Toward Understanding Saint Thomas.   M.-D. Chenu. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964.

Summary Notes of Chapter ONE: "The Work in Its Milieu"

This initial chapter establishes the cultural, intellectual, and religious **contexts** in which Thomas life and thought.

The socio-**cultural** context was marked by the breakdown of feudal institutions and the emergence of urban centers, in which new forms of association became prominent. One characteristic development was the beginning of new city schools, which fostered an atmosphere of intellectual independence and personal responsibility. The key university representative of this atmosphere was the University of Paris, to which Thomas came in 1245. Paris was becoming the intellectual center of Christianity. And though the theology faculty stood at the heart of the university, there were conflicts stemming from the growing autonomy of the faculty of arts. There was a strongly international character to the university, stemming in part from the significant role played by the new religious orders. The theology faculty assumed a prominent ecclesiastical role, enlisting the services of natural reason especially in seeking understanding of disputed questions. The very form of the theology of the period was profoundly affected by this shift to the academy, being less immediately attached to the pastoral office.

Chenu's contention is that the centuries from the Carolingian period through the sixteenth century are characterized by a movement of rebirth. The **intellectual** context of the period is one of retrieving the resources of the ancient civilization. In contrast to the later humanism of Erasmus, however, the cultivation of the Ancients in the thirteenth century was less an exercise in admiration than it was a real transposition. The ultimate goal was not an understanding of what the Ancients had said, but an understanding of reality. There was, accordingly, a consistent interplay between the art of imitation and authentic intellectual creativity. In this attempt to creatively transpose the ancient civilization, the revival of the thirteenth century hinged largely upon Aristotelianism in Paris, and Roman law in Bologna.

The previous influence of **Aristotle** had been primarily mediated through his logical works. The rediscovery of his works in natural sciences/philosophy had the effect of generating an intense inquisitiveness which sought the natural intelligibility immanent in things. There resulted a profound

realism, and a notion of science as knowledge of concrete, existent objects. This reflected a notable shift from the Platonist philosophy with which Christian thought had traditionally sustained itself. There was, accordingly, a strong reaction against this Aristotelian rationalism. Notable aspects of Aristotelian thought were accurately seen to be irreconcilable with Christian understanding; this was complicated by the fact that the works of Aristotle initially emerged from an Arabic universe with which they had been syncretistically colored. Nevertheless, when Thomas arrived in Paris the works of Aristotle were being commented upon by Albert of Cologne in the faculty of theology. When Thomas began teaching in 1252, a decisive choice for the Aristotelian perspective was notable.

The relative significance of this choice cannot be understood, however, without attending to the **religious** context of the period. A tradition of reform had established itself, giving rise to a religious rebirth that found its inspiration in the ideals of truly evangelical living; this involved a return to the sacred texts of both Scripture and the early Christian writers. In the Friar Preachers, there resulted a transposition of religious life into institutional forms paralleling the communal and corporate forms of the new cultural context. By locating in university cities, the Friar preachers also made a commitment to enlisting natural learning in the service of the Gospel. But the depth of religious renewal makes clear that theology was clearly adopting Aristotelian reason into its service, rather than subsuming theology into Aristotle. The motive was a scientific organization of the truths of faith that would satisfy the needs of Christians in the new cultural and intellectual context.

One of the influences behind this religious renewal was the inspiration of **Augustine**, whose very name in the Western church stood for Christianity's highest ideals. His thought also remained highly influential in the development of Scholastic theology. Thus, while Thomas did reject some of Augustine's neo-Platonist sources, Chenu insists that he remained always Augustine's "faithful disciple." It was his conversion that grounded Augustine's theology, not any philosophical system. This resulted in a radical concreteness in his perception of sin and grace, which enabled later theology (and Thomas) to give real body to what could otherwise have been purely abstract consideration of human nature and metaphysical essences. Further, Augustine's primary concern with the "representative" value of things – understanding things in their relation to God rather than in their own immanent intelligibility – grounded an atmosphere of symbolism which continued to influence later medieval theologians and which is evident in Thomas' Scripture commentaries. This safeguarded an authentically religious sensibility, which could be threatened by pure Aristotelian rationalism. Augustine's insistence on the dynamic nature of human intelligence also exercised considerable influence; his notion of the human mind as

image of God remained at the heart of Thomas' rational psychology. Thomas' thought can only be understood within the Augustinian context which informed it.

His thought must also be seen within its immediate context of thirteenth century **scholasticism**. The very forms of his expression were supplied by that context. One key aspect of this was the tool of dialectic, in which the negation of an argument is used as one moment leading to the mind's assent to that argument. Another key element was the primary role of authoritative texts, due largely to the curiosity which had been aroused by the rediscovery of texts. The form of commentary came to be the prototype of intellectual expression. But this commentary on authoritative texts was allied with an intense confidence in reason, so that the very interpretation of texts was characterized by profound creativity. It is especially in the rootedness of Thomas' thought in biblical texts – manifest especially in the biblical commentaries – that it becomes apparent how deeply his work was grounded in the evangelical renewal movement of his time.

Summary Notes of Chapter TWO: "Works of St. Thomas and Their Literary Form"

The key principle underlying the development of this chapter is Chenu's assertion that "literary form is bound up with the way a mind goes about its thinking" [79]. The language available to a thinker is a tool for expressing his/her thinking, but it also exerts a formative influence on that thinking. The very form of linguistic expression, accordingly, must be considered in the attempt to understand the thought being expressed.

Thomas shared the basic genres of his time. As indicated in the first chapter, one of the most significant dimensions of the medieval milieu was the recovery on ancient texts; thus, pedagogy came to be based on the reading of texts. The *lectio* indicates the attempt to arrive at truly scientific understanding through such reading. In grammar, rhetoric, medicine, and law, accordingly, as well as philosophy and theology, creative thinking emerged through the process of coming to grips with ancient authorities. By 1215, it became the general practice in theological studies to read peter Lombard's *Sentences*; in philosophy, the works of Aristotle were read.

This reading unfolded in three layers of textual consideration: (1) a simple explanation of the words and phrases of the text in their immediate interconnectedness (*littera*); (2) analysis of the meanings of the various elements in a passage and reformulation of them in clear language (*sensus*); and (3) an attempt to infer, beyond everything that exegesis had brought out, the depth of thought contained

in the test and its true meaning (*sententia*). As noted in the previous chapter, this focus on texts involved a profound exercise of creativity within the art of imitation. Initially, such reading promoted a dynamic upsurge in thought. Eventually, however, the same reading became a source of stagnation, and "scholasticism died under the annihilating load of its texts" [83].

Before such decay set in, though, the problems encountered in reading the texts led authentically creative minds to further reaches of thought; *quaestiones* emerge from the *lectio*. There were several sources of such questions: the vagueness of some expression calling for precision; the clashing of two interpretations; the recognition that two 'authorities' had given contrary solutions to the same problem. The thinking promoted by such questions involved going beyond an attempt to understand the texts to an attempt to understand the realities referred to in the texts. Thus, in theology, various doctrines themselves became the object of thought.

Initially the central stimulus for such questioning was the desire to solve some disputed issue. As this procedure developed, however, the form of questioning became a "deliberate artifice" by means of which even widely accepted positions were subjected to thinking for the sake of achieving deeper understanding. This involved movement well beyond appeal to the authority of texts, to an effort to appeal to reasons that would display the roots of things to the mind.

Such questioning first emerged from the encounter with texts, but gradually the question came to be detached from the originating text. One form of this is the "disputed question." At this exercise, one of the masters submitted a question of current interest to be discussed with the other masters, in the presence of the school body. Chenu's description is vivid: "Objections were raised, points discussed, retorts flung back, with the debate finally coming to an end with the master in charge giving his own conclusion of 'determination' on the question" [89]. These final determinations form the written record through which we have access to these events.

A further development of this procedure was the "quadlibetal disputation," in which the subjects to be debated, rather than being determined by one of the masters, were left to the initiative of the members of the audience. A wide range of topics were, accordingly, debated, and the mood of such events manifests "the intense vitality animating the medieval university milieu" [92].

It is from the dynamic perspective of such questioning that the key unit of the most comprehensive scholastic works must be understood. Chenu characterizes an "article" as "an account reducing to simple elements and expressing in schematic form for the benefit of the students all the

work that was required to raise, discuss, and solve a question under dispute" [94]. An article begins with a question, a statement of doubt concerning a proposition that pushes research and reflection to its limit. Alternative approaches to the question are presented. The initial arguments (*objectio*) bring in reasons grounding one alternative; the *sed contra* then briefly presents the other alternative. The body of the article is the author's response, in which he sets forth at least the principles needed in order to resolve the doubt raised by the question. On the basis of these principles, the author then answers the initial arguments. In most occasions, this involves not a simple rejection of these arguments, but the positing of distinctions which will go beyond the arguments while embodying whatever truth is to be found in them.

Each of these literary forms was employed by Saint Thomas. His most straightforward textual lectio involved commenting on Aristotle. His commentaries on the Bible involve such textual comment, but also go well beyond it to a grappling with disputed questions. His commentary on the *Sentences* does follow the order of the text, but goes well beyond simple exposition "to the study of questions whose great number and variety are wholly outside the text from which he started" [97]. His most comprehensive works were composed in reference to some external circumstances and perceived scientific needs; the *Summa Theologiae* clearly manifests the dynamic questioning embodied in the "article" form. There are also occasional works, and several sets of collations stemming from his duties as a master in the faculty of theology.

Awareness of the dynamic structure of these literary forms must ground the interpretation of any given work.

Summary Notes of Chapter THREE: "The Language and Vocabulary of Saint Thomas"

This chapter continues the attempt of chapter two to indicate the integral connection between the thought of St. Thomas and the 'tools' used to formulate and express that thought; the focus now shifts, however, from analysis of various genres to consideration of the actual language which Thomas used.

Chenu notes that Thomas incorporated 'the make of his mind' in his vocabulary to a remarkable high degree; accordingly, this vocabulary is the central concern of the present chapter. At the outset, several concrete examples are given which demonstrate both the complexity and the fruitfulness of

coming to a literal understanding of Thomas' expressions. The first such example is a trio of medieval Latin words for dimensions of mind: *mens*, *spiritus*, *anima*. In a packed paragraph, the divergent Aristotelian, Dionysian, and Augustinian backgrounds to Thomas' usage of *mens* are given. Christian and philosophical themes are seen to be woven together in the attempt to understand the subtle nature of mind. *Spiritus* is presented as referring to all the various phenomena which have to do jointly with body and mind, thus carrying a wide range of meaning. *Anima* was the Aristotelian form of a body (animal or human); but it had a deep Christian background of referring to the immortal human soul. The sense given is of a profound compactness to each of these words.

Similarly, *formatio* is seen embodying both Aristotelian hylomorphism and Augustine's Platonic notion of participation, thus picking up two quite distinct traditions. Further, the Augustinian use of this notion in the doctrine of "illumination," in which the rational nature is "formed" through participation in the light and power of grace, provides a firm **theo**logical background to usage of the term. Again, the word is very compact, as were many of Thomas' expressions, even seemingly rather 'ordinary' ones. This compactness necessitates the exercise of great care in interpreting the truly literal meaning of Thomas' use of such terms in particular and varying contexts.

The larger framework for considering the development of such vocabulary, of course, must lie in the development of the total language. Thus, Chenu attempts briefly to locate 'Scholastic Latin' in the ongoing movement of 'Medieval Latin.'

He first delineates 'phases.' Coincidental with "the overrunning of Europe by the barbarians" [104] was the disintegration of classical Latin. From the sixth through the eighth centuries, however, there were notable figures who "contrived to transfer some of the riches of classical Antiquity into their own products of pen" [105]; they include such luminous names as Boethius, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, and the Venerable Bede. The early medieval Latin which emerged was heavily influenced by the liturgy, the Vulgate, and the writings of the Latin Fathers; its vocabulary and phrase constructions were largely drawn, not from classical usage, but from "the Latin of the masses" [106]. Chenu notes several characteristics of the language of the medieval schools which emerged from this: the tendency to compile excerpts; the prevalence of concern for technical grammar over rhetorical concerns; the prominent function of glossaries; the role of the church in education; and the prominent role played by dialectic. By the eighth century, the language is far from that of Augustine.

The Carolingian renaissance involved something of a return of Latin to its sources, centering mostly on grammar and literature. Grammar, syntax, and semantics were developed and enriched. It remained true, however, that this Latin was "no longer a 'mother tongue'" [107]. Because of this, certain "plastic qualities" were inherent in the language. Nevertheless, it was not a 'dead' language; it continued to develop, and it answered the needs of intellectual life. It was in the twelfth century that medieval Latin had been brought to a point of development at which it became "an admirable instrument for intellectual life, doctrinal culture, and religious expression" [107].

Such Latin had rather lost contact with everyday life. In the hands of Albert, Bonaventure, and Thomas, however, it was a wonderful tool for intellectual analysis and construction. Subsequent to them, it was to be "deprived of life for a long time to come" [109]

In 'Scholastic Latin' itself, Chenu points out three characteristics. First, as a **school** language, pedagogical aims dominated; usefulness for instruction took precedence over concern for rhetorical beauty and/or the communication of emotion. Secondly, it was a **technical** language, with great concern for precision of usage; abstract words which could express the formal aspect of things were coined, and metaphorical language tended to be denigrated (for the purposes of theology as a science). Thirdly, it was largely derived from efforts a**t translation**. Positively, this enabled some of the 'compactness' of language, to which reference has been made earlier; negatively, the transference of old words to new meanings could cause no small confusion. Further, this meant that which works were being translated had a considerable impact on the language that was developing; thus, Chenu notes that in the revivals of the ninth, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, "it was, not Plato, but Aristotle who was translated" [113].

The language of Thomas bears these marks. Thus, Cardinal Cajetan remarked that "Saint Thomas always speaks in a formal way" [117]. For his mind, this language was a powerful instrument especially for expressing abstract, general ideas. His use of clear linguistic distinctions rendered his expression clear, concise, and incisive. Metaphors are infrequent in his theological works, and those which are used tend to be widely used images which he gives to illustrate a theoretic exposition. Nevertheless, Thomas was clearly sensitive to the wide range of meanings which words can carry; his precision in attempting definition did not pretend to arrive at the necessary and univocal meaning of a term. Further, his "verbal clarity did not hide from him the mystery of things" [121] as it did, in Chenu's judgment, for some later scholastics. There remains great religious power in the most abstract of Thomas' writings. Understanding his tools of expression, however, is the key to being able to discern that power in his theology as an authentic *intellectus fidei*.

[WP: Perhaps the 12th c. 'renaissance' of Latin –Bernard, John of Salisbury, etc – would alter Chenu's judgment a bit. His *Théologie au 12ᵉ Siecle* gives more credit to the 12th c., although he does have some here (p. 107).]

Summary Notes of Chapter FOUR: "The Procedures of Documentation"

Part One of this work intends largely to present the cultural, religious, and intellectual contexts in which Saint Thomas lifework emerged and within which it must be understood. The first chapter outlines the general dynamics operative in that milieu. Chapters two and three 'unpack' those dynamics in terms of literary forms and language; chapters four and five turn to consideration of commonly operative procedures of mind. The specific concern of this chapter (four) is with those mental procedures precisely as they operate on texts regarded as carrying the weight of authority.

The underlying focus of thought on texts in this period stems from various reasons. At the most elemental level, Chenu notes that this had simply become customary. The 'barbarian mind' had not been able to attain real systematic and theoretic understanding of classical works. What emerged was a more elementary teaching that handed on collections and compilations of texts as an "authoritative means of transmitting an inheritance of some value" [127]. The value of the texts was recognized, even though thoroughgoing understanding proved elusive; *florilegia* and compilations of *sententiae* became the common form of preserving and handing-on texts of perceived value. The classics of this preserving instinct are the *Liber Sententiarum* of Peter Lombard, and Gratian's *Decretals*.

A second reason for the centrality of authoritative texts can be grasped in the dominant role of clerics in organizing the framework of medieval culture. This dominance meant that theology would naturally assume a most esteemed place. In theology, primacy of place is given to the authoritative texts of the word of God; this habit of mind in theology came to be followed in other sciences.

Thirdly, there is the general milieu of renaissance considered in chapter one. The discovery of ancient texts aroused enormous curiosity, which found its initial channel of expression within the processes of imitation. From grammar to metaphysics, all "cultural achievement came by the texts of authors considered as the masters of right thinking and of right expression" [128]. It must be immediately remembered, however, that this 'imitation' was the vehicle for profound 'creativity.' The

text was indeed regarded as authoritative, but the procedures of mind were not restricted by any rigid authoritarianism.

The question emerges, then, as to the real meaning of *auctoritas*. The underlying connotations of the medieval usage of the term involve (a) the juridic sense in which one person guarantees what s/he is handing over to another person, and (b) a general sense of dignity. The development of the word thus came to signify that quality in virtue of which a person was "worthy of credit, of consideration, of credence" [130]. Further development involves extension of the word's designation beyond the person's inner quality to his/her expressions, e.g., texts. Thus, a text itself came to be called an *auctoritas*. A key factor in establishing a text as authoritative was legal **recognition**; in theology, this meant ecclesiastical recognition. But this medieval appeal to recognized authority must not be seen as the equivalent to later (post-sixteenth century) theology's argument from tradition.

In the medieval period, there was great range in both the authorities to which appeal was made and the manner in which that appeal functioned. In terms of function, Chenu notes that some appeals to authority must be recognized as simply ornamental, while others must be seen to be properly dialectical. Further, by the late twelfth century, the practice had developed of appealing not only to the Fathers of the Church, but to the "modern masters" as well. The *magister* was perceived as being vested with a certain authority in that he had officially received a canonical mission. Gradually a collective reference comes to be made to the 'accepted' opinion among the masters. This collective reference became further differentiated between the *moderni*, referring to an immediately preceding or an almost contemporaneous generation of masters, and the *antiqui*, referring to the masters of two or three generations before. Throughout, this citation of *magistri* was clearly recognized as a far less authoritative voice than that of the *sancti*, the great Fathers. Nevertheless, citation of them is further indication of the wide range and the non-authoritative nature of the procedure of appealing to authority.

This is especially clear in the critical judgment which Saint Thomas continually exercised. He distinguished between knowledge-by-faith in which the authority of the word of God is absolutely decisive, and knowledge-by-reason in the realm of science, in which the role of authorities is much weaker. In fact, he insisted that a pupil who, in his study of scientific theology, would limit himself to the exclusive acceptance of a solution as determined by the authorities would be left deprived of any actual understanding of the problem in question" [139]. The focus is not on authoritative demonstration, but on understanding.

In terms of the actual procedures through which this understanding was sought, considerable development occurred. There was clearly some basic understanding of problems in the compiled authorities. It was with Abelard's *Sic et Non*, however, that the problem of interpretation most forcefully emerged. Recognition of the imprecisions, inconsistencies, and inadequacies of the compiled texts called for the exercise of dialectics, which in its turn required rules of interpretation. Chenu posits eight such rules in the practice of Saint Thomas; the first seven tend to contribute to the attainment of historical understanding, while the eighth leads in a rather different direction.

First, then, is a sensitivity to the complexity and suppleness of language, such that different authors can be understood to have used the same words to mean different things. Secondly, it was recognized that the sense a word has in common usage may 'play against' the meaning it has in a text. Thirdly, the style of an author must be considered in attaining to the meaning being expressed. Fourthly, in some cases it is possible to distinguish between stylistic expression and the thought being expressed; thus, Thomas understood Aristotle, in some instances, to have rejected Platonist expression/ formulation but not the underlying thought. Fifthly, however, there are instances in which an author's thought is itself simply caught up in the relativity of its sources. Sixthly, when a text seems ambiguous, it is the context that determines the meaning. Seventhly, critical attention must be given to the text as it has been transmitted, and/or as translated. Attentiveness to such rules assists in attaining to what an author intended to express.

But there is a further situation in which inadequacies and imprecisions are evident in an authoritative text which, precisely as authoritative, one nevertheless wants to accept. The solution to this problematic situation is the procedure of "expounding reverentially" (*exponere reverenter*). In Chenu's terms, "what it amounts to is an effective retouching of a text, or a noticeable redressing of it, or again a discreet deflecting of its meaning" [145]. Saint Thomas locates a key theological incidence of the need for such reverential expounding in the later reading, e.g., of the pre-Arian Christological writings. Such writings lacked some of the precision which emerged out of the crucible of the Arian struggle; rather than being neglected or rejected, however, they need to be interpreted in a reverent manner. In this, it is clear that Saint Thomas was aware both of divergent positions among the Fathers and the fact of development in theological doctrine.

In all of this there is an ongoing process of interplay between two successive approaches: (1) the integral data investigation, in which texts are brought out into the open; and (b) the rational procedures of probing through the texts but beyond them. Chenu remarks that "within these correlative

approaches was contained the efficacious equilibrium destined to control the whole of theology's history" [149]. Saint Thomas was keenly aware of the requirements for gathering data/ documentation and attempting to ascertain their authenticity; an insistence on penetrating to the historical meaning intended by the author is characteristic of Thomas among his contemporaries. Yet, at the same time, the primary end of his search for understanding is not historical exegesis, but is beyond history. His concern, in other words, "is not. . . to know what men have thought, but rather to know how truth herself stands" [154]. Historical investigation and rational speculation remain inextricably intertwined, as "documentation and speculation interlace with one another in the oneness of *sacra doctrina*" [149-150].

Summary Notes of Chapter FIVE: "The Procedures of Construction" (I-IV)

While obviously attentive to the significance of the content of a person's thought, Chenu's focus throughout part one has been on the form of expression and the procedures of thinking which contextualize and ground that content. In chapter five, the focus shifts from externally available tools to the attempt to understand something of the more interior procedures through which Thomas arrived at his insights and built them into the synthesis of his systematic works. Concern is now with "the inner initiatives of [Thomas] understanding" [156].

This is not, however, to posit any kind of separation between culturally available tools or categories on the one hand, and some kind of disincarnate consciousness on the other. Previous chapters have insisted that reason operates only through the linguistic, conceptual, and literary tools that are available. But beyond that insistence there remains the question of the precise manner in which a given person uses those tools. And individual's 'procedures of construction' will bear strong similarity to those of his/her contemporaries; there will also, however, be distinguishing marks of the individual's mind. Chenu is here concerned both with the common procedures of medieval scholasticism and with Thomas' personal use of those procedures.

The first such tool to be considered is dialectical exegesis. Developing a point considered at the conclusion of the previous chapter, Chenu notes that the use of texts involved a move beyond authority to the dialectical exercise of reason. The scholastic concern is not simply with the interpretation of a given text, but rather with understanding the reality to which the text refers. The common form of this attempt is breaking down the content referred to in the text into rational, especially Aristotelian, categories. The affective power of a text to evoke religious response or moral sentiment is often

seriously diminished in this effort, but there is considerable gain in rationally grasping the intelligibility immanent in realities. In order to attain that understanding, the procedure clearly moved beyond pure exegesis; it involved the creative contribution of one's active intelligence operating with culturally available categories.

In thus moving beyond exegesis, this working of intelligence frequently unfolded in psychological, moral, and metaphysical analyses. Especially in the psychological and moral realms, keen empirical observation of the workings of human consciousness is evident; the method of analysis, however, is not simply induction based on concrete observation. Rather, there is an *a priori* analysis which considers universal structures. A conceptual framework is employed in seeking this essential understanding. Yet it remains clear that Thomas effort is not simply to understand an abstract human nature, but to understand the concrete human condition. An Augustinian focus on concrete experience of the spiritual life gave real vitality to the Aristotelian metaphysical categories which, in isolation from such concreteness, could remain abstract and religiously arid. In Thomas' consideration of the virtues, for example, the category of *habitus* is utterly central; in itself this is an empty category, but one which is given flesh by considering biblical data and attending to Christian interiority.

Similarly, the language and categories of Thomas' metaphysics are thoroughly Aristotelian. Nevertheless, the atmosphere and procedures of Thomas' metaphysical treatment of the transcendentals continually respects "that ontological mystery wherein the obscurity inherent in the notion of existence is preserved in the science of being" [164]. The metaphysical categories in themselves could be built up into rationalist systems (as later developments demonstrate); used by the mind of Thomas, however, they remained in service of the effort to understand faith. The religious sensibility which remained in his metaphysical theology is manifest in his ultimate use of biblical expressions to speak of "that sublime truth" (*CG* I, 22]. Further, analogous use of human concepts to understand something of God always involves subjecting those concepts to the Dionysian way of negation. "Faith can put to her use all the techniques of reason, but she subjects the objects and tools of it to a purifying process such as meets the demands of the mysteries" [165].

Related to such analyses is the procedure of building up definitions, which is commonly regarded as one of the chief traits of the scholastic method. In his seeking of definitions, Chenu characterizes Thomas as having exhibited "a combination of suppleness in procedure and of tenacious concern for exactness" [166]. In such defining, initial attention is given to the names of the realities to be defined; in other words, consideration is given to the etymology and the common usage of words. The various uses

are then classified, with the end result being a determination of the word's proper meaning. In principle, there is only one definition of an object in which its quiddity is adequately expressed. It is also possible, however, for an object to be defined exactly, if not exhaustively, by a single one of its properties, causes, or principles. Thomas, accordingly, exhibits considerable flexibility in his defining and usage of words. While rigorously seeking clarity, his is not the mind of a mechanistic logician needing absolutely univocal definition.

A further characteristic of Thomas' expression which gives some insight into procedures of his mind is the relative absence of imaginative expression. Chenu clearly recognizes this as a limitation: "It does not seem that Saint Thomas was blessed with an imagination endowed with the quality of creativeness for this type of figurative expression" [170]. The power of Thomas' mind rests in "that utter soberness and unemotional objectivity sought by the pure light of intelligence" [170]. This does not mean that images are utterly absent from his works. In the *Summa Theologiae*, such images as the following are used: time image of movement and rest as figures of ratio and intellectus [I, 79, 8]; circular movement as an image of contemplation {II-II, 180, 6]; the sun and its rays as illustrative of the notion of participation {I, 19, 4]; and the image of art and the artist in the analysis of divine action {I, 44, 3]. Characteristic of all these, however, is that they are generally found in texts cited by Thomas; they are not original with him. Further, he makes a consistent effort to intellectually 'purify' the image; there results "a devoiding of the figurative power of words" [172]. In some theological analogies, imaginative expression continues to play an inspirational role even after its intellectualization; the image of the sacraments are "remedies" are exemplary of this. Nevertheless, it must be granted that figurative expression is rare in Thomas and is peripheral to his purposes.

What clearly is not peripheral is the art of making distinctions, which was characteristic of scholasticism as a whole. Whereas the focus of Augustine had been on the interrelatedness of things and their ultimate unity in a metaphysics of participation, the concern of scholastics tended to be with identifying and distinguishing things. In thomas, the notions of unity and participation draw a fine but firm line between distinguishing and separating; the concern for making precise distinctions, however, is evident. This is manifest especially in the manner in which he responds to the opening arguments of the articles in the Summa. The response is frequently in terms of a distinction which the body of the article has made possible.

The significance of this procedure is perhaps most powerfully evident in Thomas' distinction between essence and existence; by making this distinction, he effected a radical transposition of

Aristotelian metaphysics. In a more explicitly theological context, Thomas accomplished a comparable transposition of an Augustinian notion by acknowledging the material role of concupiscence in original sin, but denying it a formal role.

In interpreting Thomas, it is essential to understand such distinctions in the context in which they are made. In doing this it is much easier to keep in mind that the distinctions were originally worked out in order to understand unified realities. The distinctions are magnificent tools of abstraction, but must not be accorded more significance than is due them. Their purpose is to assist understanding of unities that are broken up precisely to facilitate understanding. Their function as a constructive procedure of mind was well expressed by Maritain: "Distinguish to unite."

Summary Notes of Chapter FIVE: "The Procedures of Construction" {V-VII)

The context of this chapter makes it clear that Chenu's central consideration is the **constructive** nature of the intellectual operations which gave birth to the Thomistic synthesis. The focus is on the **dynamic** character of human intellect as it moves "from one intelligible to another" [177] To interpret Thomas properly, attention must be paid to the manifold ways in which that movement is evident in his thinking. The profound intensity of that dynamism is evident in the very structure of the *Summa Theologiae* in which consideration of one question gives rise to another. But there is a further intellectual movement evident within each question, and within each article; it is within this context that the flexibility of Thomas' intellectual dynamism is evident.

The ideal of "science," strictly considered, is a movement of mind which attains to demonstration, "wherein from two pre-known truths a third effectually follows" [178]. It would be misleading to attempt an interpretation of each article of the *Summa* in light of this ideal. There are, of course, attempts at such demonstration, but there are also significantly different forms of reasoning which attain different degrees of certitude. Reading a given article properly will involve discerning the kind of certainty attained. Frequently the structure of a particular response will involve a number of arguments which unfold into a certain convergence; the result of such a procedure is not the absolute certitude resulting from demonstration, but rather an emerging sense of probability. [WP: "Newman has something like this."}

Further, use of the syllogistic form in an argument must not be automatically construed as reflecting a deductive demonstration of truth. Besides being used to deduce a new truth from two pre-known truths, the syllogism can also be used to express a truth that is known by intellect in a way other than deduction. Thus, Chenu notes that the Platonic metaphysics of participation was a significant influence on Thomas. The movement of mind appropriate to such a metaphysics is more a matter of 'remembrance' than deduction; it is a matter of "becoming aware of a reality that was present right from the beginning" [181]. In Thomas, the expression of such 'remembrance' often resembles the form of Aristotelian logic, but the actual movement of mind which underlies that expression is quite different from Aristotelian metaphysics.

One reason for this is that Thomas the **theo**logian remains ever aware of the reality of mystery. Specifically, he understands that the objects of theological knowledge frequently cannot be demonstrated necessarily because "the objects of the entire Christian economy are subject to the pleasure of the Divine will and not governed by some internal necessity" [181]. The intelligibility which is sought in such cases is not causal necessity, but 'fittingness.' This difference qualifies the very movement of mind; with a different end in view, there is a different style and tone of proceeding to the end. Thomas' theology often involves an attempt to discover the various ways in which revealed facts can be understood as 'suitable,' and the further task of systematically ordering such 'suitabilities.' One way of grasping the distinctiveness of the mind's movement in such a procedure is to note that it begins with an affirmation of fact and proceeds to seek a partial grasp of the intelligibility of that fact. But throughout this process, it is understood that "the mind remains in disproportion with mystery" [183]. The affirmation of fact does not follow upon the grasp of intelligibility, but mysteriously grounds it; and even that consequent grasp will always remain partial.

Part of the 'fittingness' which is shown to characterize various facts of revelation is precisely the way in which they 'fit' in the comprehensive *Weltanschauung* which Thomas builds. The internal coherence of this overarching vision gives both scope and suggestive power to his arguments of suitability.

Another way in which the comprehensiveness of Thomas' thinking plays a key role is in the functioning of axioms within his theological reasoning. The major premise in an explicitly formulated syllogism, or the foundational principle of an unfolding argument, is obviously of central importance in understanding the reasoning being proposed. Frequently these axioms or principles are expressed in formalized statements whose usage is quite widespread. Chenu insists that understanding these axioms,

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and thus understanding the reasoning built on them, requires an understanding of the systematic context in which they have meaning. In other words, the precise meaning of a formula may well be quite different in a strictly Aristotelian context than it would be in a Dionysian context. Grasping the proper context of an axiom and the very specific use to which is it put in a given article is essential for interpreting the argument being expressed.

Much of what Chenu writes about the intellectual dynamism of Thomas' constructive procedures distances that dynamism from any univocal interpretation that would regard it all as seeking deductive demonstration. Perhaps the procedure most clearly distinct from demonstration is what Chenu terms "re-solution," or **re**duction. The movement of this procedure is to "start from the contents of a subject and go back to their necessary prerequisites, so the conditions that make them intelligible" [188]. Essentially, this is a matter of **transcendental reflection**. It differs from contemporary transcendental method (Maréchal, *et al*.) which seeks conditions of possibility in consciousness, in that the possibilities considered here are explicitly metaphysical. Nevertheless, the structure of intellectual procedure is similar; the guiding question concerns what would have to be possible in order for 'x' to be 'x.' [WP: "'Transcendentals' a good example."] As Thomas proceeds in this fashion, the foundational significance of his religious experience and affirmations is readily evident.

In all these ways of proceeding, a profound "mental and moral serenity" [191] is evident in Thomas' intellectual work. L The most notable evidence of this is the manner of his refuting the theological views of other persons. His "reverential interpretation" of the authorities of antiquity has been previously considered. Something similar was operative in his intellectual dialogue with contemporaries. Differences were real. Yet the tone of his engagement evidences a sensitivity to the questions raised by an 'opponent,' and to the insights he had attained. "[I]n Saint Thomas, contact with an opponent takes on the aspect as of a dialogue wherein the thought of the other, far from being barred from the search in progress, is made part of it" [192]. His facility at making distinctions enabled him to disagree with another person and yet use that person's thought, partially transposed, in building his own comprehensive understanding. At the least, "opposing opinions are given their fair share" [193].

This sensitivity to others is not, of course, simply "a matter of easy-going benevolence" [193]; Thomas clearly did note engage in what David Tracy has termed a Will Rogers type of pluralism, in which a thinker has never met a position s/he didn't like! There are positions which Thomas clearly rejects. For example, Aristotelian positions on the creation of the world and the spirituality of the soul are posited as

being inadequate for the expression of Christian truth. Even here, however, an incessant intellectual curiosity is evident in the attempt to understand how the Philosopher had arrived at his positions.

These attitudes and dynamic intellectual procedures enabled Thomas to construct an extraordinary synthesis of faith and reason. In a sense, that synthesis is an entire universe of thought; yet, it must never be thought of as a closed universe. Each individual part is, indeed, dependent on other individual parts and on the whole. But that dependence is frequently a matter of one part raising questions which needed to be considered in another part; the dependence, in other words, is dynamic, not static. The mutual involvement of the parts is more like a living, growing organism, than it is like a pre-cut jigsaw puzzle when finally put together. To enter the 'world' of Thomism, then, is to enter into the dynamic questioning which constructed the synthesis, rather than simply learning the concepts which express that synthesis as an accomplished fact. Our focus as students of Thomas must move beyond the *pensée pensée* to the *pensée pensante*.

Summary Notes of Chapter ELEVEN: "The Summae Theologiae"

The '*summa*' began to emerge as a literary genre in theology during the twelfth century, when theology as a discipline became more and more independent of immediately pastoral and spiritual concerns. The shift was toward systematization, and the *summa* served as a vehicle of synthesis. Thus, Chenu posits a three-fold purpose for the *summa* in the thirteenth century: (a) to expound the whole of a given scientific field of knowledge in a concise manner; (b) to organize the objects of this field of knowledge in a synthetic way; and (c) to realize this aim so that the product be adapted to teaching students.

In the prologue to the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas notes the inadequacy of other common genres for these aims. The commentary is bound to the order of exposition of a text, and the disputations were bound to the circumstances of a given controversy. It is hoped that the new genre will allow exposition to be dictated by the needs of the subject matter [WP: "*ordo doctrinae* is an important phrase"] and by the needs of students.

Concurrent with the emergence of this literary form, there was also developing a new mentality. The impact of Aristotle involved a notion of science as organized knowledge which sought the causes of things; there were analytic and synthetic movements of thought, through which "a basis was supplied

for the establishment of an order in which the intelligibility of natures found its proper place within logical classifications" [303]. Applying this notion of science to theology emerged as an enormous task in the thirteenth century. The difficulty of that task stemmed especially from the historical and narrative contexts of the sacred texts. Chenu notes that initial attempts at such systematization, such as Abelard's, eliminated any sense of historical unfolding in the data. Chenu also judges that Thomas was able to insert an order within sacred history that brought out its intelligible content.

This order is manifest in the architectonic plan of Thomas' *Summa*. The neo-Platonic theme of "emanation and return," available through the Dionysian tradition, became the organizing principle of the Summa, and the structure of the intelligibility to be anticipated in the objects studied by theology. The unity of theology, accordingly, is provided by the fact that every being/event/nature is to be understood in terms of its dual relationship to God as (a) principle and (b) end. This enabled theology to include beings from any genus among its objects and still to maintain a formal unity. L One key result of this is the reemergence of cosmological dimensions of theology, which had been minimized by the psychological and moral focus of Augustine. Another significant implication is that in the midst of the scientific shift toward system, theology remains authentically **theo**logical; it is the reference of everything to God, not Aristotelian categories, that guarantees the unity of theology. 'Greek' reason remains a tool of a fundamentally Christian theological science.

This theme of going-forth-from (*exitus*) and coming-back-to (*reditus*) God is evident in the very construction of the *Summa*, whose first and second parts are related to one another as are emanation and return; all beings and events are to be understood as ultimately having God as efficient and final cause. In the third part of the *Summa*, the intelligibility of the Incarnation can be understood in its being the divinely chosen and utterly gratuitous means of the *reditus* to God. In Chenu's marvelous phrase, Christ is "the craftsman of this return" [313].

In this structure, it is striking that realities such as grace, charity, and contemplative knowledge are treated in the second part, prior to consideration of Christ in the third part. What this involves is analysis of the basic structures of such realities, prior to consideration of the concrete mode of their realization in Christ. The Incarnation enters into the 'circuit' of emanation and return as the means of return graciously willed by God.

Throughout this systematization, Thomas remains sensitive to the revealed data of Scripture. This is especially evident in those sections – concerning creation, the old law, and the life of Christ – in

which Thomas develops biblical material. The possibility of 'losing' something in the shift from historical categories to those of science is very real; the theologian must compensate for this, as Thomas did, by returning to the data of Scripture. The fruitfulness of this is evident in the coherent balance achieved in the *Summa* between (a) the Augustinian approach of examining the historical states of human existence, and (b) exploring the theoretical conditions of a human nature.

Another significant consequence of the unity provided by the *exitus-reditus* theme is the unity of dogmatic and moral theology; human acts can be understood as 'steps' of the journey of human nature returning to God. The theological categories for understanding the moral lives of human beings are not separate from the categories to be employed for understanding other dimensions of being.

The interpretation of any text from the *Summa*, accordingly, must flow from a grasp of the overall intelligibility of the 'plan' and the place of any given text within it.