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## Who Is to Blame for the Sinking Ship? Aquinas on Divine Goodness, Evil and Freedom<sup>1</sup>

*Koga kriviti za potapljajočo se ladjo? Tomaž Akvinski o božji dobroti, zlu in svobodi*

*Abstract:* This paper presents the basic features of Aquinas' theodicy, first indicating some difficulties regarding the problem of evil—or even attempts to implicate God in evil—that have emerged in the wake of scientific achievements, especially in the field of evolutionary biology. What is needed in response to these challenges is an appropriate view of God's causality, which is analogous in character and does not constitute one of many causalities in the world. A correct understanding of the relationship between the First Cause and secondary causes sheds new light on the debate about the Creator's responsibility for evil in the world. For Aquinas, God's action is focused on the good of the whole, which is why the notion of integrity or rectitude, which was already present in Paradise, explains the accidental—not intentional—presence of evil in the world. Against that background, the paper explains God's manner of responding to evil as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas, which consists in conquering evil with the greater good, its paradigm being the Incarnation. For a Christian, this is a model example of how a man can conquer evil by strengthening good and persisting in it through cooperation with grace.

*Keywords:* Theodicy, Original Justice, Biblical Thomism, Secondary Causes

*Povzetek:* Prispevek prikazuje glavne značilnosti teodiceje Tomaža Akvinskega. Pri tem najprej izpostavlja nekatere težave pri vprašanju o zlu – ali celo poskuse povezovanja Boga z zlom –, ki so se pojavile v luči znanstvenih dosežkov – predvsem na področju evulucijske biologije. Kar je pri odgovarjanju na takšne izzive potrebno, je ustrezen pogled na božjo vzročnost, ki je analogičnega značaja in ne tvori le ene od številnih vzročnosti v svetu. Ustrežno razumevanje odnosa med Prvim in drugotnimi vzroki razpravo o Stvarnikovi odgovornosti za zlo na svetu osvetljuje na novo. Za Tomaža je božje delovanje osredotočeno na dobro

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kot celoto. Prav zato pojem integritete ali *rectitudo*, prisotne že v raju, dobro pojasnjuje prigradno (naključno) – in ne namerno – prisotnost zla v svetu. Na tej podlagi prispevek pojasnjuje božji način odzivanja na zlo, kot ga interpretira Tomaž, kar pomeni zmago nad zlom z večjim dobrim; paradigma tega načina je (Kristusovo) učlovečenje. Za kristjana je to zgled, kako lahko človek premaga zlo z okrepitevijo dobrega in vztrajanjem v njem ob sodelovanju z milostjo.

*Ključne besede:* teodiceja, izvirna pravičnost, biblijski tomizem, drugotni vzroki

»Many good things would be taken away  
if God permitted no evil to exist.«

Thomas Aquinas, ST I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3

## 1. Introduction: The ‚Forge‘ of Aquinas

From time to time, scholars rediscover some of the forgotten treatises or topics from the *Summa Theologiae* and publish them in stand-alone form. During the era prior to the printing press, the moral part of the *Summa*, the passages related to virtues and vices, were frequently copied from manuscripts. However, a somewhat forgotten treatise on ‚divine government‘ in the *Summa Theologiae* (I, qq. 103–119) still awaits its time of rediscovery (Perrier 2019). Its importance or significance can be considered on both the macro level and the micro level. On the macro level, the treatise outlines the framework of God’s relationship to the world, rejecting deism and pointing to God’s specific way of acting in the world and its history (Torrijos 2020, 158; Oleksowicz 2020). On the micro level, it addresses questions concerning how the human person may imitate God in His action. How should we govern in the face of the evil that appears? Shall we ignore it, turn our eyes away, fight against it, or concentrate only on the good things?

But if God governs the world and guides the history of salvation, then why does evil appear in it at all? For many people, the existence of evil is a reason to abandon faith in a merciful and providential God. Paradoxically, evil provokes the necessity not only of theodicy but also anthropodicy (Sontag 1981; Vodičar 2017 567; Petkovišek 2019), because humans are authors of many evil situations. Awareness of this resounds even in popular culture: a well-known Polish singer and songwriter, Czesław Niemen, sang in 1972,

»Oh, strange is this world,  
Well, still it seems,  
There’s so far so much evil.  
And strange it is that since long ago,  
Man despises man. /.../  
But most people are of good will.«

God's relationship to evil is a singular issue that touches many others. For St. Thomas, however, this is the question that affects not only the genesis of evil but also the order in the world and the way in which God acts in the world that allows evil to happen. It is a matter of understanding both God's relationship to evil if there is any at all, and how we, called to follow God, are to deal with evil.

The popular explanations of evil, which often go as far as to accuse God of it, are for St. Thomas the result of our ignorant and simplistic vision of the world. Using an image from St. Augustine, St. Thomas compares the situation to that of a man seeing a forge who does not know its workings. He sees in it

»many appliances of which he does not understand the use, and which, if he is a foolish fellow, he considers unnecessary. Moreover, should he carelessly fall into the fire, or wound himself with a sharp-edged tool, he is under the impression that many of the things there are hurtful; whereas the craftsman, knowing their use, laughs at his folly. And thus some people presume to find fault with many things in this world through not seeing the reasons for their existence. For though not required for the furnishing of our house, these things are necessary for the perfection of the universe.« (ST I, q. 72, a.1, ad 6)

On the basis of this extensive quotation from St. Augustine, Aquinas conveys an understanding of original justice in Paradise (Mrozek 2013). There, man would use things in accordance with their destiny, whereas the drama of evil consists in the disruption of this harmony. In Paradise, the snakes would still be poisonous (the serpent's venom did not emerge as a result of original sin), but they would not harm man (ST I, q. 72, ad 6).

What is necessary is to see the whole picture and to pay attention to the 'good of the whole'. It demands a certain intellectual humility to accept it. Interestingly, Eleonore Stump uses the image of a hospital that, from the perspective of an alien, is incomprehensible: people who walk on their own enter it and leave with crutches. From the outside, one cannot see that a person entering the hospital required surgery (Echavarría 2017).

In this paper I would like to draw attention to a few basic features of Aquinas' theodicy, first indicating some difficulties regarding the problem of evil—or even attempts to implicate God for evil—that have emerged in the wake of scientific achievements, especially in the field of evolutionary biology (Hofmann 2020; Ortiz 2022). These observations will make way for a reflection on fundamental issues, such as the divine causality as the First Cause, that is not as the causality of creatures (which often seems to ignore the contemporary debate around divine action making God one of many entities), His responsibility for evil, and finally whether this God's method of overcoming evil can be imitated by us.

## 2. Is the First Cause Responsible for Secondary Causes' Activity?

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To borrow a phrase from C. S. Lewis, our culture often puts God in the dock. This can be seen in many statements in which God is accused of allowing evil to happen in human life, from the death of a newborn child to an accident caused by a drunk driver.

In one of the articles in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas analyzes these arguments, perhaps making reference to current events of his time, using the example of helpless observers of the sinking ship who ask whether God is guilty of the fact that the ship is sinking or whether it is rather the captain who is to blame. Relying on this metaphor, by analogy, some have suggested that God is primarily responsible for it, since even according to Aristotle's *Physics*, the one who is the author of the salvation is also the perpetrator of the Fall, because He creates such a possibility at all. Thomas' answer clarifies the scope of responsibility of the immediate cause and God as the First Cause:

»The sinking of a ship is attributed to the sailor as the cause, from the fact that he does not fulfil what the safety of the ship requires; but God does not fail in doing what is necessary for the safety of all. Hence there is no parity.« (ST I, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3)

Aquinas observes that in some sense we can always accuse the creator of everything, just as the lumberjack and carpenter who built the ship might be responsible for her sinking. God never does evil because He always acts for the purpose of the good (Dewan 2007). Even if He knows evil, it is through the good (for example, which has not been realized) and not directly (ScG I, cap. 71). However, the achievements of modern science, especially those of evolutionary biology, pose other questions about the situation before that of original sin and God's relationship to it (Pardo 2017). If evolution is the means to an end, we can still ask why God has chosen what seems from our perspective to be a cruel manner of creating the world. Generally, the problem of physical evil in Paradise concerns the presence of physical evil before the appearance of man and his sin that disturbed the original harmony. The concept of evolution regulated by natural selection seems to necessitate the suffering of animals, which, at first glance, contradicts the teaching that God is on the side of the weak and the poor (Mensch 2019). Do dinosaurs which eat each other contradict the goodness of God? And, by contrast, do a lion and a lamb (or a cat and a mouse) dwelling together represent the vision of Paradise that we often imagine? The question arises whether there was an experience of suffering in the life of the first humans or whether it was an ideal state, not subject to evolution. In the Platonic view, man has fallen from this state and now suffers in the body as he seeks to free himself

For Aquinas, the state of innocence (*status innocentiae*) and the nature of life in Paradise are not a matter of fairy tales. His account remains extremely realistic, even if he would accept a spiritual interpretation of original justice in Paradise

(Vijgen 2019). It runs contrary to the view that we have fallen from above and now are only trying to get back there. On the Platonic account, our goal consists in returning to the same place, Paradise. But this is not the vision of Christian Revelation. The saved persons are not returning to Paradise, because they will go to heaven (Doddson 2019).

To summarize the considerations contained in *Prima Pars*, qq. 91 to 102, in which Aquinas asks whether Paradise is a physical place on earth, what the body of the first man was—from all this emerges a certain image of a man who was not created in a ‚finished‘ state but rather was subject to development (Haught 2015; Platovnjak and Svetelj 2019). The sin disturbs the original trajectory but does not reverse it. In the state of original innocence, although the order that reigned in the state of innocence has been disrupted, the natural goods that it ordered were not abolished with the fall (Houck 2020, 65–68). The formulation from Genesis that the subsequent days of creation bring everything that was perceived by God as ‚very good‘ does not signify perfection (as if it was not necessary to add anything to earthly creation). Rather, according to the Hebrew term, to be ‚very good‘ means to be filled in a proper measure. For Aquinas, the expression ‚very good‘ at the end of creation indicates that not only parts of creation are good but the universe as a whole is good as well.

Therefore, in Paradise, although there was inequality between people in a certain respect in some other aspects, they were equal. This indicates that there was also a need for rule among people. This governance in paradise seems to resemble advising and persuasion, but it would not negate the necessity of this order of dependency (Arguello 2018, 103). For Aquinas, this fits with the nature of the *generatio rerum*, in which one goes from an imperfect state to a perfect state: matter is for the sake of (Latin *propter*) form, and the form for the sake of perfection (ST I, q. 96, a. 1c). Moreover, the same existence of dependence (related to inequality and suffering) originates from the order of providence, which *semper inferiora per superiora gubernat* (ST I, q. 96, a. 1 c.; *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 8, ad 12), and what is possessed by participation is subordinated to that which is possessed by the essence (*aestimatio* in animals, and *prudencia* in humans). As with the case of passions, the *subiectio* of animals to man does not imply that man absolutely dominates them. To order them does not signify their suppression but rather the use of their potential for a greater good, in which such potential is harmonized with the main goal of human beings. The idea of order and God’s permitting of some evil it is one of the important arguments in Aquinas’ theodicy (Sanguinetti 1980).

Nevertheless, the vision of paradise presented by Aquinas is not, in my opinion, identical to the argument that the creation of the world through evolution (with its consequences in suffering, the disappearance of species, etc.) was the only way in which God could create the world. Aquinas preferred the category of *convenientia* in order to explain the details of God’s creative act (Austriaco 2019; Roszak 2022).

### 3. God's Responsibility for Evil: Aquinas' Understanding of Divine Action

The solution to dilemmas regarding evil requires an understanding of God's way of acting as the First Cause and, at the same time, as the source of all goodness. With this in mind, in the 'forge' of Aquinas, one can begin to slowly understand the functioning of the whole: this image refers to the mutual relationship of tools, to the grasp of the 'purpose' and the mode of operation. The problem, however, which affects specific solutions, is the language and, above all, the way in which we communicate God's word in our human language. It is worth developing this point further.<sup>2</sup>

God's action in the world is frequently perceived on the same level as natural events, treating Him as if He were one of the causes of this world (Dodds 2012). For many centuries, there has been a discussion between supporters of equivocal, univocal, and analogical predication about God (te Velde 2006, 109–114). Aquinas opted for analogy, in which it can be seen that although we use the same word to describe two different things (e.g. God is, Peter is), the word means neither the exact same thing nor two completely different things. Rather, it means two different things that are analogically similar (a similar dissimilarity). In order to grasp the truth about God's action in this way, we need to detach ourselves from univocal human images that do not take into account the transcendence of God (Horvat and Roszak 2020; Salvador 2021). To judge correctly about God, we need to change our 'taste', following Aquinas' metaphor:

»A person with a diseased palate misjudges the taste of foods and sometimes recoils from the tasty but approves the disgusting, whereas a person with a healthy palate judges tastes correctly; so a person whose affections are corrupted by conformity to worldly things misjudges the good, whereas a person whose affections are upright and sound, his sense having been renewed by grace, judges the good correctly.« (*In Rom.*, cap. XII, lect. 1 [nr. 967])

It is worthwhile to explore three points related to God's action in the world that play a significant role in explaining the existence of evil: (1) the causality of the First Cause, (2) its action for the good of the whole and the good of the parts and (3) whether the world could have been better created.

<sup>2</sup> Irena Avsenik Nabergoj deals with Aquinas' explication of images from the concrete reality of the world for expressing spiritual meaning in the totality of understanding God's basic attributes (Avsenik Nabergoj 2018, 143–147). In her article „Foundational Literary Forms in the Bible“, Irena Avsenik Nabergoj explains in more detail the multifarious meanings of biblical texts of various literary genres: »The judging of individual figures on themselves would not have great significance in the study of the message of the Bible. It is not therefore the question of ›literary archeology‹ on the search for fragments but of recognition of material and spiritual sublimity, semantic purity and mystery of intuitions, emotions, thoughts and intentions expressed by multipurpose conventional and original literary components of texts in their harmonious literary structure.« (Avsenik Nabergoj 2019, 856)

### 3.1 The First Cause and Secondary Causes

The understanding of causality in Aquinas's thinking is shaped by the *Liber de causis*, and we find one of the key definitions of the First Cause there: *causa enim prima dat secundae quod influat super effectum suum* (*De veritate*, q. 6, a. 6c.) And so the role of the First Cause is neither to 'replace' natural causes nor, contrary to occasionalists, to eliminate the causality of creatures making that their causality would be apparent. Rather, thanks to the First Cause, the secondary causes can truly be causes. It reflects, even more, the omnipotence of God if He acts by others, and not only by His own power; on St. Thomas's account, the higher the cause, the more effects it extends to (ST I, q. 65, a. 3c). He explains this dependence referring to one of the issues of the creation treaty:

»For when we have a series of causes depending on one another, it necessarily follows that, while the effect depends first and principally on the First Cause, it also depends in a secondary way on all the middle causes. Therefore the First Cause is the principal cause of the preservation of the effect which is to be referred to the middle causes in a secondary way; and all the more so, as the middle cause is higher and nearer to the First Cause.« (ST I, q. 104, a. 2c.)

God's action does not presuppose the existence of an earlier subject but is always a creative action. Therefore, God should not be perceived through the opposing actions of the creatures; instead, He creates with them a certain harmony, although we are often inclined to see the opposite. As Aquinas affirms *finis proximus non excludit finem ultimum* (ST I, q. 65, a. 2, ad 2).

At the same time, divine action does not eliminate the freedom of secondary causes that do not compete with divine freedom (Keltz 2019). Although no metaphor can fully reflect this relationship, it can be helpful to use a soccer metaphor. Our attempts to discover the action of the First Cause cannot be a search for God as one of the elements of this world, one of many. Rather, God is like a coach who is present in the match but with a role that differs from that of the players. The coach's wisdom and tactics are present in the free action and cooperation of the players with each other. Moreover, normally we do not see the coach; he or she is outside of the playing field (i.e., transcendent), but in some concrete way the coach is present in all free activities of the players (Roszak and Huzarek 2019). Will anybody watching the match on television be able to see the trainer's traps in the system of passes and offside traps if he focuses only on naturalistic explanations? Analogically, each particular science (e.g. physics, chemistry, or biology) is able to say much about the physiology of a soccer player, e.g. his anatomy or manner of breathing, but theology can provide a complete picture of the whole game.

So when moral evil appears, can we blame God as the First Cause for it? Aquinas, in trying to explain how God is related to evil events and how He is not the cause of human wrongdoing, offers a series of images, such as a servant who deviates from the will of his Lord, or a lame man. God is not the cause of the lame



man's illness but rather of the fact that even being lame, he is able to walk. Aquinas is clear in this aspect:

»S]in denotes a being and an action with a defect: and this defect is from the created cause, viz. the free-will, as falling away from the order of the First Agent, viz. God. Consequently this defect is not reduced to God as its cause, but to the free-will: even as the defect of limping is reduced to a crooked leg as its cause, but not to the motive power, which nevertheless causes whatever there is of movement in the limping. Accordingly God is the cause of the act of sin: and yet He is not the cause of sin, because He does not cause the act to have a defect.« (ST I-II, q. 79, a. 2c)

Thomas presents an interesting account of the relation of the First Cause to the other causes in the section of his commentary on Romans where he discusses the words *from him*, *through him*, and *for him* in Rom 11:36. He analyzes the three Latin prepositions, namely *ex*, *per*, and *in*. *Ex* indicates the creative power of God (*principium motus*), *per* is about the mode of action (*causa operationis*), and *in* manifests the result (*habitus causae*). The second of the prepositions corresponds to Aquinas' understanding of instrumental causality that is reflected by two examples (1) a knife, which is an instrument that is caused by a primary cause (the craftsman) who himself uses an instrument (i.e., a secondary cause) to make it (a hammer), and (2) an official acting on behalf of the king; the king himself is the primary cause acting through his official who is the secondary cause (*In Rom.*, cap. XI, lect. 5, nr. 946).

### 3.2 The Good of the Whole

Aquinas' reasoning about evil must be understood within the context of his basic conviction that the human race's development carries with it a certain good that would not exist if we had been completely formed from the beginning as confirmed in the good (*De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 7c; Kadykalo 2020; Kwakye 2020). The cultivation of man's freedom to develop his potentiality in cooperation with grace, is also a kind of a good, not a sign of the absence of the Creator, as the representatives of extreme evolutionary theories seem to argue. Aquinas's view in this respect often refers to the 'order' (*ordo*), which denotes a certain relationship and proportion. This point invites one to perceive everything from a macro perspective, which requires a systematic understanding. Such a hermeneutical approach is proper to theology as a divine science that perceives the reality *sub ratione Dei* and that is why it does not make unnecessary science as such, although theology can introduce a certain global order of affairs.

Interestingly, Aquinas talks about this order in the context of Paradise, when he clearly confirms that in spite of the idyllic images that imagination paints of that place, there was inequality there, but these differences (i.e. in the body, as some would be stronger than others) did not result from sin or infirmity. The reason for them was rather the order that is established through this inequality and



the love that is greater when the father/mother loves children than between equals, hence

»the cause of inequality could be on the part of God; not indeed that He would punish some and reward others, but that He would exalt some above others; so that the beauty of order would the more shine forth among men. Inequality might also arise on the part of nature as above described, without any defect of nature.« (ST I, q. 96 a. 3)

As Agustin Echavarria points out, this does not indicate that Thomas's system is a 'theodicy' in a Leibnizian understanding, or that evil plays a positive role (Echavarria 2013). Rather, it indicates that evil is associated with the good without which there would be no perfection of the universe. Hence, strength does not lie on the side of evil, because it is *per accidens* and not *per se* that it contributes to the perfection of the universe (Brock 2018). Evil is not a cause of good, but an opportunity to reveal the good. This good would be revealed in the patience of the martyrs even if evil did not manifest itself. The key point of Aquinas's reasoning is the notion of *ordo*:

»God and nature and any other agent make what is best in the whole, but not what is best in every single part, except in order to the whole, as was said above. And the whole itself, which is the universe of creatures, is all the better and more perfect if some things in it can fail in goodness, and do sometimes fail, God not preventing this. This happens, firstly, because »it belongs to Providence not to destroy, but to save nature,« as Dionysius says (*De Divinis Nominibus* IV); but it belongs to nature that what may fail should sometimes fail; secondly, because, as Augustine says (*Enchiridion* 11), »God is so powerful that He can even make good out of evil«. Hence many good things would be taken away if God permitted no evil to exist; for fire would not be generated if air was not corrupted, nor would the life of a lion be preserved unless the ass were killed. Neither would avenging justice nor the patience of a sufferer be praised if there were no injustice.« (ST I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3.)

This does not imply the necessity of evil but rather the power of God who permits evil for the greater good. Thinking 'according to the principle of the whole' is characteristic of the work of the architect, which St. Thomas refers to as theologians. Aquinas is convinced that the diversity of creatures is because creation is intended to reflect the Creator, but no single creature can of itself reflect every attribute of the Creator. In this way, God Himself, from the beginning, has wanted to introduce perfection into the universe and established creatures that, although imperfect, contribute to its perfection (ST I, q. 65 a. 2 ad 3).

### 3.3 Can God do Something 'Better'?

From the perspective of the order of the universe, Aquinas directly addresses the perfection of God's action (Woolard 2020; Pabjan 2018). He specifies in question 25 of the *Prima Pars* that we cannot claim that God can improve His action as if He could act with greater wisdom or goodness. However, as to the result, God's

perfection is not exhausted in created beings, because by their very nature, the beings can always be better (,improvement' is something good for a human being). Certain unimportant features could exist in the subject in a ,better way'. Hence, according to Thomas, if ,better' is interpreted in a noun meaning, then God can create certain things better in a certain way, while in the adverbial sense it is not possible. It is important in this context to distinguish between two types of goodness that can be affected by the action of God:

»The goodness of anything is twofold; one, which is of the essence of it—thus, for instance, to be rational pertains to the essence of man. As regards this good, God cannot make a thing better than it is itself; although He can make another thing better than it; even as He cannot make the number four greater than it is; because if it were greater it would no longer be four, but another number. /.../ Another kind of goodness is that which is over and above the essence; thus, the good of a man is to be virtuous or wise. As regards this kind of goodness, God can make better the things He has made. Absolutely speaking, however, God can make something else better than each thing made by Him.« (ST I, q.25, a.6)

We cannot say that there exists the best world out of many possible worlds because there are many ways in which divine wisdom can be expressed; none of the effects of God's activity can be taken as an absolute measure of God's actions (Paluch 2003). The aim of the divine action—the glory of God—will be achieved in any case, whether with certain creatures or others, with their behaviour or that of others, and it will be done in a perfect and infallible manner (Echavarria 2012, 530). It is probably similar to a game of chess in which it is known in advance that God will win although the game may take any one of a number of different courses. This particular ,course' and the amount of evil present in the world is presented as a counterargument in many theodicies, noting that God's victory takes place only when we prove that there is more good than bad. From Thomas' perspective, however, there seems to be another dominating aspect: the value of the free choice of good. This free choice retains its value even if it involves the risk that many will not choose the good or even that no one will choose it.

The image that Aquinas chooses to explain the good of the universe and the meaning of individual things, diverse in their goodness, is that of a zither, the music of which would be disturbed even if »one string were stretched more than it should be« (ST I, q. 25, a. 6, ad 3). This results from the belief that the good of the world consists in harmony and order, not in equality. Such a system of the world guarantees greater goodness, and God acts because of it, *propter decentissimum ordinem*. Aquinas compares this action of God with art when talking about the artistry of God, who aims at adapting His work to the best solution from the perspective of His intention, even if it involves agreeing to a lack, just as a saw is made of iron and not of glass, although the latter material is more beautiful (Storck 2010; Roszak and Berry 2021). Achieving this aim is of prime importance and God does not allow a desire for cosmetic or superficial beauty to impede his aim:

»Therefore God gave to each natural being the best disposition; not absolutely so, but in the view of its proper end. This is what the Philosopher says (*Phys.* II, 7): »And because it is better so, not absolutely, but for each one's substance.« (ST I, q. 91, a. 3c)

## 4. How to Fight Evil?

There are several practical consequences for the Christian approach to the evil that can arise from the imitation of God's actions (Shanley 2008; Zagzebsky 2010; Petkovšek 2020).

### 4.1 Fighting Evil by Increasing Good

St. Thomas's solution to the question of evil is based on the metaphysics of good. From the perspective of his reflections on the motives of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Aquinas outlines two sets of five reasons. It is significant that he first lists the five reasons of *ex convenientia* concerning the good as the goal of Christ coming into the world, and then he introduces the reasons based on the evil situation that should be repaired. It means that the characteristic manner of God's action is that of increasing the 'dose' of good in the world, as opposed to confronting evil directly and focusing upon it. In this way, the Christian attitude must be that of strengthening and promoting the good life which corresponds to *promotio hominis in bono* (ST III, q.1, a.2c).

When we look at the second set of five reasons for the Incarnation as 'the removal of evil', we find some obstacles for the good. Therefore, in order to remove those obstacles, God gives His grace in the world (ST III, q.1, a.2, ad 2). Nevertheless, in all these cases, God is still acting for the purpose of good. Aquinas describes this divine action, focused on good, through an analogy to the motion of material things, which bear within themselves a dynamic force impelling them to move, *promotio vel motus suscipientis* in accepting the *impressio agentis*. This perspective also informs Aquinas' account of the power of the sacraments and their relation to the sanctification of man.

### 4.2 Restoring Order in Nature through Cooperation with Grace

Aquinas draws attention to the *ordo* as one of the explanations of God's action. The grace granted to man leads to regaining the web of relationship, enabling man to make an effort beyond the limit of his nature, to achieve the good of this order (Colberg 2019).

When Aquinas wonders in *Summa Theologiae* q. 109 of the *Prima Secundae* whether man can avoid sin without the help of grace, he ends his explanation with a reference to the order that is violated by sin (Vijgen 2018). Based on the distinction between two human states (*naturae integrae* and *corruptae status*), Aquinas realistically observes that the will of the human person who is turned away from

God can be controlled by reason, but since it is very difficult for the reason to maintain such attention, it happens that the person falls into venial sins. Salvation in this situation consists in the will's being supported by grace, which »immediately restores it to proper order« (ST I-II, q.109, a.8c). As Matthew Lamb states:

»One of the great joys of the beatific vision will be finally to understand the beauty and wisdom of each and every thing that has occurred in one's life, in the lives of loved ones, and indeed in the whole of human history. The blessed will understand why God allowed evil and sin with all the histories of human suffering, and how God's wisdom and Christ's redemptive mission transforms that evil and suffering into the glory of eternal bliss. This understanding will be such that even the most insignificant event will be finally intelligible within the beauty of the whole of creation.« (Lamb 2007, 266)

### 4.3 Perseverance in Good

Given the foregoing outline of how God strengthens the order of good, man's attitude may be perseverance, which expresses his support for the good, allowing it to work and to change him. Man's perseverance is his means of accepting that in the divine dispensation he is to grow over time and that this is how he shall bear fruit (Stegu 2020). That is why in the Psalms man's salvation is synonymous with trust in the goodness of God, and for Aquinas blasphemy is precisely the denial or the contradiction of this goodness. Blasphemy is also reductionism, which results in the fact that we no longer see the cause in the effect. Christianity proposes that the believer widen his or her perspective to see the whole, namely, all the manifestations of good (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2018; Žalec 2020, 274; 2021, 141).

## 5. Conclusion

God's action for the purpose of good testifies to His omnipotence, which is associated with His mercy. The divine motive for action is not evil but »admitting people to participate in the infinite good, and this is the final result of the power of God /.../ in this, above all manifests the omnipotence of God, that it belongs to his first bringing and giving all good« (ST I, 25, a.3, ad 3). It is impossible to understand Aquinas' proposal without an important distinction between two kinds of causality: primary and secondary (proper to creatures), which makes it possible to address the question of responsibility for evil properly. The key to understanding Aquinas' theodicy seems to be the perspective of goodness, through which it is possible to understand the proper response of man in imitation of Christ, who acts by enhancing the good in the world. Pointing to the good of the whole, rather than seeing it through the prism of the particular good, is Aquinas' response, which always sees the rationale for God's action in goodness (Lazaro 2014; Petkovšek 2018).

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