

What is a Thomist? (translation)¹

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Introduction

Writing one hundred years ago, on the occasion of the sixth centenary of the canonization of St. Thomas Aquinas, eminent Spanish Thomist Santiago Ramírez, OP (1891-1967) reflects on the profound legacy of St. Thomas Aquinas by examining what it means to be a Thomist. In emphasizing the need for a holistic embrace of the Angelic Doctor's intellectual and spiritual life and drawing on the enduring guidance of the Church and Thomistic tradition, the work aims to inspire both scholars and those in formation to strive for a deeper understanding of Thomistic thought, fostering its application to contemporary challenges in philosophy and theology.

Ramírez dedicated his life to Thomistic studies and teaching, particularly at San Esteban in Salamanca, Spain, and the Angelicum in Rome.² He left a substantial

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¹ The article in Spanish “¿Qué es un Tomista?” was published in *Ciencia Tomista* 27:164-193 (1923).

² Notes on Ramírez's life can be found in Ramón Hernández Martín, OP, “Santiago María Ramírez Dulanto,” *Historia Hispánica*, Real Academia de la Historia, <https://historia-hispanica.rah>.

legacy in philosophical research and speculative moral theology. While some consider his stance “traditionalist,” his methodical and profound approach provides valuable insights that continue to shape and influence Thomists in theology and philosophy.

Since he primarily wrote in Latin, this translation aims to make one of his few lesser-known works in Spanish accessible to modern readers, with the biographical section on St. Thomas Aquinas omitted. It can be read alongside other key texts, providing a norm for understanding *what it means to be a Thomist*.³ Gratitude is due to Fray Manuel Ángel Martínez, OP, and the Editorial Board of *Ciencia Tomista* for their consent, as well as to Fray Bernardo Sastre Zamora, OP, for his thoughtful suggestions.

What is a Thomist?

The centenary celebrations of the death of St. Thomas were followed by a restoration and rejuvenation of Thomism, which we all participated in and celebrated. Thanks to the strong impulse of the great Leo XIII, which was continued by his successors to the Pontifical Throne, and seconded by the docility and efforts of Catholics of goodwill.

Will the centenary of his canonization be sterile? If this were true, it should be said that life and glory are to be sought in the tomb and not on the altars. It is the duty of Catholics, especially those of our motherland Spain, to make this centenary

es/biografias/37306-santiago-maria-ramirez-dulanto. See also Luis Camacho, “Santiago Ramírez, OP, 1891-1967. In Memoriam (Review),” *The Thomist* 32, no. 4 (1968): 575–77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1968.0013>. The entry on his life and works provides a comprehensive list of his writings: “Santiago Ramírez 1891-1967,” in *Filosofía en español*, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.filosofia.org/ave/001/a272.htm>. Among his works, he is best known for his treatise on analogy, originally published in *Ciencia Tomista* as “De analogia secundum doctrinam aristotelico-thomisticam,” and later published posthumously in four volumes as *De analogia*. The most recent examination of this opus can be found in the anthology on the Thomists of the twentieth century: Mauricio Beuchot, OP, “Santiago María Ramírez (1921-1922) - De analogia,” in *Grandi Opere Del Tomismo Nel Novecento*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2020).

³ In particular, see Serge-Thomas Bonino, OP, “To Be a Thomist,” *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2010): 763–773. Translation by Thérèse Scarpelli Cory. Originally published in French as “Être thomiste” in *Thomistes, ou De l'actualité de saint Thomas d'Aquino* (Paris: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2003), 15–26. Following the thought of the Portuguese Thomist John of St. Thomas (João Poinset) (1589–1644) on the criteria of what makes a Thomist, see Jürgen Vijgen, “What Is a Thomist? The Contribution of John of St. Thomas,” *Thomistica (The Sacra Doctrina Projects)*, posted December 10, 2018, by Taylor O'Neill, <https://thomistica.net/essays/2018/12/10/what-is-a-thomist-the-contribution-of-john-of-st-thomas>. An expanded version of this, delivered during the XI International Thomistic Congress in 2022, can be found in Jürgen Vijgen, “The Thomist Tradition?” in *Vetera Novis Augere: Le risorser della tradizione tomista nel contesto attuale I. Bilancio e prospettive*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino and Luca F. Tuninetti (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2023), 81–100, <https://www.urbaniana.press/catalogo/vetera-novis-augere/9987?path=catalogo>.

fruitful with a greater fecundity than the past since, as Leo XIII beautifully says, it is the Spaniards “who love the memory of the Angelic Doctor and in whom the Thomistic system of philosophizing has found talented and learned followers at all times.”⁴

Since fecundity is a property of perfect life and life does not exist in the abstract, but in a living subject, it is necessary to conclude that the fecundity of Thomism must spring from the perfect Thomistic life existing in the perfect Thomists.

Moreover, Thomism is not something merely sentient or vegetative but essentially intellectual. It is reflective, conscious, and intimate, as intellectual life is all the more perfect, intimate, and immanent, and, therefore, not merely mechanical and routinary. Therefore, as the knowledge of the true Thomistic spirit grows, until it possesses a *full consciousness* of what it is, according to a very current expression, the Thomistic life will also increase and be perfected until it reaches its complete fullness.

We do not claim to believe that Thomism has fully realized itself in us. Therefore, we can hardly reveal it to others. Some have tried to do so.⁵ I do not know whether it was with good or bad fortune.

Our purpose is more modest. *What is a Thomist?*, as we believe it is beneficial to know *what a Thomist* is in living a perfect Thomist life. Asking that question enables us to acquire what we lack and act according to the being that we have, that is to say, to tend, at least, to that ideal of the perfect Thomist.

By *Thomist*,⁶ we do not mean an empty word, nor a man dressed in a certain color, be it white or black, much less one who takes from St. Thomas what comes to his fancy, according to his whims. Instead, it means one who *participates or has or aspires to have the spirit* of St. Thomas Aquinas and who tries, as far as he can, to penetrate more of him and to conform with him.

It follows that it is impossible to define what a Thomist is except in relation to St. Thomas. It follows that it is necessary to know beforehand what the *spirit* or the

⁴ *Epistola a D. Alejandro Pidal y Mon*, December 12, 1884, in Berthier, O.P., *S. Thomas Aquinas “Doctor Communis” Ecclesiae*, vol. I, no. 275, p. 225, Rome, 1914. Translator’s note: The citation format of the original article is preserved in this translation.

⁵ Maggiolo, O. P., *Le thomisme*, apud. *Revue Thomiste*, January 1921, pp. 5-29. Ét. Gilson, *Le thomisme. Introduction au système de S. Thomas d’Aquin*, Strasbourg, 1920.

⁶ On the historical origin of this name, see Card. Ehrle, S.J., *Arnaldo de Villanova ed i “Thomatiste,” in Gregorianum*, July 1920, pp. 475-501.

form, so to speak, of St. Thomas is in order to see immediately the way to incarnate it in us, to cultivate it and make it bear fruit, and to avoid anything that opposes its development.

This is a beautiful question of utmost transcendence, for which we confess we do not have enough space in a journal article. For this reason, we are not trying to discover the Mediterranean, nor are we addressing ourselves to the trained and older Thomists, but to those who are in the process of formation so that they may be stimulated to form themselves in the *spirit* of the Holy Doctor, according to the orientations of the Church. We will say, then, a few old vulgarities, which, because of their vulgarity, and even because of their antiquity, are sometimes forgotten, at least practically, by many of those who call themselves, and perhaps are, perfect Thomists, that is to say fully fledged Thomists. It should be noted, however, that we are not making polemics or referring to any particular person or group.

May God grant that, if not by our successes, at least by our blunders, we may succeed in awakening those who wish to be Thomists so that they may think a little about *what a Thomist in spirit is*. In any case, we beg our readers not to judge us *a priori* but after having read us from beginning to end, with serenity of spirit.

What is the true spirit of Saint Thomas Aquinas?

Let us consult his life and works, and they will tell us [what his true spirit is]. St. Thomas is a spirit obsessed with the problem of God, to whom he devoted all the energies of his soul and all the moments of his life [...] St. Thomas is a typical and concrete case of the union and harmony between reason and faith, between sanctity and science, between philosophy and theology. He himself is the born incarnation of his own system and, therefore, the first Thomist. The exemplar of pure and integral Thomism is St. Thomas himself in person.

Let us summarize this exposition [...] in the following points:

1. St. Thomas is a *spirit in love with the truth in all its manifestations*. First of all, he is in love with the subsistent and personal Truth, which is the Word of God, and then, with every truth derived from that Word, whether as a direct impression in Christian revelation or as a glimmering in the works of creation and in the philosophers, who are its readers and interpreters.
2. From this intense love of truth is born his *immense assiduousness*, which makes him *seek the truth by all possible means, without rest or repose*. He seeks the truth through the senses, reason, reading, meditation, study,

and prayer. In a word, he seeks it with all his soul, with all his powers and with all his strength. For this reason, when he stopped writing on December 6, 1273, and withdrew his writing instruments, remaining as if out of his mind, absorbed in God, Friar Reginald believed that he had gone mad from so much work.⁷

3. From that same love is derived his *breadth of criterion and his respect and tolerance for all thinkers*. In all of them reverberates in some way the eternal Truth, which enlightens every man who comes into this world. Specifically, because he seeks, first and foremost, the subsistent and personal Truth, he never loses sight of it. He always tends to see all truths derived in that one Truth, by whom all being and all truth has been made. He, therefore, aspires as his desideratum to marvel the very divine plan by which everything has been created, both in the order of nature and in the order of grace. He himself magnificently expressed it [...] in that prayer that he used to repeat at the beginning of any literary act and when he began to study:

“*Ineffable Creator, Who from the treasures of Your wisdom, have established three hierarchies of angels, have placed them in marvelous order above the highest heavens, and have elegantly disposed the parts of the world, You, who are the true font of light and wisdom, and said to be the highest principle, deign to pour upon the darkness of my understanding the ray of your brightness. Remove from me the double darkness in which I was born, namely, sin and ignorance. You, who make the tongues of children speak, instruct my tongue and infuse my lips with the grace of your blessing. Give me the keenness of understanding, the capacity to remember, the way and the ability to learn, the subtlety to interpret, the abundant grace to speak. Guide the beginning of my work, direct its progress, and bring it to completion. You Who are true God and true Man, Who live and reign, forever and ever. Amen.*”⁸

The spirit of St. Thomas is like an immense mirror, with two faces always open. Forgive me for the vulgarity of the comparison for the sake of clarity: the one upwards is to receive the direct rays of the Eternal Truth. The one downwards, which is towards rational and non-rational creatures, is to gather in itself all the flashes of truth coming from the indirect or oblique outpourings of the Word of God. Thus,

⁷ *Processus de Vita S. Thomae*, ch. 9, n. 79, p. 712, col. 2 in the end. “Brother Reginald (Frater Raynaldus) fearing, in case that because of too much zeal, he could incur some insanity...”

⁸ In *Monita et Preces*, loc. cit., pp. 60-61.

gathered in a common beam with the light directly received, it projects them again on his intelligence and his heart, which are fused in a certain way with the same Word of God that breathes Love, like a light with another light and a love with another love. Since his soul is pure and transparent, one can see the secrets of the Word through it in a certain way.

In St. Thomas, there is no duality of speculative and affective life. The two, raised to a superhuman perfection, merge and complete each other, resulting in a single most perfect integral life, as beautifully described by Clement VI in these words: “It is clear, for those looking at his life, that it was as if *all his body parts were some examples of virtue*. We see simplicity in his sight, kindness in his countenance, humility in his kindness, sobriety in his taste, truth in his tongue, sweetness in his smell, integrity in his touch, piety in his internal parts, gravity in his comportment, honesty in his gesture, clarity in his understanding, goodness in his affection, holiness in his mind, charity in his heart. In him, the outward form of the body was the image of the mind and figure of rectitude.”⁹

4. From this, it follows that the spirit of St. Thomas is *universalist and magnanimous*.¹⁰ It is neither small nor singularist, but above all, it is an eminently synthetic and profound spirit penetrating the very roots of things, like the Word himself, who creates being and sees all things in the subsistent Being, the source of all being.
5. In a word, the obsession of the spirit of St. Thomas is the Word of God, from whom he had the good fortune to hear: “*You wrote well about me, Thomas. How do you wish to be rewarded?*” St. Thomas does not hesitate to answer because he had made his choice from a very early age: “*No one but You, Lord!*”¹¹ From the Word, he drew all his knowledge as his first source. On the Word, he founded all his knowledge as his first principle. This is the reason why his doctrine is eternal as the Word, and unshakable and true as He is. It is not strange that his biographers called him the *organ of the Word*¹² and that the Church honors him with the title of *Doctor of Truth*. It is perfectly understandable how Urban V could say with truth these stupendous words: “I am not afraid of heresies, nor of their

⁹ In Berthier, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

¹⁰ G. De Thoco emphasizes the magnanimity of St. Thomas, precisely in dealing with his profound humility, which contains a very deep and very true meaning: “as truly humble, who despised his self-contempt in a magnanimous manner, having a quiet mind and tranquil speech...” (*Vita ...*, ch. 5, n. 27, p. 668, col. 2).

¹¹ G. De Thoco, *Vita ...* 6, n. 35, p. 671, col. 1.

¹² G. De Thoco, loc. cit.

offspring, perpetuating in this Order (of Preachers).”¹³ The reason is that the Order of Preachers will last as St. Thomas, from whose doctrine it has never departed one iota, according to a recent phrase of Benedict XV: “*This Order is to be praised, not merely because it produced the Angelic Doctor, but also because it never afterward deviated a hair’s breadth from his teaching.*”¹⁴

What should be the “spirit” of a true Thomist?

Considering the spirit of St. Thomas in itself, it will not be difficult to know what a Thomist is. A Thomist, then, is *one who has or aspires to have the whole spirit of St. Thomas, not in just any way, but as the Church understands it.*

Well then, the Church, through the mouth of her Pontiffs, wants us to follow the doctrine and method of St. Thomas as true and catholic, and to strive with all our strength to extend and propagate them. “By the tenor of the present, we command you to follow the *doctrine of the said Blessed Thomas* as true and catholic, and to *endeavor to extend it to all men.*”¹⁵

However, it is impossible to *amplify* that doctrine without understanding it deeply, according to its own spirit. With this, it is necessary to possess the spirit of the Holy Doctor. One must have in himself the spirit of the text and that of the commentary. According to what we said above, this spirit is a spirit of amplitude and synthesis, of universality and order, of multiplicity and unity. Therefore, the shortest and surest way to *formally* understand the doctrine of the Angelic is to penetrate its order and context, as John of St. Thomas, recognized by all as one of the best Thomists, taught in these terms:

“The labors of many holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church procured this great service of spreading the stones of heavenly wisdom *in order*. Yet among them, its happy completion was reserved by Divine Providence to Thomas Aquinas. In the heavenly fusion, he condensed it to order. He laid these desirable stones in such a wonderful arrangement *that nothing wiser, nothing more congruent, nothing more orderly could have been devised... Therefore, the most important and effective way to investigate and perceive the mind of the Angelic Doctor in such an admirable edifice of Theology is to carefully study first the order he treated and disposed of in the Summa. He*

¹³ Raymundus Hugonis, *Historia translationis S. Thomae Aquinatis*, in Bollandianos, *ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 729, col. 1.

¹⁴ *Letter to the General of the Order of Preachers*, October 29, 1916, *Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1916, p. 397.

¹⁵ Urban V, *Bull to the University of Toulouse*, August 31, 1368, in Berthier, *op. et loc. cit.*, *op. et loc. cit.*, p. 64.

observed this in dealing from one question to another and from one matter to another, running as if by certain golden links. For one does not deserve the name of Sage or Doctor by right if he does not know the order of the knowledge which he learns.”¹⁶

The breadth of the Thomistic spirit demands that the Thomist studies everything, if possible, in its own sources, in imitation of the Holy Doctor. He must, therefore, know Sacred Scripture in depth and be aware of the exegetical advances of recent times. He must master all the Fathers of the Church, in their doctrinal and critical aspect, not with the superficiality of a plain historian but with the depth of a theologian. He must be familiar with all the ancient and modern theologians, both hostile to St. Thomas and defenders of him. He must possess very well the ancient philosophy and that of his time, the sound and the false, to take advantage of the former, challenge the latter and to know how to delimit the boundaries of faith and reason truly and correctly. In short, he must work to master everything from the Word of God, as St. Thomas mastered all the science of his time and made it serve God.

It is clear, and this goes without saying, that the Thomist must begin by being familiar with all the works of the Holy Doctor, not by studying them as if in stray moments and consulting them only in cases of predicament, but in a constant manner, in themselves. That is where he should begin, for this will save him much time and make him progress more, for, according to a famous phrase of John XXII, “*a man makes more progress in a year in reading the works of St. Thomas than from learning all his life the teaching of others.*”¹⁷

However, it is not enough to be confined to St. Thomas alone and to disavow systematically all the others. The Angelic Doctor was not born through spontaneous generation but was already incubated since ancient times, especially in St. Augustine and Aristotle for his systematic form. He also depends on everyone, even on his own contemporaries. Therefore, it is impossible to know St. Thomas in himself while ignoring the philosophical and theological tradition from the earliest times. Did he

¹⁶ *Isagoge ad D. Thomae Theologiam: explicatio connexionis et ordinis totius Summae Theologicae D. Thomae per omnes materias*, in his *Cursus Theologicus*, vol. 1, p. 85, edit. Lugduni 1663. The same Holy Doctor outlined his scientific program at the beginning of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Cfr. *Contra Gent.*, book I, chapter I.

¹⁷ Words spoken in Consistory, while trying to instruct the process of canonization of St. Thomas, in G. De Thoco, *Vita ...*, ch. 13, n. 81. 13, n. 81, p. 682, col. 1.

not build his grand synthesis keeping in mind all human thought?¹⁸ The brickworks of this great construction have been collected and polished to a great extent by the whole of humanity, although the architect was St. Thomas Aquinas.

One need not have meditated much on the works of the Holy Doctor to notice at once the difficulty of understanding many questions and the danger of understanding them backward, if one does not know, for example, the theories of St. Augustine or Aristotle and the doctrines of Avicenna and Averroes, to speak only of the most famous. Since St. Thomas is so impersonal and because he is so universal, who has not experienced an infinity of difficulties in his interpretation, appealing to other more personal, contemporary authors, such as Blessed Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, and Blessed Innocent V (Peter of Tarantasia)? One is not a true Thomist if he is content to look merely at the *Tabula Aurea* of Peter of Bergamo and then transcribe *from a book in quinternium* the parallel places of St. Thomas noted there, juxtaposing them with each other and finally crying out loudly against everything that is not manifestly contained therein or against the one who dared to add a jota to the letter of the Saint? Such a person may be a madman or a fanatic, but not a Thomist.

Thomism does not live on paper but in the intellect. In the intellect, it lives as nourishment to be assimilated and as a germ to be assimilated. Have we not seen that the spirit of the Holy Doctor was essentially assimilating and eminently transforming and creative? We must see how great St. Augustine and Aristotle appear when seen through the glasses of St. Thomas! The Thomist should not transcribe but *amplify* St. Thomas, refining and completing his sources, testing and consolidating his principles, assimilating and increasing his doctrines with the new assimilable elements contributed by his successors up to the present day, and having done all this, to apply Thomism to the problems of today, with the certainty of success. The Thomist should not be satisfied with St. Thomas alone, nor with St. Thomas and his predecessors and contemporaries together, much less should he be satisfied with entrusting himself to a Thomist of more or less renown. Still, he should read and meditate on the rigid and lax Thomists, and the theologians and philosophers of other schools. Everything illustrates, everything helps, as there are fragments of truth in everything.

There are those who have this account. For example, John of St. Thomas, the Salmanticenses, and [Jean Baptist] Gonet were men of great talent. They dedicated their entire lives to the study of St. Thomas, taking advantage, at the same time, of the

¹⁸ On this point, see the beautiful book of Father Pegues, O. P. *Initiation Thomiste*, Première Partie: Ce qui a préparé saint Thomas, Paris, Téqui, 1921.

writings of the previous Thomists. Therefore, I can completely rely on one of them. Without further ado, I can become, as if by magic, a thoroughbred *Thomist*, armed left and right and capable of fighting and defeating anyone who comes along.

May these gentlemen excuse me; for I believe they are very far from being true Thomists. These theologians, and many others who could be cited perhaps with greater justice, were, without doubt, wise and thinkers never sufficiently pondered, and it must be recognized that they delved deeply into St. Thomas, whom they loved with all their souls. But this is not enough to trust them with one's eyes closed because it is necessary to see if, in *John of St. Thomas*, for example, it is *all of St. Thomas* or there is also *something of John*, which is not of the Holy Doctor, but rather dust kicked up by the fighters of other fields and contracted on the roads of his time. The same must be said of the Salmanticenses, Gonet, and anyone else. For the rest, they certainly *took advantage* of the speculations of the previous Thomists. Thus, to cite only Gonet, it is known that he *took advantage* of the manuscripts of [Pedro de] Godoy and that when Godoy failed him in the treatise *on the Sacraments*, he took *great advantage of the writings* of Juan Martínez de Prado, whom he follows step by step even in the quotations, as anyone who has the pleasure of simultaneously browsing through them can verify.

There are others who take a similar account of [Francisco] Suárez, [Luis de] Molina, [Gabriel] Vázquez, or [Juan de] Lugo. They believe that by quoting St. Thomas a few times, perhaps because of the sources to which those theologians refer, they are already as Thomistic as St. Thomas himself, when in reality they are Suarezians, Molinists, or Lugonians, and sometimes not even that, because those very wise men read and studied others who called themselves Thomists, while the latter does not have the goodwill to make that sacrifice.

To all of them, I ask: if St. Thomas himself were alive today, would he read and study [Domingo] Báñez, [Domingo de] Soto, [Johannes Paulus] Nazarius, and a thousand others called Thomists, not only for what they are in themselves, but also, and principally when it is a question of challenging them? Likewise, would I read [John Duns] Scotus, Suárez, Vázquez, Molina, and countless others, who are not called Thomists, but who claim to be so, at least *a posteriori*, that is, *post factum* the ecclesiastical precept about following the doctrine of St. Thomas, either for what they are in themselves, or also for what they dispute or in order to dispute them?

The answer does not seem doubtful to me. To deny it would undermine the breadth of spirit we have seen in St. Thomas and even his sincere love for the truth, without regard for persons or schools. The true Thomist must study them all in their

sources and never speak through a goose's mouth, as is vulgarly said because it is a matter of very transcendental things: truth, charity, and even justice.

It is necessary, then, that the true Thomist *amplify* Thomism with all his strength and make it grow, but with a homogeneous growth and by intussusception, not heterogeneous or by juxtaposition. Therefore, it is necessary to digest everything that comes from outside, not with medicines and artificially, but with the secreted juices of Thomism itself, which are powerful enough to ferment and produce the digestion of any food, however strong it may be if it is objectively assimilable. But here, as in all things, discretion is needed so as not to insist on taking unhealthy foods that, instead of giving strength, produce dizziness until they are thrown out of themselves by a violent reaction. Such happened to the Thomists who wanted to devour the dishes prepared by [René] Descartes, the traditionalists, the ontologists, and the modernists. They had only two ways: either to burst, if they had a weak stomach or overate, or to vomit them, having to be on a diet for a while, with the aggravating circumstance of having to purge themselves repeatedly, and then to fortify themselves with injections of pure Thomism, until they resumed their normal life.

Nonetheless, we must also guard against the opposite vice and not shut ourselves up, without wanting to take any food, for fear that we will be poisoned. Indeed, let us take the proper precautions – and the Holy See has pointed out several of them – but then we must nourish ourselves well in order to have a good life. We must never forget that profit is not proportional to what we eat but to what we digest, as [Jaime] Balmes beautifully says.¹⁹

John of St. Thomas magnificently expressed this character of the true Thomist by the following words:

He who truly and sincerely professes to be his disciple *not only* follows him or agrees with him *in the conclusions* which he teaches, *but also does not reject his reasons* and endeavors to *explain and clarify them*, and, if any passages seem contradictory, *to settle and explain them*. For in this way, the amplification of the doctrine of Doctor Thomas is mainly procured. On the other hand, if one *does not care much about Doctor Thomas's reasonings*, *does not settle contrary passages*, and finally, *ignores the places where he treats the matter clearly and expressly*, and instead, justifies the mind of Doctor Thomas from some more obscure passages or from where something is discussed in passing or incidentally, he is not to present himself as a disciple of Doctor Thomas. When a matter is being discussed through a transcendent, it is unnecessary to present oneself as a disciple of Doctor

¹⁹ *Filosofia Elemental, Logica*, section VIII, n. 399, p. 161. Ninth edition, Barcelona, 1905.

Thomas. The reason is that *he accepts the conclusions of Doctor Thomas but rejects the reasons. By this very fact, he admits that he taught without sufficient foundation and reason and did not present himself as a Master and a Doctor, because he did not prove what he said.* How, then, will he be his disciple, who opposes his methods? How will he regard him as a Master and be revered as one of the first and chief teachers whose methods he despises? *Without reason, however, there is neither science nor doctrine. Therefore, he does not want to have a teacher in knowledge whom he does not want to approve of the reasons he teaches.* This is not to *amplify* the doctrine but to *cut it short* and to *alter it*. Therefore, he is not a true follower of Doctor Thomas, nor does he desire the kind of exhortation and admonition of Urban V. Vincent of Lerins elegantly says in *Against Heresies: to develop, it is relevant that each thing expands to be itself, while to be altered means a thing is changed from one thing into another.* Therefore, the intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge of *each one and all*, both of one man and the whole Church, must grow and progress significantly through the ages and centuries, *but in its own kind, falling into the same sense and thought.* And below: *It is fitting that those ancient heavenly philosophies should be cleansed, purified, and polished by the process of time. However, it is wrong that they should be cut off or that they should be mutilated. They may receive clarity, distinguished light, but it is necessary that they retain fullness, integrity, and propriety.*

I would like all the true followers and disciples of Doctor Thomas to put this before their eyes so that in written discussions and expositions, they may bring light and distinction to the pleas of the Holy Doctor but always retaining the *fullness, integrity, and specificity of his doctrine.* However, if his reasons are not confirmed but abandoned; if it is only mechanically treated by explaining his mind and sense; if those things which seem to be contrary to themselves are not agreed upon and not reconciled, how is the fullness, integrity, and properties of the doctrine retained? If it is not retained, how can one strive with all his strength for its *amplification*? How can there be true followers who do not fulfill this ministry?"²⁰

To properly understand Thomism, as conceived by St. Thomas, and to *amplify* it at the same time, it is necessary to simultaneously make a study of the penetration

²⁰ *Tractatus approbatione et auctoritate doctrinae D. Thomae*, disp. 2, art. 5: "What leads to true understanding and discipleship of Doctor Thomas?" (*Curs. et loc. cit.*, p. 179). We highly recommend the reading of this treatise where the difficulties that some recently opposed to the complete restoration of Thomism and its definitive introduction in Catholic schools are masterfully resolved. He says a little earlier, "How can one be numbered among his (St. Thomas's) disciples – he who tries to do this in order to demonstrate that Holy Doctor failed in something, or that he had an indefensible doctrine?"

and comparison of the Thomistic doctrine in St. Thomas and his continuators up to the present day. By comparison with other systems and doctrines, we will see their sources, progress, and deviations through the centuries, thus opening the way to penetrate the soul or *substantial form* of Thomism.

The ancient Thomists were more concerned with the intimate penetration of the doctrine itself than with its comparison. This not only advanced the doctrines of St. Thomas, but sometimes they also let themselves be carried away by routine and ergotism because of lack of living reality and conscious thought, and even for lack of new horizons to explore. Therefore, it is common to find a great deal of dust and chaff mixed with exquisite grain in many.

The true Thomist must recognize this well-worn field of Thomistic speculation of seven centuries, take a pitchfork and winnow that precious harvest, separate the grain from the chaff, and let the wind of criticism carry away the dust. It must, therefore, begin by doing a work of cleaning and purification.

At the same time, we must be fair to our predecessors and recognize their merit. St. Thomas Aquinas sowed an excellent and most pure grain in the Thomistic field, so wide and so fertile. The Holy See and the authority of the Order of Preachers repeatedly watered that field with wise admonitions. They uprooted the thistles that grow next to the wheat with rigorous dispositions. At the same time, the Thomistic laborers continued to work in it, and the harvest grew. Is it correct that we should leave this precious harvest to rot for the simple reason that it is not entirely clean? Is not the work of cleaning and purification shorter and less costly than weeding, reaping, recollection, and threshing? Let us understand that, if we do not collect that grain, we will not have good bread, and we will lack healthy and nutritious food. Let us not exchange that golden wheat for the hay that grows in the green meadows of the present times, which delights the eye with its flowers and the nose with its aromas. They do not resist the heat of deep and prolonged meditation, in whose presence they wither and dry up. Let us not allow man to give up bread for hay, which is more proper to another class of animals.

The Thomists of today – here I only refer to the Thomists *a la moda* or *a la dernière*, as they say – are more concerned, not to say almost exclusively, with the positive study of comparison, especially concerning the environment in which Thomism was born. In this, it is fair to say that they have made great progress and contributed much to a better understanding of the true Thomistic spirit. Nevertheless, this study alone is not enough, nor can it in any way replace the study of intimate penetration, which is more substantial in Thomism, since it is essentially speculative and universal and, therefore, quite separate to place and time.

When we are in the presence of a magnificent cathedral, what interests us most is to see the artist's plan marvelously carried out, contemplating it in the sunlight in its symmetrical whole and its intimate details. Of course, one will not have the soul of an artist, nor will he understand the intrinsic value of the work, if he devotes himself exclusively to finding out who were the stonecutters who worked on it, from which quarry they took the stone, and even which were the oxen or the mules that dragged it. All these trifles are *fascinating details for the curious*. Still, they are not of so much interest objectively or for the genius, who nourishes his spirit with the form of things and not with purely material elements, without failing to recognize that knowing these minute details contribute to better appreciating the work's artistic value.

Readers will forgive me if I use this image, which is not very lofty, for there are those who think that the whole substance of Thomism in present times consists of knowing what were the color of the mules that carried certain pieces that can be seen in the Thomistic building. They say that these are things of great topicality and that they find deep sympathies in the public... You need humor, curiosity, and ... *artistic taste!*

There are exaggerations in all things. When the experimental sciences began to make their way, there was no one to put up with those who obtained the first results. They were very puffed up, absolute, and so contemptuous of all previous speculation! This is a widespread phenomenon due to the perpetual childhood of man.²¹

Some believed, and they said very seriously as one who speaks a great truth, that the question of the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures depended in no way on historical investigations. They are like those who thought not many years ago that by procedures and reactions and chemical decompositions, they would find prime matter and substantial form and show them to whoever wanted to see them as one who shows a fist... And it is said that these good gentlemen laughed very seriously at those ancients who were eagerly searching for *the philosopher's stone!*

Fortunately, they are not all like that, and it is not fair to think of things by the exaggerations of some exalted ones. One will be able to remember with gratitude and deep respect the names of [Heinrich] Denifle, [Franz] Ehrle, [Antonio] Uccelli, [Pierre] Mandonnet, [Auguste] Pelzer, [Martin] Grabmann, Miguel Asin, and so many other very wise men who, by through research and patience, are succeeding in reproducing the medieval scene in which Thomism appeared as the true protagonist. In this sense, many studies of inestimable value are being made, and even some

²¹ On this *perpetual childhood of man*, it is worth reading what Balmes says so beautifully, very little child among children, says in his *Criterio*, § L, p. 236, Barcelona, 1910.

unpublished works of those medieval thinkers are being published. However, most of them remain unpublished and, therefore, unavailable to the majority of mortals who are not specialists in handling ancient manuscripts. The day when all that ancient literature would be published would signal a new epoch in the annals of Thomism, for then a complete comparative study could be made, not by those who entertain themselves with counting the folios of the manuscript and measuring its magnitude and admiring its type. Yet, those who *read within*, that is, philosophers and theologians by profession, judge things by their principles. Such is our ardent desire and of specialists in this class of studies, such as Dr. [Martin] Grabmann, who beautifully says:

Would that in more opportune times, the Body of those ancient Thomists could come out of the hiding place of manuscript codices into the light of publication! In these works, love and piety for the Angelic Doctor stir and inflame our hearts. In the prologues and beginnings of books, in the margins of codices, and elsewhere, we can find the signs and characteristics of the love that sat in the hearts of those disciples of St. Thomas and who, until now and in the future, set fire to the friars preachers, as we see.²²

How fortunate for us if those medieval laboratories were open to the public! We would then be speaking *by sight* [*de visu*] and *not by hearsay*, as is, unfortunately, still the case. It would be ideal to join the positive with the speculative, as matter with form and potency with act. We would have perfect Thomism, as something *one in itself* [*unum per se*], that is, substantial and subsistent.

At the end of reading what we have said, someone will tell us that we make a perfect Thomist impossible, because no one can do that much alone. Who can read for himself all that has been written on each question? Who has the time to see the historical sources of Thomism, follow its development through stealth, and then submit it all to a personal and profound examination, trying to enrich the Thomistic treasure with new jewels?

It is true: one thing is ideal, and another is reality. A single man cannot by himself embrace everything, but he must work as much as possible to come closer to that ideal.

²² *De Summae D. Thomae Aquinatis Theologicae studio in Ordine Fratrum Praedictorum, jam saeculis XIII et XIV vigente*, in *Miscellanea Dominicana in memoriam VII anni saecularis ab obitu S. Patris Dominici (1221-1921)*, p. 161. Rome, F. Ferrari, 1923.

After an overall study, which we can all do, it is necessary to specialize and make complete monographs on specific points, according to all the requirements of the Thomistic ideal. It is possible to do this, and from the set of these well-done monographs will emerge a complete, truly *amplified* Thomism. Therefore, if we make an absolutely *perfect Thomist [as an individual]* unrealizable, we make the perfect *Thomists as a group* very possible. Moreover, it is well known that the idea of perfect is somewhat relative and admits an infinity of degrees. When we speak of a perfect Thomist, we mean human perfection, according to the possibility of our weak nature. We do not mean that the perfect Thomist reads and studies everything, absolutely everything, including the *vulgarities* of all the books, pamphlets, and articles of *vulgarization*, which in our times are infinite. We refer only to masterly and substantial works.

We have all been pursuing a similar ideal for many years in the order of Philosophy and Science, longing for the time when sages will be professional philosophers and the philosophers, laboratory scientists. Suppose we cannot fully realize this ideal. In that case, we will not for that reason cease to be true sages and true philosophers as long as we do our best, putting all the means at our disposal to achieve it. It is comparable to a good religious that who aspires approximately Christian perfection and employs any means or sacrifice to reach it, even if he does not possess that perfection in all its fullness, as *no one is good but God alone [nemo bonus, nisi solus Deus]*.

What is not good is that many, seeing this difficulty and wanting, however, to appear to be perfect Thomists, are content to *take* a few notions of St. Thomas without having meditated and deepened them well and then collect from here and there a few historical data, with some critical observation or another. So they launch into publicity with great apparatus and to the sound of trumpets and drums the fruits of their writings, articles upon articles, and volumes upon volumes. They have not personally read the historical sources, nor have they followed the thread of ideas through the Thomists of seven centuries, for they despise practically all those who call themselves Thomists as if they were “like a parrot” or “redundant repeaters.” At most, they limit themselves to quoting two or three, or half a dozen, to make believe that they have read the Thomists and know the tradition. With these preparations, they descend into the arena to fight hand-to-hand against the new enemies, astonishing the world with their knowledge and making it believe that they have a vital Thomism, applicable and applied to the solution of current problems.

Something similar happens in its kind with many wise men and with not a few philosophers of our days. They do not have enough patience or capacity to make profound speculations, or they disdain to stoop to conscientious and detailed

laboratory study, and with this spirit – which is the antithesis of the spirit of St. Thomas, as we have seen above – they spoil the cause of Philosophy and Science because they repel, instead of attracting specialists in one field or another. These specialists either laugh at them or despise them. How abundant, unfortunately, is this bad seed!

It would not be wrong to have a little more humility and confess one's ignorance, *since, among men, he who is superior in one way may be inferior in another way.*²³ For this reason, solidarity and mutual respect are needed between the speculative and the positive, between those who meditate and those who experiment, between those who build and those who carry, so that the result is not a tower of Babel but a superb cathedral. However, one must bear in mind that it is easier to go down from speculation to experimentation or the search for positive documents than from the laboratory to Metaphysics and from the archive to Theology.

Once a perfect and *amplified* Thomism is possessed, it would be easy to *propagate* and defend it, for the best publicity would be to show its own perfection, and the best defense is its own truth. Nonetheless, there are those who care very little for the first and are mainly concerned with the second and the third, which are more *useful* and *louder*, wanting to propagate and defend Thomism with a significant quantity of words and a minimal dose of ideas. Those who think and act in this way are already judged.

At this point, there will be readers who will say: All that we have just said can happen, but tell us, concretely, who are or were the true Thomists, possessors, and imitators of the true spirit of St. Thomas.

You will have to excuse me for not being able to satisfy you. I have already said from the beginning that I dispensed with persons and schools because I was trying to define *what a Thomist is*. It is known that *definitions must abstract* from individuals and be universal. Let each one put his hand in his bosom and see if the definition of Thomist that we have given suits him.

A modern writer has just put, as a characteristic of the Thomistic school (which they call *historical*, as opposed to a real Thomism), among other things, intolerance or narrow-mindedness and exaltation, personified above all in Báñez.

This is not the place to express this issue. Indeed, if the aforementioned

²³ Saint Thomas, III *Contra Gent.*, chap. 120.

writer's words were valid, the *historical* Thomistic school would be *ipso facto* excluded from true Thomism. But are these characteristics objective and historical?

Regarding *intolerance*, the author refers to a foreigner who stated it many years ago. It is clear that it is one statement plus another, one being made by a foreigner and the other by a Spaniard, resulting in *two statements* over all, neither more nor less. He says that by *affirming* this *intolerance*, they imply that they *do not tolerate it*, and that, consequently, those who make the *affirmations are intolerant*, because, as Balmes sharply puts it, *he is not tolerant who does not tolerate intolerance*.²⁴

As for the exaggeration or exaltation of the orthodoxy of the doctrine of St. Thomas, care is taken to verify it, not by the works or words of the representatives born of that school, but by the words of a semi-theologian, semi-preacher, who did not pass into history except to make that verification, and certainly, to draw the *characteristic* of a whole group by the ugly *face* of a stunted individual belonging to it, does not cease to be a very curious story, capable of *characterizing* by itself the historian who profuse it. Indeed, if Sancho Panza knew about it, he would blurt out that saying, "The frying pan said to the kettle: Get out of there, black-eyes!"

It is the same as if I wanted to prove the exaltation of spirit, as an unmistakable characteristic of the illustrious Society of Jesus, by so many amiable and respectable titles, because, on one occasion, I heard a reverend Jesuit father give some Spiritual Exercises, who affirmed *categorically and with repeated insistence* that, without making the Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, it was *absolutely impossible* for anyone to be saved. It is evident that this was the exaggeration of a particular person, not of the whole Society because it occurs to anyone to think that, before St. Ignatius was born and wrote his *Exercises*, many saints went to Heaven, who certainly did not make the Spiritual *Exercises*. Otherwise, it would have to be said that St. Ignatius did not compose the Exercises according to the Ignatian method, a consequence that would not be admitted by that good father or any other of the Society.

That is why it is necessary to be calm and sensible in order to affirm certain things. However, I do not want to engage in polemics so as not to fail to keep our promises from the beginning.

So much has already been said about the excellence of Thomistic doctrine that it is almost impossible to extol it further. We are not friends of exaggerations or

²⁴ *Pensamientos sobre Literatura Filosofía Política y Religión*, in *La Sociedad*, vol. IV, p. 305, fifth edition, Barcelona, 1889.

exclusivism. Those who believe that in these poorly drawn lines, we have exaggerated the note, let them read the papal documents of seven centuries, that is, since the death of St. Thomas to the present, and say that the Church has seven centuries of exaggerations, through the mouths of her Pontiffs. John XXII said that “no one would think it wrongly that this glorious Doctor enlightened the Church more than all the other Doctors”²⁵ and that “he had performed as many miracles as he had written articles.”²⁶ Blessed James of Viterbo affirmed that *no one should attribute or ascribe to himself the Sacred Science to know anything fully, except those who follow and adhere to science and writings of Friar Thomas Aquinas, who opened the way for the intelligent to know.*²⁷ And Pius X, conqueror of modernism, synthesized and *amplified* the whole Thomistic tradition of the Roman Pontificate when he said: *If the doctrine of any writer or Saint has ever been approved by Us or Our Predecessors with such singular commendation and in such a way that to the commendation were added an invitation and order to propagate and defend it, it may easily be understood that it was commended to the extent that it agreed with the principles of aquinas or was in no way opposed to them.*²⁸ Nothing more can be said.

Let us aspire, then, according to the desires of the Church, to be integral and perfect Thomists in life and doctrine. If in St. Thomas, the Saint and the Sage cannot be separated, neither should they be separated in Thomists. It is with these desires and aspirations in mind that we will pray with spirit and truth the prayer of the Church on the feast of her Doctor, which contains the synthesis of the whole of the present article:

- a. God, Who, enlightened Your Church through blessed Thomas, Your Confessor and Doctor,
 - a. with his *wondrous learning*
 - b. and enriched her with his *holy life*,
 - β. grant us, we beseech You,
 - c. that *what he taught*, we may *understand*
 - d. and *what he accomplished*, we may *imitate*.
- δ. THROUGH CHRIST, OUR LORD. Amen. SO BE IT. **PS**

FR. SANTIAGO M.^a RAMÍREZ, O.P.
Salamanca, February 5, 1923.

²⁵ Words pronounced in the Consistory cited above, in G. De Thoco, Vita, ch. 13, n. 81, p. 682, col. l.

²⁶ In Berthier, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁷ Processus de Vita S. Thomae Aq., ch. 2, n. 6 (loc. cit., p. 688).

²⁸ Motu proprio Doctoris Angelici, June 29, 1914 (Acta Apost. Sedis. 1914, p. 338).

¶ *En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo
Amén. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.*

¶ *La salve Regina es de modo*



*D*ulce te Dios Reyna y ma
de de misericordia vida
dulçura y esperança nra. Dios
te salve atí llamamos los desle
crados hijos de Eva. Atí suspi
ramos quiendo y llorando en
aqueste valle de lagrimas. Ca
pues abogada nuestra, buelue
anofores en los tus misericor
diosos ojos. y despues de a. 3.