Ruedi Imbach notes, Berthier and Mandonnet's labors testify to a "new Catholic impulsion to Dante Studies," symbolically given papal approval

"rediscovery" of medieval thought within the context of an earlier generation of scholars, including the Dominicans Berthier and Mandonnet.

54 Pierre Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien: introduction a l'intelligence de la vie, des œuvres et de l'art de Dante Alighieri* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1935). I am currently working with Patricia Kelly on the first English edition and translation of Mandonnet's *Dante le théologien* (forthcoming in the Studia Traditionis Theologiae series with Brill). In citing this text here, page numbers refer to the original 1935 French edition, while English translations are, with grateful permission of Patricia Kelly, from our new edition and translation of the work.

55 Berthier entered the Dominican order in 1871. From 1890 to 1905, he was the principal collaborator of Georges Python (1856–1927), founder of the University of Fribourg, in creating a faculty of theology. From 1890 to 1891, he was the dean of the faculty of theology, and from 1891 to 1892, he was rector of the University. From 1907 to 1920, he lived again in Rome, notably as consultant of the Sacred Congregation of Studies.

56 For Berthier's Dante scholarship, see especially *Dante Alighieri: La* Divine Comédie*: traduction littérale avec notes par Joachim-Joseph Berthier, O.P., réédition de la version de 1924 souls la direction de Ruedi Imbach* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2018); and *La* Divina Comedia *di Dante con commenti secondo la scholastica del P. Gioachino Berthier,* Inferno [hereafter, *Inferno*], vols. 1–2 (Fribourg: Libreria dell'Università, 1892). For a list of Berthier's Thomist works, see "In Memoriam R.P. Mag. Fr. Joachim Ios. Berthier, OP," *Angelicum* 2, no. 3 (1925): 343–45. In *L'étude de la somme théologique de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Fribourg: Librairie de l'université, 1893), Berthier underlines that, just as the great poet Dante chose Virgil as his guide, so theologians should choose St. Thomas: "Dante, the great poet, chose Virgil, also a great poet, to be his guide on his journey through the kingdom of all sins; we, theologians, choose St Thomas to be our guide on an analogous journey" (156).

by the removal of Dante's *Monarchia* from the index of prohibited books in 1881 (where it had remained since 1554), and which paralleled the renaissance in Thomistic Studies instigated by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879.[57]

The representation of Dante as a Thomist and the conviction that Dante's principal theological and philosophical authority was Aquinas accompanied (and perhaps partly underpinned) the Leonine revival of Dante studies alongside Thomism.[58] Thus, Berthier dedicated his commentary on the *Inferno* to Pope Leo XIII, "eminent patron of Thomistic and Dante studies," and inserted, on its title page, an image of St. Thomas (in his teaching chair) with Dante standing next to him listening.[59] Although Dante was nine when Aquinas died, the intended signification of this visual representation is not altogether fanciful. In the *Convivio*, after all, Dante represents himself as listening to the wise, relating how he went to the disputations of the schools of the religious (the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella and the Franciscans at Santa Croce); he also explicitly singles out Aquinas, modelling himself "on the good friar Thomas Aquinas, who entitled one of his works, written to refute the arguments of all those who deviate from our faith, *Against the Gentiles*" (*Convivio* 4.30.3). Moreover, in the *Commedia*, Dante affords St. Thomas the place of preeminence amongst the lovers of wisdom in the heaven of the sun, and Dante-pilgrim listens to more of St. Thomas's words in the poem than of any other character, save Virgil and Beatrice.[60] In these ways, Dante arguably invited his readers to gloss his poem with Aquinas, and his first commentators dutifully obliged, quoting liberally from both the *Summa theologiae* and the *Summa contra gentiles*, as well as drawing on Aquinas's other writings, including his Aristotelian and biblical commentaries.[61]

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57 I am deeply grateful to Ruedi Imbach for a copy of his unpublished lecture "Dante à Fribourg," as well as for his revised edition of Berthier's translation of the poem.

58 For a succinct history of the reception of Dante through Aquinas from the first commentators to the Leonine revival in the late nineteenth century, see Simon Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. Claire E. Honess and Mathew Treherne, 2 vols. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 1:66–109, at 66–86.

59 See Berthier, *Inferno*: "mecenate insigne degli studi Tomistici e Danteschi." Underneath the image of Aquinas and Dante are cited Dante's words from the *Convivio* "dal buono Frate Tommaso" (*Conv*. 4.30); and, alongside it, the entry for Dante in a Dominican Encyclopedia: "Dante . . . in whose works learning and knowledge of many things, and especially of Scholasticism, are undoubtedly shown."

60 See Mandonnet, *Dante*, 266. See also S. Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," 239–42.

61 See S. Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," 66–67. Gilson here highlights,

In presenting Aquinas as Dante's principal authority in theology and philosophy, Berthier and Mandonnet could thereby draw on a venerable and majority tradition in the commentary on Dante's *Commedia* as a whole.[62]

The canonization of the Thomist Dante in the early twentieth century is illustrated by Pope Benedict XV's encyclical on Dante, *In Preaclara Summorum*, published on the sixth centenary of Dante's death in 1921:

> Dante lived in an age which inherited the most glorious fruits of philosophical and theological teaching and thought, and handed them on to the succeeding ages with the imprint of the strict scholastic method. Amid the various currents of thought diffused then too among learned men Dante ranged himself as disciple of that Prince of the school so distinguished for angelic temper of intellect, Saint Thomas Aquinas. From him he gained nearly all his philosophical and theological knowledge, and while he did not neglect any branch of human learning, at the same time he drank deeply at the founts of Sacred Scripture and the Fathers. Thus he learned almost all that could be known in his time, and nourished specially by Christian knowledge, it was on that field of religion he drew when he set himself to treat in verse of things so vast and deep.[63]

The encyclical notes disapprovingly, however, the deleterious effects of the teaching of those not "disposed to the truths of the Faith as they should be."[64] The encyclical's aspirations and concerns for Dante are expressed in more detail and depth in the combined special issue of the *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscholastica* and the *Rivista Scuola Catholica* on Dante published later the same year.[65] As with the Dominicans who founded the

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for example, Jacomo della Lana's commentary (1324–1328), with "well over eighty quotations [from Aquinas], and, by one estimate, over 380 direct and indirect references to Aquinas in total," Jacomo's commentary affording a "revealing insight into the early reception of Aquinas in a layman qualified in arts and theology."

62 Berthier, "Introduzione," no. 17, in *Inferno*, 2:xxxviii.

63 Pope Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter on Dante to Professors and Students of Literature and Learning in the Catholic World *In Praeclara Summorum*, §4.

64 Benedict XV, *In Praeclara Summorum*, §10. The encyclical calls instead for teaching which draws students to the "vital nourishment" of Dante's poem, which is its very purpose, such that Dante may be for them "the teacher of Christian doctrine."

65 See *Scritti vari pubblicati in occasione del sesto centenario della morte di Dante Alighieri* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1921), vii: "We are currently witnessing many and various distortions of Dante's thought. Our great poet is betrayed by the supporters of alien

Institut historique d'études thomistes to defend the integrity and authority of Aquinas's doctrine, so scholars in this issue, including the Jesuit Giovanni Busnelli (1866–1944) and the Dominican Mariano Cordovani (1883–1950) adopt the historical and scientific method in order to recover the true doctrine of Dante and the true purpose of his poem: to lead people from sin and ignorance to perfection of life and knowledge of God.[66] They also defend, through historical research, what they see as the profound harmony between the thought of Dante and Aquinas.[67]

In *Dante le théologien* (1935), Mandonnet similarly addresses critically the "universally established custom" of placing Dante's theories in parallel with those of Aquinas. Mandonnet underlines that such correspondences, however fruitful, do not imply a formal Thomism, because St. Thomas is not simply a "great leader of a school," but above all "the representative of Catholic teaching," and thus St. Thomas finds "common ground with all the great theologians," and his primary achievement was "to better order this teaching, and evidence it more perfectly."[68] Moreover, Mandonnet distinguishes the sources from the shape of Dante's thought. While Mandonnet notes that Dante, as a layman and an impoverished exile, may

philosophical, social and political doctrines, and each one attributes to Dante his own doctrine." See, especially, Giovanni Busnelli's "Le più recenti pubblicazioni Danteschi," 179–86, at 186: "We see the signs and evidence of this lack of sound instruction in the Christian faith not only among state school students, but even amongst professors and Dantisti who, when they interpret religious topics in the *Divine Comedy*, fall into erroneous expressions and false concepts, witnessing thereby to the serious damage which atheist programmes of public instruction have caused, and continue to inflict upon, the culture of society."

66 A protagonist in the Chenu affair, Mariano Cordovani, O.P., berates the tendencies of Italians to know Dante only through the Ugolino and Francesca episodes, and of Dantisti to know the whole poem with all its parallels in the various historical contexts but, nonetheless, to ignore what is most important: God "And yet it is altogether indisputable that the entire poem is a great effort by Dante to rise to God through wisdom and virtue, a magisterium to guide all humanity to salvation, and a purifying fire from the abyss to the empyrean. That which Dantisti consider least in Dante is precisely the knowledge of, and longing for, God: and our Catholic celebration of the great Father Alighieri would be in vain were we not to react strongly against this unworthy process of reduction and distortion of the greatest soul to have ever arisen in Italy" ("Le vie di Dio nella filosofia di Dante," in the *Scritti vari* combined issue, 21– 41, at 21). On Cordovani's important role in the condemnation of Chenu's views, see, for example, Alberigo's introduction, "Cristianismo come storia e teologia confessante," in Chenu's *Le Saulchoir una scuola* (1982 ed.), ix–xxx, at xix–xxiii.

67 See, for example, Giovanni Busnelli, "La cosmogonia Dantesca e le sue fonti," in the *Scritti vari* combined issue, 42–84.

68 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 263–64.

have had to search for solutions to certain problems in whatever theological sources were at hand, he nonetheless maintains that, where possible, Dante drew on Aquinas's works and, where this was not possible, "conformed his thought to the one who was, in his eyes, his master." Although there may be differences here or there on questions of secondary importance, Mandonnet insists that Dante follows Aquinas on key points of contested doctrine in the thirteenth century,[69] and that "the commentators are therefore on the right tracks who compare the doctrine of the great theologian and of the great poet to shed light on both."[70]

Étienne Gilson, Bruno Nardi, and the "Myth of the Thomist Dante"

It is the "universal opinion among Dante scholars that Dante faithfully followed the teachings of St. Thomas" against which Étienne Gilson reacted polemically.[71] In doing so, he followed the lead of the Italian scholar and ex-priest Bruno Nardi (1884–1968), his exact contemporary, with whom he would forge an enduring friendship.[72] Both Nardi and Gilson situated their own arguments about Dante as specific refutations of those of Mandonnet and, more generally, as attacking what they saw as the clerical "myth of the Thomist Dante."[73]

Nardi's doctoral dissertation, "Siger de Brabant dans la Divine Comédie et le sources de la philosophie de Dante" (1911), was prompted by Mandonnet's *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme au XIIIme siècle* (1899).[74]

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69 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 264. See also 277: "If Dante conformed his thought to that of his master in the major and specific points of Thomas's doctrine, it is because Dante had studied it attentively. This gives us reason to believe that it is also principally through the same channel that Dante received, at least in large part, the knowledge of the common teaching of Catholic theology."

70 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 277.

71 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 246.

72 See *Étienne Gilson's Letters to Bruno Nardi*, ed. Peter Dronke (Florence: SISMEL and Galluzzo, 1998).

73 Nardi's account of Dante may also have been partially influenced by his own autobiography, as an ardent nationalist, and an anticlerical and anti-Thomist former priest who, on account of this, had been denied university positions. See Paolo Falzone's entry "Bruno Nardi" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 77 (Rome: Institute of the Italian Encyclopedia, 2012). Dronke comments: "the Vatican had blocked Nardi's appointment to a university Chair till quite late in life. . . . Nardi's whole conception of medieval philosophy, defending its originalities and diversities with polemical wit and matchless learning, must have been a thorn in the flesh of the Vatican, which clung for its official philosophy to a simplified, and dogmaticised version of Thomism" (Dronke, *Étienne Gilson's Letters*, xi).

74 Nardi's dissertation was first published in the *Rivista di filosofia neoscholastica* 3 (1911):

Mandonnet's study underlines the exceptional place assigned by Dante to Siger of Brabant, its title page featuring the relevant tercet about Siger in the heaven of Christian wisdom: "This is the eternal light of Sigieri who, reading in the Vico de li Strami, demonstrated enviable truths" (*Paradiso* 10.136–38).[75] Explicitly opposing the hypothesis that Dante was ironically subverting the Dominicans by elevating Siger in this way,[76] Mandonnet argues that Dante desired to place examples of philosophers who were not also theologians in the heaven of the wise (a proscription which limited the choice), and Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia are his examples of masters who were exclusively philosophers.[77] On Mandonnet's view, Dante places Siger in the heaven of the wise as a representative of philosophy, and as a defender of the autonomy of philosophy from theology, and of the arts faculty from the theology faculty—his enviable truths (*invidiosi veri*) referring to some of his philosophical theses attacked by Bishop Tempier in the condemnation of 1277.[78] In the general respect of defending the relative autonomy of philosophy and the textbooks of Aristotle, Siger is on the

187–95 and 526–45, and *Rivista di filosofia neoscholastica* 4 (1912): 73–80 and 225–239. It was also published in a single volume as *Sigieri di Brabante nella "Divina Commedia" e le fonti della filosofia di Dante* (Lucca, 1912). Subsequent references are to the latter edition.

75 "essa è la luce etterna di Sigieri, / che, leggendo nel Vico de li Strami, / silogizzò invidïosi veri." See Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, pt. 1, *Étude critique*, 289.

76 Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, pt. 1, *Étude critique*, 294: "We know without a shadow of a doubt that Siger's troubles were the consequence of the condemnations of March 7, 1277, of which the Dominicans were not the craftsmen but rather the victims."

77 Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, pt. 1, *Étude critique*, 306: "Having wished to place in Paradise a representative of philosophy, that is, of the profane sciences, Dante had to choose a renowned cleric who had not also been a theologian. Due to this proscription, the choice was necessarily very limited." Mandonnet's interpretation is picked up by Berthier in his comment to *Paradiso* 10.136: "Siger of Brabant, renowned philosopher. It is rather the Aristotelian school that Dante presents to us in this first round" (*Dante Alighieri: La Divine Comédie*, 768).

78 Mandonnet demonstrates that the early commentators were wrong to interpret *invidiosi veri* as identifying Siger with sophistry (and also highlights their misidentification of Siger with the legend of Serlo de Wiltonia); instead, these "enviable truths" refer specifically to the Parisian debates, and reflect badly on the accusing party (i.e., Tempier et al.). See Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, pt. 1, *Étude critique*, 267: "It is clear that Dante alludes here to the malevolence which Siger attracted due to his teaching in Paris, which relates it to the condemnation of 1277." See also 290: "As to the truths syllogized by Siger which would have made people envious, we can affirm, given what we know of his doctrines, that it was not his exercises in sophistry as such but rather his doctrines themselves and, above all, those doctrines that led to the condemnation of 1277 which caused antipathy towards him."

same side of the debate as St. Thomas, St. Albert the Great, and the Dominicans as a whole.[79] Hypothesizing that Dante probably had little knowledge of the specific Averroist doctrines of Siger of Brabant that he documents in his study,[80] Mandonnet strongly opposes the attempt by "Dante amateurs" to use subsequent historical knowledge of Siger as a favored argument for an emphasis on Dante as a heretic or heterodox thinker.[81]

By contrast, Nardi develops as the argument of his doctoral thesis what Mandonnet had dismissed as the "amateur" reading of Siger. Where Mandonnet downplays Dante's knowledge of Siger's Averroist theses documented in his study, the doctoral student Nardi emphasizes them as central to Dante's syncretist thought. On Nardi's view, Dante's celebration of Siger in the heaven of the wise implies his particular intellectual sympathy for these Latin Averroist theses.[82] Siger does not stand for the general autonomy of philosophy from theology, but rather for the more specific division within the Aristotelian philosophers themselves, between the Latin Averroists and the Thomists, a division which Dante—in his original poetic synthesis—would eventually overcome.[83] Deriving from

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79 Kenelm Foster, "Tomasso d'Aquino," in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* [*ED*], dir. Umberto Bosco, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, 6 vols. (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–78), 5:626–49, at 630b: "As for the problem of the substantial difference between theology and philosophy, and of the autonomy of the latter, [Dante] tends to side with the Dominicans, and it cannot be ruled out that this may be one of the reasons for the exaltation of Siger of Brabant."

80 Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, pt. 1, *Étude critique*, 301.

81 Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, pt. 1, *Étude critique*, 301: "Now that we know the specific doctrines of Siger, the amateurs of Dante studies—who have endeavoured to discover a heretic in the author of the *Divine Comedy*—would have one of their best arguments to support their thesis, and would explain the presence of the celebrated Averroist amongst the great theologians of Dante's Paradise as if nothing could be more natural."

82 An especially contested example is Dante's apparent allusion to Averroes's theory on the unicity of the possible intellect in *Monarchia* 1.3.19. In *De reprobatione Monarchiae composita a Dante* (ca. 1329), the papal Dominican Guido Vernani, O.P. (ca. 1290–1345) was the first to interpret Dante's delineation of a distinctive earthly goal for humanity-taken-as-a-whole as implying the Averroist position on the unity of the potential intellect. With regard to *Mon.* 1.3.9, and the Averroist doctrine of the unicity of the potential intellect, see George Corbett, *Dante and Epicurus: A Dualistic Vision of Secular and Spiritual Fulfilment* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), 51–58 and 61–63 (nn. 47,48, and 60). See also Anthony K. Cassell, *The Monarchia Controversy: An Historical Study* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 8–14.

83 Bruno Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante*, 11: "If one finds Siger of Brabant in Dante's Paradise, it is because—in the spirit of the poet—the Averroism of the master of the 'vico degli strami' [street of straw] was not an element to be thrown out; instead, it came to be

Mandonnet a picture of the world of Latin Averroism that Siger inhabited, Nardi makes this the backdrop for his understanding of Dante's own early philosophical culture. Nardi's substitution is reflected in the second part of his dissertation's title: Nardi's "Siger of Brabant in the Divine Comedy *and the Sources of Dante's philosophy*" replaces Mandonnet's "Siger of Brabant *and thirteenth-century Averroism*." As Paolo Falzone highlights, this conviction underpins Nardi's presentation of Dante's intellectual trajectory as a "convert" from "a period of life in which he sympathised with those Arabic-Aristotelian views, of which Siger of Brabant was the famous champion" (an intellectual sympathy which caused "the frightening chasm he was digging within his mind [between] the philosopher's exigencies [and] the aspirations of the believer") to the reorientation of "his philosophical opinions towards their theological reinterpretation in a new, and original Christian synthesis," with the abandonment of the *Convivio* and the writing of the *Commedia*.[84]

If Nardi's lifelong approach to Dante was stimulated by his attempted refutation of Mandonnet's scholarship on Siger, what Kenelm Foster (1910–1986) called Gilson's "brilliant raid into Dante territory" with *Dante et la philosophie* (1939)—subsequently translated into English as *Dante the Philosopher* (1946)—was nothing other than a book-length refutation of Mandonnet's *Dante le théologien* (1935), not translated into English, and typically referred to (if at all) in English-language scholarship through Gilson's caricature.[85] In two letters to Nardi in 1937, Gilson

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absorbed and reworked, alongside other elements, into a body of doctrine that constitutes his philosophy." On Nardi's doctoral dissertation, see especially Paolo Falzone, "Bruno Nardi's Louvain Dissertation (1911) and the Uneasy Character of Dante's Philosophy," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 75 (2013): 357–73.

84 See Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante*, 67–70. The English translation (by Andrea Robiglio) is cited from Falzone, "Bruno Nardi's Louvain Dissertation." As Falzone comments, "throughout his long and laborious career, Nardi essentially remained devoted to this youthful reconstruction of Dante's thought," a reconstruction which—at a critical distance—shows just how "deeply Nardi was indebted to an idealistic prejudice according to which there is clear progress in philosophy and, therefore, also in Dante's thinking. . . . Nardi's analysis gained both depth and precision, but remained consistent with the approach of his Louvain dissertation. Throughout the research conducted throughout twenty consecutive years—as collected in two volumes of essays, *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (1930) and *Dante e la cultura medievale* (1942)—the intellectual profile of the Florentine Poet, as it had been sketched at Louvain, was articulated in a tripartite form fated to last until the end of Nardi's scholarship" (362–63). Falzone adds that "today it is honestly impossible to accept Nardi's scheme of the three phases of Dante's philosophical development."

85 See Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, ix: "In the forefront was the fundamental thesis

berates Mandonnet for completely ignoring Nardi's *Siger de Brabant* (1911) in his *Dante le théologien* (1935); like John the Baptist, Nardi has preached in the desert, and Gilson must save Nardi's important insights by bringing them to a wider audience and readdressing the problem of Dante the theologian, *contra* Mandonnet.[86] Indeed, Gilson's letter to Nardi of June 17, 1937, contains the seed of *Dante et la philosophie* (1939): "I do not believe that Dante is a Thomist, or an Averroist: he was Dante. But he holds in theology Thomist doctrines, and in philosophy Averroist doctrines, and it is clear as day that his conception of the relationship between philosophy and theology is characteristic of Christian Averroism."[87] Following Nardi, Gilson presents Dante as a thinker strongly influenced by Latin Averroism in his early maturity (they both erroneously date Dante's *Convivio* and *Monarchia* to this period) who then, due to an intellectual conversion, provided an original (and not Thomistic) synthesis in the *Commedia*.[88]

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upheld by Father Mandonnet in his *Dante le théologien*. Accordingly, the reader will find it discussed with an insistence which, I fear, will be to some unpleasing. And yet anyone who has read this book knows very well that all the parts hang together and that the closely-knit fabric of its reasoning must be unravelled stitch by stitch if it is not desired that a portion which yields in one direction should still be sustained by the countless threads that link it to the remainder." Like Mandonnet, Gilson had a lifelong love of Dante and published various short articles on his work. Like Mandonnet also, Gilson's last published book was on Dante: *Dante et Béatrice: études dantesques* (1974). During the anniversary year of 1965, Gilson prepared three original papers published as "Trois études dantesques": "Dante's *Mirabile Visione*"; "What is a Shade?"; and "Poetry and Theology in *The Divine Comedy*" (Shook, *Étienne Gilson*, 372).

86 Gilson, Letter to Bruno Nardi, June 17, 1937, in Dronke, *Étienne Gilson's Letters to Bruno Nardi*, 4: "As for the Thomism of Dante, I never believed in it either. . . . I may return to this one day because the 'Dante theologian' of Mandonnet, who completely ignores your work, proves that you have preached in the desert." In a second letter the following month (July 8, 1937), Gilson informs Nardi of his proposal to readdress the problem of Dante theologian in a year or so, assuring him that he will draw upon and honor his excellent work in this regard: "I plan to take up the problem of 'Dante theologian' in a year or two. I will then be sure to refer and pay tribute to your excellent work" (5).

87 Dronke, *Étienne Gilson's Letters to Bruno Nardi*, 4.

88 For Gilson, Siger's place in Dante's heaven of the sun is symbolic of Dante's understanding of the mutual independence of philosophy and theology (implicit, in his view, in Latin Averroism), and evidence that this philosophical separatism was part of Dante's political thought, i.e., about the relative autonomy of the Holy Roman Empire (*Dante the Philosopher*, 257–76).

The 1930s Debates about Dante and the Subsequent Influence of Gilson and Nardi

In an appendix to *Dante et la philosophie*, Gilson comments that the "serenity" of his and Nardi's view of the Latin Averroism of Dante and Siger, and hence of their relationship to Aquinas's thought, "was unexpectedly shattered" by a "thunderbolt" from the cleric and historian Fernand van Steenberghen (1904–1993).[89] The thunderbolt in question was van Steenberghen's 1931 attribution of an anonymous treatise *Questiones de anima* to Siger, an attribution which, if true, demonstrated that, in light of Aquinas's critique, Siger had realized the error of his Averroist position on the unity of the intellect and conformed to the Thomist one.[90] It followed that Dante might have known about Siger's intellectual conversion to the Thomist position and consequently celebrated him at least in part for this (rather than as a Latin Averroist) in *Paradiso* 10. This revisionary view is compatible with Mandonnet's general contention that Dante places Siger in the heaven of wisdom *specifically as a philosopher*, but rather than Dante being unaware of Siger's Averroistic philosophical theses (Mandonnet's 1899 hypothesis), he is instead aware of Siger's conversion from these to Thomistic ones (van Steenberghen's 1931/1938 hypothesis). As the Jesuit scholar Giovanni Busnelli (1866–1944) put it in 1932, Dante's tercets about Siger "take on a definitely and profoundly true meaning, because they imply that Thomas Aquinas (who eulogizes him in heaven) knew of Siger's renunciation of an exaggerated form of Averroism in favour of the true Aristotelian doctrine as he himself interpreted it."[91]

As Gilson commented, "the idea of Siger of Brabant as a convert to Thomism that emerged from [van Steenberghen's] book was precisely what Father Busnelli was waiting for to enable him to crush Signor Bruno Nardi,"[92] and it would "destroy the thesis I uphold."[93] Gilson avowed that he only became acquainted with van Steenberghen's *Les oeuvres et la*

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89 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 319. Van Steenberghen had taken the same side as Mandonnet, against Gilson, in the famous "Christian philosophy" debates of the early 1930s (see, for example, Sadler, "Bibliography," in *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 27–28).

90 Fernand van Steenberghen, *Siger de Brabant d'après ses œuvres inédites*, vol. 1, *Les oeuvres inédites* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université, 1931).

91 Giovanni Busnelli, S.J., *La Civiltà cattolica* 3 (1932): 132 (cited in Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 319).

92 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 319.

93 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 317. Gilson further acknowledges "too great an interest in deeming [van Steenberghen's conclusions] open to question to be able to discuss them without being suspected of prejudice."

doctrine de Siger de Brabant (1938) after he had completed *Dante et la philosophie* (1939). His claim that this represented a "new approach to the problem" of which he was previously unaware is, however, disingenuous.[94] Van Steenberghen's new approach was already evident from his *Siger de Brabant d'après ses œuvres inédites* (1931), and as is evident from Gilson's 1937 correspondence with Nardi, the implications of van Steenberghen's 1931 volume (and the immediate controversy that it caused) were a key context, and motive, for him writing *Dante et la philosophie* in the first place (rather than a potentially inconvenient afterthought). Thus, in the June 1937 letter, Gilson highlights his particular gratitude to Nardi for his rebuttal of van Steenberghen's thesis, in his 1936 "Il preteso tomismo di Sigieri di Brabante," with which he substantially agreed. Furthermore, Gilson's overall judgment in this 1937 letter (*prior* to writing *Dante et la philosophie*) is substantially equivalent to that in the appendix to the book: first, that the attribution of *Questiones de anima* to Siger is disputable; second, that no one has ever reversed their views without more explanation; and third, that there is no documentary evidence that Siger's adversaries gloated about his *volte face* from Averroism to Thomism (which, Gilson wryly remarks, is as implausible as if M. Alfred Loisy had recanted his biblical exegesis but, because modernism had been condemned, no one had thought to mention it).[95] In writing *Dante et la philosophie*, then, Gilson was entering the fray against the clerical Thomists (principally Mandonnet, but also van Steenberghen, Busnelli et al.) and coming to the aid of Nardi at a critical juncture in an evolving debate. When the clerical scholars seemed to have found their ultimate proof that "a Thomist [Dante] glorifies a Thomist," Gilson sought to argue that Nardi's sustained critique of the Thomist Dante as a myth should not be finally crushed, but as in fact transpired, should emerge victorious.[96]

Indeed, the opinions and scholarship of Nardi and Gilson would go on to underpin the subsequent twentieth- and twenty-first-century reception of Dante's philosophy and theology, and of the relationship between Aquinas's and Dante's thought. The most influential postwar North American Dante scholar, Charles Singleton (1909–1985), simply noted that "one surely thinks of Étienne Gilson and Bruno Nardi as our Masters in this, in medieval philosophy," while the English Dominican Foster, the

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94 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 317: "I keenly regret that I only became acquainted with this work after I had completed my own" (see also 259n1).

95 See Gilson, Letter to Bruno Nardi (17 June 17, 1937), in Dronke, *Étienne Gilson's Letters to Bruno Nardi*, 3–4, and Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 319–27.

96 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 317

postwar authority on Dante's theology in English and Italian scholarship,[97] explicitly situated his understanding of the *status questionis* in opposition to Mandonnet and as following the "pioneering labours of Bruno Nardi and Gilson's brilliant book [*Dante et la philosophie*]."[98] Whether mediated by Foster or not, Nardi's and Gilson's subsequent influence on the

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[97] In addition to his entry "Tommaso d'Aquino" cited above, Foster was entrusted with the most important theological entries in the six-volume *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, on Christ, God, Theology, the Gospel, and the *Summa contra gentiles*: "Cristo" (2:262–69); "Dio" (2:452–57); "Teologia" (5:564–68); "Vangelo" (5:874–77); "Summa contra Gentiles" (5:479–80).

[98] Kenelm Foster, *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977), 56 (and n. 1); Foster, "Tomasso d'Aquino," 626–49. Foster specifically singles out J. H. Whitfield's review of Gilson's *Dante et la philosophie* in *Modern Language Review* 41, no. 3 (1946): 334–35, which is "notable as the first tribute by an English Italianist to Gilson's brilliant raid into Dante territory, the effect of which had been delayed by the war" ("Dante Studies in England, 1921–1964," *Italian Studies* 20, no. 3 [1965]: 1–16). Foster was first introduced to Dante by Edward Bullough, who followed the "Thomist Dante" tradition, citing favorably Mandonnet, Berthier, Busnelli, et al. (see Edward Bullough, "Dante, the Poet of St. Thomas," in *St. Thomas Aquinas: Papers from the Summer School of Catholic Studies held at Cambridge, August 4–9*, ed. C. Lattey [Cambridge: Heffer & Sons, 1924], 247–84). However, Foster turned strongly against this Thomist approach to Dante, aligning himself with Nardi and Gilson, and opposing (and strongly so) the work of Mandonnet. Foster's intellectual trajectory was unusual for an English Dominican of his time: he also reacted strongly against the "purely Catholic diet of Aristotle (dubbed an honorary Papist), Aquinas and Père [Reginald Garrigou] Lagrange, as their intellectual *beau ideal* for a Friar Preacher" taught at Hawkesyard Dominican priory (Aiden Nichols, "Kenelm Foster," in *Dominican Gallery: Portrait of a Culture* [Leominster: Gracewing, 1997], 304–341, at 304–5), and he was not chosen, as would have been expected for a Dominican of his obvious intelligence (he had previously graduated with a first and the offer of a fellowship from Cambridge), to proceed to a theological degree and a teaching career in the order. As Bede Bailey, O.P., a fellow Dominican who knew him well, put it: "Both at Hawkesyard and Blackfriars, Oxford, Kenelm was thought to be not properly docile in his approach to his studies. . . . So when the time came for the students to be divided into intellectual sheep and goats—those who would proceed to theological degrees and those who would not—he found himself among the goats" (Bede Bailey, O.P., "In Memoriam Kenelm Foster OP: 1910–1986," *New Blackfriars* 67, no. 789 [1986], 138–40, at 139). Instead, Foster studied for a doctorate in the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty at Cambridge, going on to lecture in Italian Studies for thirty years (1948–1978), and remaining torn, it seems, between his double vocations as a Dominican Thomist and an Italianist; Bailey commented that Foster "learned and cultured, an artist and a poet," identified with the Catholic poet-priest Gerard Manley Hopkins, "perhaps sharing the poet's tension between his religion and artistry," a tension Foster memorably applied, of course, to Dante in *The Two Dantes* ("In Memoriam," 139).

understanding of the relationship between Aquinas's and Dante's thought was and is widespread and persistent.

For example, three reappraisals of the relationship between Aquinas and Dante were published in 2013 alone, all of which uphold the thesis and foundational approach of Nardi, Gilson, and Foster. Simon Gilson's nuanced account of the complex history of the question addresses the developments since the mid-twentieth century in historical scholarship on both Aquinas and Dante, according to which both authors emerge as more eclectic in their use of sources.[99] He nonetheless reaffirms the scholarly consensuses that: (1) "the view of Aquinas as the principal or exclusive influence on Dante's theological and philosophical *forma mentis*," albeit "once widely-held, [is] now discredited," and "it is quite impossible to ignore the divergences between them: these are numerous and often of considerable philosophical and theological magnitude;" (2) "Bruno Nardi [is] still widely regarded as the pre-eminent historian of Dante's philosophical and theological thought," with accompanying praise for "his vast erudition and polemical zeal against what he saw as the 'leggenda del tomismo dantesco';" and (3) Étienne Gilson, "another pre-eminent historian of medieval theology," provided a "balanced judgement on Dante's philosophical and

[99] With regard to developments in scholarship on Aquinas's and Dante's thought, see, for example, S. Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," 79–82 (including nn. 38–43 and 48)—see esp. 75–76: "We ought also to recognise that the study of Aquinas's own philosophical and theological culture has developed notably since the time of the disputes between Nardi and Busnelli. . . . The significance of the Dante Aquinas relationship has been further complicated, and, in some quarters, subject to radical revision, by several major studies that have revealed not only the complexity and multiplicity of Dante's theological interests, but also his strong concern with affective, non-rationalist currents and thinkers." In an indicative bibliography (76–77, nn. 30–33), Gilson rightly singles out the work of Zygmunt G. Barański as having presented the "greatest challenge, not simply to Aquinas's presence in Dante, but to the entire tradition of late medieval neo-Aristotelianism as a *chiave di lettura* for the poem" (77). Barański traces the genealogy of his own approach from its "cautious point of departure in late nineteenth-century positivist and historicist research, before spectacularly dashing forward, thanks to the seminal contributions of Bruno Nardi, Étienne Gilson, Kenelm Foster, and Cesare Vasoli" ("'With such vigilance! With such effort!' Studying Dante 'Subjectively,'" *Italian Culture* 33, no. 1 [2015]: 55–69, at 60). Barański's position is, however, even more radical than theirs, disputing as it does the very "critically entrenched image, of Dante the 'philosopher' and 'theologian'" itself, and the governing assumption that Dante had much in common "with the professional theologians and philosophers of his day" at all (60–61). In Barański's view, Dante's approach is better considered as "sapiential," and opposed to the "rationalistic" approach of the schools (see, especially, *Dante e i segni: saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* [Naples: Liguori, 2000]).

theological views," with praise of *Dante et la philosophie* as a "classic work" which "offers a magisterial—and witty—critique of Mandonnet's excesses in reading Dante as a Thomist, taking care to point out the many areas of opposition between Dante and Aquinas."[100] Christopher Ryan similarly comments that, "for all Dante's espousal of Aquinas as among the most cherished of his *auctores*, the differences between them are as great as the similarities, one of the great achievements of the twentieth century in the area of Dante scholarship being the retrieval of Dante from Thomas, or, more exactly, from Thomism," and Ryan attributes this achievement principally to Nardi, Gilson, and Foster.[101] Following suit, John Took claims that "perhaps the single most important accomplishment of twentieth-century Dante scholarship—certainly in the area of philosophy and theology—was the separating out of Dantean and Thomist spirituality," an accomplishment Took also specifically attributes to Nardi, Gilson, and Foster in turn, concluding that, "well before the end of the century, then, the myth of Dante's Thomism . . . has as a result of these and of similar interventions been put to rest."[102]

Thomistic and Dantean Theses: A Twenty-First-Century Reappraisal

In accepting Gilson and Nardi as authoritative and reliable guides to Aquinas, Dante scholars have typically followed their analyses of the divergences between Aquinas's and Dante's thought, and hence their dismissal of the "Thomist Dante" as a "myth." However, as we have seen, Aquinas is not a stable or self-evident point of comparison because his own thought is subject to highly varying interpretations. In light of the reception history analyzed above and with particular reference to Mandonnet's *Dante le théologien*, I thus reappraise and re-examine, in this third and final section, eight key Dantean theses that Nardi, Gilson, and Foster considered especially irreconcilable with the thought of Aquinas.

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100 S. Gilson, "Dante and Christian Aristotelianism," 70–73.

101 In 2013, John Took published his posthumous revision of Christopher Ryan's reappraisal of the Aquinas and Dante relationship, which had remained incomplete at the time of Ryan's death in 2004. See Christopher Ryan, *Dante and Aquinas: A Study of Nature and Grace in the "Comedy,"* revised by John Took with introduction (London: Ubiquity, 2013), 3–4.

102 John Took, "Between Philology and Friendship: Dante and Aquinas Revisited," in *Conversations with Kenelm: Essays on the Theology of the "Commedia"* (London: Ubiquity Press, 2013), 1–47, at 1–2.

The Natural Desire for the Beatific Vision

For Nardi, Gilson, and Foster, Dante's most evident non-Thomistic thesis is that man does not have a natural desire for the beatific vision. To support this view, they cite Dante's *Convivio* 3.15—"[What God is] is not something we naturally desire to know"—and for contrast, section 4 of chapter 30 in Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* III: "The natural desire to know does not rest in that knowledge of God whereby we know merely that He is."[103]

There are two issues here: one about their interpretation of Dante and the other about their interpretation of Aquinas. With regard to *Convivio* 3.15.7–10, they ignore the procedural point that, in this passage, Dante is approaching the question philosophically (not theologically), and is responding to a specific objection to the earthly happiness (the life of philosophical contemplation) he is describing: how can (philosophical) wisdom make a man happy if there are objects of the intellect which he knows exist, but which he cannot know perfectly (i.e., know their essence). Dante argues as follows: (1) natural desire is proportioned to the capacity of the agent desiring; (2) nature would be in vain if an agent, in desiring its perfection, were to desire its imperfection; (3) knowledge of God's essence (not that God exists but what and who God is) is not proportionate to human nature, and is only naturally proportionate to God; therefore (4) we do not naturally desire the beatific vision (i.e., to see God face to face).

The second issue is that they take Aquinas's position on this question to be self-evident (whereas, in fact, it was one of the most contentious problems in the history of twentieth-century Catholic thought[104]), and

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[103] Foster, "Tommaso d'Aquino," 626a–49a. See also Falzone, "Nardi's Louvain Dissertation," 370–72 ("This thesis is clearly opposed to Aquinas' solution; it contrasts with those of other theologians as well"), and Luca Bianchi, "Moral Philosophy," in *Dante in Context*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 159–72, at 170: "This statement provides decisive evidence against the 'legend' of Dante's Thomism, since it is clearly at odds with the basic tenets of Aquinas' ethics and anthropology."

[104] See especially Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010), and Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010). For further contributions to the ongoing twenty-first century discussion, see also Long, "On the Possibility of a Purely Natural End for Man," *The Thomist* 64, no. 2 (2000): 211–37; Stephen Wang, "Aquinas on Human Happiness and the Natural Desire for God," *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1015 (2007): 322–34; Christopher Malloy, "De Lubac on Natural Desire: Difficulties and Antitheses," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 9, no. 3 (2011): 567–624; Patrick Gardner, "Thomas and Dante on the *Duo Ultima Hominis*," *The Thomist* 75, no. 3 (2011): 415–59; Long, "Creation *ad imaginem Dei*: The Obediential Potency of the Human Person to Grace and Glory,"

they quote, as evidence for it, two passages—from Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* and *Summa contra gentiles*—where Aquinas is approaching the same question theologically.[105] In *De veritate*, by contrast, Aquinas speaks of the beatific vision as exceeding "the proportion of human nature because the natural powers are not sufficient for attaining, or thinking, or desiring it," a position in harmony with Dante's philosophical position in the *Convivio*.[106] As the historian Frederick Copleston (1907–1994) comments, in *De veritate*, St. Thomas "does not admit a natural desire in the strict sense for the vision of God, and it seems only reasonable to suppose that when in the *Summa Theologica* and *Summa contra Gentiles* he speaks of a natural desire for the vision of God, he is not speaking strictly as a philosopher, but as a theologian and philosopher combined, that is, presupposing the supernatural order and interpreting the data of experience in the light of that presupposition."[107]

Nova et Vetera (English) 14, no. 4 (2015): 1175–92; Jacob W. Wood, "Henri de Lubac, *Humani Generis*, and the Natural Desire for a Supernatural End," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 4 (2017): 1209–41; and David L. Augustine, "Extrinsicism?: Revisiting the Preconciliar Theology of Nature and Grace," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 3 (2020): 791–816.

105 Foster, "Tomasso d'Aquino," 646a. See also Foster, "Dante's vision of God," in *The Two Dantes*, 66–85. In terms of the twentieth-century debates, Foster cites only one article on this issue: Antonius Finili, "Natural Desire," *Dominican Studies* 1, no. 4 (1948), 313–59. On Finili's place in the debates of the 1920s, see also Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 356–69.

106 Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2 (cited in Long, "On the Possibility," 211). See also Long, "Creation," 1185–92.

107 *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 3. See Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Augustine to Scotus* (London: Search Press, 1950), 405: "In the *De Veritate* (q. 27, a. 2) St. Thomas says that man, according to his nature, has a natural appetite for *aliqua contemplatio divinorum*, such as it is possible for a man to obtain by the power of nature, and that the inclination of his desire towards the supernatural and gratuitous end (the vision of God) is the work of grace." That we know through Christian revelation that God has in fact, in history, become incarnate and thereby raised up human nature by grace to participate in the beatific vision does not necessarily imply, for Aquinas, that human nature would have been in vain were God not to have done so (otherwise, and this is one of the many problematic implications of de Lubac's position, it seems that God *had* to become incarnate). See also Long, "On the Possibility," 231: "But in a state wherein nature is not further ordered, the end proportioned to human nature remains a true felicity, a genuine end. One grants that this felicity would be imperfect because mobile. No finite good can perfectly quell the will, and apart from revelation all knowledge of God is causal knowledge proceeding from creaturely effects. Still, natural felicity is imperfect only relative to an end utterly disproportionate to human nature that we cannot even raise to desire apart from grace."

In this regard, McInerny highlights Cajetan's distinction between two ways of considering man's desire for the beatific vision: (1) as pertaining to man's nature, it is not natural; (2) as pertaining to man ordered to a supernatural end, it is natural. Aquinas's passage in *De veritate* should be understood in the first sense (as should Dante's passage in *Convivio* 3.15), whereas the passages in the *Summa theologiae* and *Summa contra gentiles* should be understood in the second sense.[108] Rather than a necessary and "certain" contradiction between Aquinas and Dante, then, what is at stake here are two rival interpretations of Aquinas's thought, as well as, on the part of Nardi, Gilson, Foster, and others, an interpretative failure to account for the procedural distinction, common to this period, between speaking *philosophically* and speaking *theologically*. Gilson considered "absolutely perfect" de Lubac's thesis in *Le mystère du surnaturel* (1965) that, according to Aquinas, man has a natural desire for the beatific vision (in both senses), a desire only grace can accomplish.[109] However, de Lubac (and Gilson) were reacting against the mainstream Thomist tradition of the time, according to which "man is made for a natural happiness in such a way that if he is called to the vision of God, as he is, such a grace can only be superadded. The theory thus denies that man [in the first sense] has a natural desire for supernatural beatitude 'the aspiration for which is due to a grace specifically Christian.'"[110]

Dante's Imperialist Political Theology

Étienne Gilson highlights the striking contrast between Dante's and Aquinas's political thought. Dante affirms that the pope is "the Sovereign Pontiff, vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Peter's successor, to whom we owe what is the due, not of Christ, but of Peter"; by contrast, Aquinas states that he is "the Sovereign Priest Peter's successor, the Vicar of Christ, the Roman Pontiff, to whom all the kings of the Christian people owe submission, as to Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself."[111] In doing so, however, Gilson is only reiterating what Berthier and Mandonnet had both underlined as a non-Thomistic element in Dante's thought. Thus Berthier considered wildly idealistic, dangerous in its time, and clearly erroneous Dante's

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108 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 84.

109 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 79.

110 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 72. See also Long, *Natura Pura*. However, Wood argues that de Lubac's understanding is not, nonetheless, "an historical *novum*," but instead was a "foundational commitment of the Thomism of the Aegidian tradition, which was established by Giles of Rome" ("Henri de Lubac," 1210).

111 Dante, *Monarchia* 3.3; Aquinas, *De regimine principum* 1.14.

practical application of the twofold end of man (natural and supernatural) to support his imperialist argument for the complete temporal sovereignty of a Holy Roman Emperor in *Monarchia*, and thought the Dominican Guido Vernani (and the Church as a whole) quite right to refute and condemn this thesis shortly after Dante's death in 1328.[112] Mandonnet similarly contextualizes Dante's imperialist utopianism, excusing it with reference to the political passions, unjust exile, and disappointments of Dante and his time.[113] The removal of Dante's *Monarchia* from the Index in 1881 was in no way a belated recognition that Dante's political vision had, in fact, been correct. Nonetheless, times had moved on, and the Church arguably did not want to dampen, by this censure, the enthusiasm for Dante as the Christian poet of the *Commedia*. Notwithstanding Dante's heterodox political vision, it is the theological and philosophical doctrines of the *Commedia* overall, then, that Mandonnet and Berthier consider sound, and in general harmony with Aquinas's teaching.

*Dante's "Division of Human Life under 'Two Final Ends' (*duo ultima*)"*

According to Gilson, Nardi, and Foster, not only Dante's imperial political theology but the ethical theory of the *duo ultima* (the two ends of man) that underpins it sets him at odds with Aquinas's own moral thought: "Dante's dualism, and the *temporal final goal* which it implies, are excluded in advance by St. Thomas."[114] Gilson claims that "not only—as far as we know—did St. Thomas never speak of *duo ultima*, nor, in this sense, of *duplex finis*, but his doctrine excludes even the possibility of their existence."[115]

Once again, the issue concerns the selection of one passage in Aquinas's works without regard to others and the failure to distinguish between the

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112 Berthier, "Introduzione," no. 7, in *Inferno*, 2:xxiii–xxiv. See Berthier, VII: "In that book Dante erred in many places, induced to such error both by the sophistry of the Bolognese jurists, who followed Raniero in teaching these Roman-German doctrines, as well as by his own disgust for the democracy which had caused him so much suffering in his native Florence. For our purposes, it would be useless to discuss the arguments adopted by the poet, especially given that everyone today understands them to be great utopias, which could only be realized in a perfect world." For an analysis of Guido Vernarni's critique of Dante's positions, see also Corbett, *Dante and Epicurus*, 51–56.

113 See Mandonnet, Review of Gilson, *Le Thomisme*, 134. Mandonnet also remarks that Dante's haughty spirit and moral intransigence made him manifestly unsuitable for public life and, in exiling him, Florence actually worked to Dante's glory by shielding him from the fruitless unrest of the forum, and enabling him to concentrate on his studies during his long years of solitude.

114 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 195n2.

115 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 194n2.

procedural approaches of them both. While Gilson relies on a citation from Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* to imply a single ultimate end, in *De veritate* Aquinas articulates, in a different context, a twofold ultimate end to man.[116] McInerny paraphrases the key passage as follows:

> There is, Thomas observes, a twofold ultimate end of man, the ultimate end being what first engages the will; one such end is proportioned to human nature and man's natural powers suffice for attaining it (this is the happiness of which philosophers speak, whether contemplative, which lies in the activity of wisdom, or active, which consists first in the act of prudence and consequently in the acts of the other virtues). But there is another good that is disproportionate to human nature and our natural powers do not suffice for the attaining of it, either for knowing it or for desiring it. It is promised by the divine liberality alone.[117]

While Thomists traditionally differentiate between man's natural and his supernatural end, twentieth-century followers of de Lubac—who refute this distinction in Aquinas—typically ignore or downplay evidence such as this to the contrary.[118]

Crucially, Gilson mistakenly appears to hold that the doctrine of a *duplex finis* implies that the natural end is complete from the perspective of revelation and the supernatural end thereby revealed. Gilson affirms that "all [Aquinas's] energies are bent on proving that man's final goal, as conceived by natural reason, is prescribed as a stepping-stone, and is subordinate, to that goal of whose attainment Revelation shows us the possibility."[119] However, for Aquinas and Dante, the natural end is *not* a stepping stone, as if a man were to reach his natural end and then jump from this to his supernatural end; instead, the natural and supernatural ends are ways of conceiving man's ultimate end in terms of (1) his nature alone and (2) his nature elevated by grace.[120]

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116 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 194n2.

117 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 20.

118 Thus, as Gardner notes, Bradley "mentions the passage most stubbornly inhospitable to his thesis (*De Verit.*, q. 14, a. 3) only in passing to trump it with other texts" ("Thomas and Dante on the *Duo ultima hominis*," 417n5). See also Denis J. M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 398.

119 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 194n2.

120 In *De veritate*, Aquinas also underlines that beatitude, the vision of the divine essence, is beyond the power of the human intellect, which must be raised by the light of glory

Therefore, although Dante's heterodox political vision was undoubtedly opposed to that of Aquinas, the extent to which the underpinning theory of the *duo ultima* is opposed to Aquinas, and to a lay and worldly (*laico e mondano*) aspect of Dante's thought (as for Nardi, Gilson and Foster), depends on the particular interpretation of Aquinas's thought itself.[121] As Patrick Gardner has argued more recently, "behind very different political applications lies an instructive agreement in principle" between Aquinas and Dante: this very "distinction between two ultimate ends or goods for man."[122]

The Relationship between Philosophy and Theology

For Gilson, Nardi was right to deduce a heterodox approach to philosophy as a strict consequence of Dante's doctrine of the *duo ultima*: "Nardi, with great shrewdness, has seen and pointed out that there is disagreement here between Dante and St. Thomas, and that this difference implies another, regarding the nature of philosophy itself. . . . I am convinced that he is entirely right on this point, and even that what he says is an incontestable and obvious historical fact."[123] However, Gilson's and Nardi's identification of difference on this point between Aquinas and Dante follows, again, from their own particular and highly contentious interpretations of Aquinas's thought. Gilson's interpretation of Dante's trajectory (from the "dualism" between philosophy and theology in the prose works to the alleged Christian synthesis of the *Commedia*) is, in essence, a cultural mapping onto Dante of his wider agenda for twentieth-century "Christian

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(the *lumen gloriae*) to see God, the first truth, and all things in Him (q. 10, a. 11, ad. 7). Referencing this passage, as well as passages from the *Summa theologiae*, Mandonnet sees no difference of opinion between Aquinas and Dante in their approach to a temporal beatitude in this life, and the beatitude of the future life (see Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 216–17).

121 Foster, "Tommaso d'Aquino," 647b.

122 See Gardner, "Thomas and Dante on the *Duo Ultima Hominis*," 419. Gardner argues that Dante's distinction between man *as corruptible* and man *as incorruptible* is common enough in principle: man (a composition of soul and body) is mortal (death is simply the division of a man's soul and body), whereas man's soul is immortal (and will be reunited with its body at the resurrection); in light of this, man has a natural and temporal end, a temporal beatitude *as a man* (composite of soul and body), and an eternal beatitude *in virtue of his immortal soul* (the beatific vision of man's soul, and with the general resurrection, of man body and soul). See also Jason Aleksander, "Dante's Understanding of the Two Ends of Human Desire and the Relationship between Philosophy and Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 2 (2011): 158–87.

123 Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, 194n2 (Gilson cites Nardi, *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 282 and 304–5).

philosophy," and, with Chenu, for a "new school" and "new curriculum" of theology.

By contrast, Mandonnet and Berthier maintain the traditional Thomist position that Catholic theology does not admit of intrinsic change and includes within it a philosophy (subject to the dictates of reason, conforming to the Faith, and therefore *in se* immutable). To Dante's sacred poem, both heaven and earth have set their hand ("'l poema sacro, / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra"), and in continuity with the early commentators, Mandonnet and Berthier interpret these lines to indicate that Dante distinguishes between, and draws upon, both philosophy (which derives its principles *from below*) and Christian revelation (which derives its principles *from above*).[124] That St. Thomas wrote philosophical works (such as his long commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *On the Soul*) as well as theological works which draw on this philosophy (most notably, the *Summa contra gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*) does not imply that he was less a Christian in writing the former (or, indeed, that there were two Thomases, one an Aristotelian philosopher and the other a Christian theologian). Rather, philosophy is an important field of knowledge in its own right, as well as being the handmaid of theology (*ancilla theologiae*), part of the doctrine which makes up (and, in the Scholastic curriculum, prepared for the study of) theology. Nor, then, does Dante's procedural emphasis on philosophy in the *Convivio* necessarily imply, as it did for Nardi, Gilson, and Foster, an intellectual conversion for him to write the *Commedia*.[125]

Mandonnet affirms, indeed, that the great achievement of thirteenth-century theology was to place "every field of intellectual endeavour then known in contact with the revealed order." Theology is, then, a "universal science which the *Commedia* holds all together: everything in the revealed order and in the purely human order, in faith and in science in the domain of thought; in grace and in nature, in the order of reality."[126] Dante's epic is the "poem of human destiny in light of Christian teaching," the theme

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124 Dante, *Paradiso* 25.1–2; Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 258.

125 Foster is perplexed that in the *Convivio* the "influence of divine grace in the human soul and body in the present life—a central issue for Christian ethics—is entirely ignored" (Foster, *Two Dantes*, 239). From Mandonnet's perspective, however, this is simply concomitant to the work being principally philosophical.

126 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 255; 258. Mandonnet notes that the very "breadth and variety of [the *Commedia*'s] subject matter" has led critics to locate Dante as "primarily philosophical, moral, historical, or even political," a tendency based on a fundamental misunderstanding of "what theology was for Dante's contemporaries and for Dante himself" (254).

"of the great thirteenth-century works of theology, about man's fall, restoration, and return to God."[127] The natural and supernatural orders, the orders of nature and of grace, are nonetheless distinct and irreducible in themselves.[128] It is for this reason that, with regard to speculative knowledge, Mandonnet identifies Dante's Virgil with philosophy, while he identifies Dante's Beatrice specifically with revealed truth, faith, and the light of glory.[129] In the *Commedia*, it is Dante's Aquinas who represents, for Mandonnet, Christian theology (which brings together the truths of reason and Christian revelation into a formal synthesis).[130] Thus, where Foster in particular saw the dichotomy between Virgil and Beatrice as setting Dante at antipodes with Aquinas and creating a deeply problematic tension in the poem between "Two Dantes," Mandonnet understands Dante's Virgil and Beatrice as his poetic solution to the challenge of representing, in the speculative order of knowledge, the Thomistic autonomy of truths from reason and from revelation, truths which find—in Christian theology (in Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* as in Dante's *Commedia*)—their integration, without thereby losing their distinction.

The Relationship between Nature and Grace

For Foster, nature must in some sense surrender its autonomy in a Christian synthesis. By contrast, Virgil (and Dante's limbo of the virtuous pagans as a whole) seems to embody a kind of human perfectibility without healing grace (*gratia sanans*), which Foster finds incompatible with Aquinas's thought and theologically unacceptable.[131] For Mandonnet, in an individual Christian, grace clearly builds on nature and transforms it; nonetheless, at a conceptual level, the natural order retains its distinction. In Dante's *Commedia*, this is represented by the action of both Beatrice (the order of grace) and Virgil (the order of nature) on the Christian pilgrim Dante.

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127 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 254.

128 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 259.

129 Mandonnet adds that one could thus extract the subject matter of philosophy and theology from the poem, placing it within the traditional division of these two disciplines; in doing so, Mandonnet claims, one would see how Dante had almost exhausted the essential truths of these sciences, whether directly or through allusion (Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 261).

130 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 266.

131 Foster, *Two Dantes*, 248–49: "a 'nature' whose contact with God (through grace) is minimal, but whose intrinsic excellence, on its own level and for the duration of life on earth can, in principle, be complete. And this completeness in human excellence, if achieved, would be *self*-achieved. Grace as *sanans*, as healing the wound of sin, would not, in principle, be needed."

Crucially, however, the issue here is principally a hermeneutical one, and only secondarily an issue of dogmatic theology. Underpinning Foster's claim of divergence between Aquinas's and Dante's thought is his assumption that the literal sense of Dante's poem is true, or intended to be interpreted as such. This highly questionable assumption pervaded postwar Dante criticism, whether the *Commedia* was understood as a mystical vision (Nardi), figural fulfilment (Erich Auerbach), or according to the allegory of the theologians (Singleton).[132] From the hermeneutical perspective of the allegory of the poets sustained by Berthier and Mandonnet, by contrast, Dante's imaginative creation of a limbo of the virtuous pagans, which so vexed Foster and subsequent critics, is not intended as dogmatic eschatology at all (i.e., to imply that such a state actually exists for pagans in the afterlife). Rather, what is primary is not the fictional sign, but the truth signified: the happiness of this life (*beatitudo huius vitae*), the kind of (albeit limited) earthly happiness attainable by the teaching of the philosophers. Man's natural end (natural beatitude)—praising and contemplating God without suffering but without seeing him face to face—would be, according to Aquinas's theological hypothesis, the eternal destiny of unbaptized infants in limbo. However, in Dante's fiction, man's natural end (represented in limbo) is seen from the perspective of man's supernatural end, and hence the virtuous pagans "live in desire without hope."[133]

Pagan Virtue and Pagan Salvation

Foster's hermeneutical commitment to the truth of the literal sense of the *Commedia* also leads him to consider Dante's teaching on pagan virtue and salvation as at odds with Aquinas's thought: that Dante actually believed that (1) an individual pagan could be morally impeccable and (2) an individual pagan, without some exceptional miracle, is necessarily damned. For Mandonnet, by contrast, what is at stake here are Dante's

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132 On the problematic issue of twentieth-century hermeneutical approaches to the *Commedia*, see George Corbett, "Interpreting Dante's *Commedia*: Competing Perspectives," *Biblioteca Dantesca* 4 (2021): 1–32.

133 In his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, Aquinas clarifies that the temporal beatitude of philosophical contemplation spoken of by Aristotle is qualified: "Such men are happy *as men*, for in this life subject to mutability, perfect happiness cannot be attained" (see Feingold, *Natural Desire*, 361n175); the natural final beatitude must be satisfied after this life, but from a theological perspective, this need not have involved the beatific vision (seeing God face to face), as the theological hypothesis of the beatitude of the unbaptized infants underlines. However, from the perspective of the afterlife, this qualified temporal beatitude of the pagans (intended as a limited happiness in this life) is, of course, deficient.

competing doctrinal and poetic demands in writing the *Commedia*. As poet, Dante seeks a beautiful theological form and must sustain the rules of poetic allegory and verisimilitude; as teacher, he seeks to sacrifice nothing essential in communicating doctrine.[134] Crucially, though, conflicts between these competing demands are inevitable; in such cases, the tension is resolved through mutual concessions, with sometimes the doctrinal and sometimes the poetic claim ceding precedence. In this instance, Virgil's doctrinal significance (the natural order) necessitates, at the level of the poetic fiction, his location in limbo (as morally impeccable and spiritually damned). Had Dante chosen as his signifier of the natural order an abstract (and historically non-existent) lady such as Boethius's Lady Philosophy, the problem of an individual virtuous pagan's apparent damnation, at the level of the fiction, would not have arisen.[135]

Nonetheless, according to the allegory of the poets, it had been customary from the earliest commentators to interpret this strange section of limbo *only* according to its figurative or doctrinal sense (*poetice*), and not literally as dogmatic theology (*theologice*).[136] The dogmatic truths here reside only in the signified and not in the signifier: theologically, the relative autonomy of philosophical truth, the moral law, and the human arts (as preeminently of poetry); morally, the necessity of belief in Christ for salvation, such that a living nonbeliever already exists in a moral Hell (living in desire, without hope).[137] Given what Dante would have known about their lives, it is highly implausible that he would have believed that the historical Virgil and the other adult inhabitants of limbo literally did not sin in their earthly lives. The heterodox view of moral impeccability goes against common sense and was explicitly ruled out as shameless presumption and mistaken blundering by Augustine, and as a simple impossibility

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134 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 243.

135 There were, of course, many advantages for Dante in deploying Virgil typologically; moreover, at the level of the fictional journey, Virgil's apparent damnation provides one of the most important narrative dramas and tension points of the poem.

136 See, for example, Guido da Pisa, gloss to *Inferno* 4.82–84: "But our faith does not hold that in Limbo there are any souls except innocent children. . . . The poet, however, in this part . . . . is not speaking theologically but rather poetically."

137 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 128. The moral message underpinning the tragic fate of the pagan is particularly aimed at unbelievers. As Francesco da Buti puts it: "Every unbeliever in this life is without hope. Since faith generates hope, he who does not have the true faith does not have true hope. And the unbelievers of the world still give testimony to this—who live in continual desire for beatitude and yet cannot have true hope for it because they do not have true faith" (cited, with reference to the broader question, in Corbett, "The *Limbus Gentilium Virtuosum*," in *Dante and Epicurus*, 123–29).

by Aquinas.[138] In terms of pagan salvation, Dante finally makes clear, in the heavens of Jupiter and Saturn, that the destiny of particular pagans is known to God alone. Interpreting the *Commedia* according to the allegory of the poets (as was prevalent until the early twentieth century), and bearing in mind Dante's sometimes competing doctrinal and poetic demands, the dogmatic theology hidden under the fiction of Dante's poem is not necessarily opposed, then, to Aquinas's teaching at all.

Prime Matter

A paradigmatic example given by Nardi, Gilson, and Foster for maintaining that "Dante's universe was not the Thomist one" is a very short passage about prime matter in *Paradiso* 29: "Form and matter, both joined and entirely pure, came forth into unflawed being, like three arrows from a bow with three strings."[139] In relation to this passage, Mandonnet underlines again the exegetical principle of competing doctrinal and poetic demands: critics who approach the *Commedia* from the perspective of doctrine must not forget that we are dealing also with a poet.[140] Both Nardi (anti-Thomist) and Busnelli (Nardi's early Thomist opponent), on Mandonnet's view, fell into this trap.[141] Mandonnet acknowledges that "the way in which Dante expresses himself on the subject of prime matter in canto 29 of *Paradiso* could lead one to believe that he is following Augustine's theory, a theory which allows for a potential existence of matter independent of substantial form."[142] Nonetheless, Dante's use of the technical Aristotelian and Thomist expression *pura potenza* (*Paradiso* 29.34), a concept which excludes actuality, precludes this interpretation; and, following Busnelli, he references also a parallel passage in Aquinas's *Compendium theologiae*.[143]

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138 Augustine, *Contra Iulianum haeresis Pelegiannae defensorem* 4.3.26, and Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 24, a. 12, ad 2.

139 *Paradiso* 29.22–24. As evidence of Dante's debt to Avicenna, Nardi cites, among other things, Dante's doubt in *Paradiso* 19.22–24 about the existence of prime matter in God (Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale: nuovi saggi di filosofia dantesca* [Bari: B. Laterza, 1942], 248–53). See Foster, *Two Dantes*, 57.

140 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 246.

141 Mandonnet nonetheless emphasizes that "I do not believe that Nardi's thesis as a whole is justified, and I think Fr Giovanni Busnelli SJ is right to oppose Nardi in the study he devoted to this matter, entitled, 'Dantean cosmogony and its sources'" (Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 246, including n. 28).

142 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 247.

143 Busnelli, "La Cosmogonia Dantesta," in the *Scritti vari* combined issue, 42–84, at 45–46: "And Aquinas applies this way of conceiving 'form and matter, both joined and entirely pure' to all sensible things and intelligible entities with these other words,

However, and crucially, Mandonnet maintains that the reason for Dante's formulation was poetic rather than doctrinal. Dante imprints the central mystery of the Christian faith, that God is one substance in three persons, onto the entire fabric of the *Commedia* from the macro level—one poem in three canticles narrates one vision of the afterlife through three realms, with each of the three main protagonists (Dante, Virgil, and Beatrice) having three offices—to the micro level—the arrangement of *terzine* (each with three lines). It is to apply the governing poetic principle of one-in-threeness, in Mandonnet's view, that Dante presents the categories of object resulting from the creative act of the triune God under three headings.[144] As a general principle, then, Mandonnet warns against the fallacy of simply extracting theological or philosophical doctrines from Dante's *Commedia* without considering the possible poetic or formal reasons in their particular contexts: "Many textual particularities," he claims, "may be understood and justified in the mutual requirements of poetry and doctrine which, depending on the circumstances, had to give way one to the other."[145]

The Identity of Essence and Existence in God, and their Distinction in Creatures

As with the key positive differences between Aquinas's and Dante's thought, moreover, so with the negative ones. Gilson claims that the distinction between essence and existence in creatures, and their identity in God *ipsum esse subsistens*, is the most original aspect of Aquinas's thought. He also states that "the Thomistic school, the Dominican order, and especially Cardinal Cajetan" had failed to recognize this fact. However, as McInerny points out, the "Thomist who would make the real distinction [between essence and existence] unique or original to Thomas must face the considerable difficulty that Thomas does not agree with him. He himself attributes knowledge of this distinction to Aristotle, Boethius, others."[146] If this distinction is not, *pace* Gilson, the key innovation of

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which appear copied by Dante: 'In sensible things, act, that is, form, is found to be the highest; pure potency, or matter, is found to be the lowest; and the composition of form and matter holds a place midway between the two.'"

144 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 247–48.

145 Mandonnet, *Dante le théologien*, 252.

146 McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 167 (in the prologue to his third part, "Thomism and Philosophical Theology"). See also, in *Praeambula fidei*, the chapters "Gilson's Attack on Cajetan" (39–68) and "The Alleged Forgetfulness of *Esse*" (126–55; particularly see 141).

Aquinas's thought, the claim that Dante does not particularly prioritize or emphasize this doctrine does not imply, as it did for Gilson and his followers such as Foster, that there is a clear divergence between Aquinas and Dante in this negative respect either.

Conclusion

In one (albeit simplified) narrative of twentieth-century Catholic thought, celebrated historians such as Étienne Gilson and Marie-Dominique Chenu rescued St. Thomas from the Thomists. In this narrative, for example, the censorship of Chenu in the late 1930s is typically attributed to the alleged ahistoricism, and even small-mindedness, of Thomists, with particular venom reserved for the "sacred monster of Thomism" in Rome, the Dominican Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange.[147] Despite such setbacks, Gilson and Chenu would eventually triumph, exerting a profound influence on Aquinas studies and medieval scholarship, not least by collaborating together in establishing the influential institutes of medieval studies in Toronto and Ottawa, while many of their principal adversaries, such as Mandonnet, lie largely forgotten.[148] This article seeks to contribute to a growing recovery of the rather disparaged or silenced voices in early-twentieth-century Catholic thought. As I have suggested, there were good reasons why the founders of the *Institut historique d'études thomistes* were concerned by the "alarming assertions" about Aquinas emanating from Gilson and others, while the very title of their institute (and the composition of its early members) belies any simplistic equation of Scholasticism with ahistoricism. Furthermore, it may be no coincidence that Chenu published his now-celebrated account of Le Saulchoir only shortly after the death of Mandonnet. What have become, in some circles, foundational premises of Aquinas's thought were highly contestable at the time, and it is worthwhile reappraising why this was so and, dare we say it, what the truth of the matter actually is.

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147 Kerr, for example, approvingly cites Walter Kasper's triumphalist account of the apparent defeat of neo-Scholasticism: "'There is no doubt that the outstanding event in the Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neo-scholasticism,' so Walter Kasper declared, in 1987. Anyone who began ordination studies in 1957, as I did, would agree" (*Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, vii). See also Paul Philibert, "M-D Chenu: Situating Theology in History," in Thomas F. O'Meara and Paul Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times: French Dominicans in the Twentieth Century* (Adelaide, Australia: ATF Theology, 2013), 19–41.

148 On Chenu's influence, see, for example, O'Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Times*, xi–xx and 19–41.

The early-twentieth-century battles about the true sense of Aquinas's doctrine were anything but academic. The principal protagonists knew full well that at stake was the very nature of Catholic theology and philosophy, as the debates about Christian philosophy or the new theological curriculum of Chenu exemplify in the 1920s and 1930s. While such debates about Aquinas's thought are receiving renewed attention, scholars have not heretofore examined comparatively the parallel debates in the field of Dante studies, debates which offer privileged insights into their adversaries' competing understandings of Aquinas's thought, as well as of Catholic theology and philosophy as a whole. After all, Gilson saw himself as rescuing not just Aquinas but also Dante from the clerical Thomists. While Mandonnet defended critically what had become the "universally established custom" of placing Aquinas's theories in parallel with those of Dante, Nardi and Gilson explicitly sought to dismantle what they saw as the "myth of the Thomist Dante," setting their own interpretations in polemical opposition to Mandonnet and other clerical Thomists specifically, as well as against the majority tradition in Dante commentary from the early fourteenth century. Nonetheless, especially mediated by Foster, it was the view of Nardi and Gilson on the relationship between Aquinas's and Dante's thought which subsequently prevailed in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In reappraising this relationship, I have intentionally focused on those Dantean theses that Nardi, Gilson, and Foster considered especially irreconcilable with Aquinas. On one point, there is no doubt: Dante's imperial utopianism is clearly opposed to Aquinas's political thought; however, no Thomist (and certainly not Mandonnet) pretended otherwise. On the natural desire for the beatific vision and the distinction between two ultimate ends for man, however, Aquinas and Dante are necessarily in disagreement only if one selects a single passage of Aquinas without regard to others and if one fails to distinguish the procedural relativism, common to both Aquinas and Dante, of arguing in some places *philosophically*, but in others *theologically and philosophically*. What is at stake, in these two instances, then, are competing understandings of Aquinas's doctrine, with Gilson's interpretation of Aquinas aligning with de Lubac's controversial thesis in *Le mystère du surnaturel*. Likewise, Gilson's contentious understanding of Christian philosophy arguably underlies his critique of the autonomy of philosophy in Dante's thought; by contrast, for Mandonnet, the autonomy of truths from reason and from revelation is constitutive of Thomism properly understood, and both Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* and Dante's *Commedia*, as works of theology, integrate these truths into

a formal synthesis. In this instance as well, how we understand Aquinas is the key to the divergence or not with the thought of Dante. When it comes to the salvation of pagans or the creation of prime matter, Aquinas's doctrine is not in dispute; instead, what matters is, first, the hermeneutic approach we adopt in interpreting the *Commedia* and, second, whether we account sufficiently for Dante's competing doctrinal and poetic demands in composing the poem. If one interprets the literal sense of the poem as dogmatic theology, the status of virtuous pagans (*Inferno* 4) is heterodox, as is the status of the neutral souls (*Inferno* 3) and the souls in Ante-Purgatory (*Purgatoria* 1–9), to give two other examples; if one interprets the dogmatic theology in these passages as only the sense or senses signified, the divergence between Aquinas's and Dante's thought substantially disappears.

Although underlining the potential variety and limitations of Dante's sources, Mandonnet consistently maintained that—on major points of contested doctrine—Dante typically follows the shape of Aquinas's thought. For the last hundred or so years, however, the "Thomist Dante" has been discredited as a myth, as Nardi and Gilson intended. The consequent perception of Dante as a heterodox thinker, out of step with Aquinas, has perhaps contributed to the decrease of scholarship on Dante by Thomists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, at least when compared to the intensity of Dante scholarship by Thomists in the Leonine renaissance. This article invites scholars (and especially Thomists) to re-examine the relationship between Aquinas's and Dante's thought again in light of contemporary scholarship on both these authors; it also invites scholars to reappraise the foundational scholarship of Nardi, Gilson, Foster, and their followers in relation to their now less-studied adversaries, such as Berthier, Busnelli, and Mandonnet. In doing so, we may hope to establish where the true sense of Aquinas's and Dante's doctrines might lie. Ultimately, the Dominicans Mandonnet and Berthier were less concerned about the sources of Dante's doctrine, and more concerned about what Dante's doctrine was and whether it was true. It is in this latter respect that they perceived a general harmony between Dante's thought, Thomism, and—at a time when it was threatened from within and without—Catholic philosophy and theology. N·V