

“For He is our Peace”  
Thomas Aquinas on Christ as Cause of  
Peace in the City of Saints

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**M**OST SCHOLARS WHO HAVE COMMENTED upon Aquinas’s view of peace have done so in the context of discussing his teaching that peace, defined as the “tranquility of order” (*tranquillitas ordinis*), is the aim of a just war.<sup>1</sup> Although “civic peace” falls short of the perfect peace that the saints will

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<sup>1</sup> An abridged version of this essay appears in *Reading Scripture as a Political Act* copyright © 2015 Fortress Press. In *Summa Theologiae* II-II 29.2, Aquinas adopts Augustine’s definition of peace as *tranquillitas ordinis*. English translations of the *Summa Theologiae* are from the Benziger edition unless otherwise noted. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1948). Avery Cardinal Dulles observes that, “political theorists have frequently dealt with ...civic peace ...according to Saint Thomas.” Avery Cardinal Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York, NY: Crossroads Publishing, 1983), 149. Most scholarly comment upon Aquinas’s view of peace treats the concept in the context of his teaching on war in *ST* II-II q. 40. John Finnis’s treatment of peace is representative since he places emphasis on the fact that Aquinas taught that genuine peace is not the absence of war but the maintenance of the common good. John Finnis, “The Ethics of War and Peace in the Catholic Natural Law Tradition,” in *Christian Political Ethics*, The Ethikon Series in Comparative Ethics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 193. See also Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven and William Barbieri, eds. *From Just War to Modern Peace Ethics* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); Gregory M Reichberg, and others, “Thomas Aquinas: Just War and Sins Against Peace,” in *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 169–98; Richard B. Miller, “Aquinas and the Presumption against Killing and War,” *Journal of Religion* 82, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 173–204; James Turner Johnson, “Aquinas and Luther on War and Peace,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 3–20. Aside from Matthew Levering’s indirect but helpful treatment of peace in Aquinas’s *Commentary on John* in Thomas G. Weinandy, John P. Yocum, and Daniel A. Keating, *Aquinas On Scripture: An Introduction To His Biblical Commentaries* (London: T. & T. Clark Publishers, 2005), the only scholars that directly address the subject are Francis E. McMahon, “A Thomistic Analysis of Peace,” *Thomist* 1, no. 3 (July 1939) 169–92; and Edwin J. Buers, “Saint Thomas Aquinas and Peace,” Catholic University of America, M.A. Thesis 1934. R. A. Johnson advances the position that Aquinas’s theological method represents a “nonviolent” theological confrontation of the Cathars. See Roger A. Johnson, *Peacemaking and Religious Violence: From Thomas Aquinas to Thomas Jefferson* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

possess in heaven, such peace is a positive state of civil well-being, and not merely the absence of war.<sup>2</sup> Scholarly focus on this true-but-imperfect peace in the secondary literature creates the impression that peace in Aquinas mostly concerns the peace of the city of man, and has little to do with the church.

However, as Gregory M. Reichberg has shown, Aquinas's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, especially his comment upon Matthew 5:39 ("But I say to you, do not resist and evil doer"), indicates a more complex picture, which Reichberg refers to as a "two stage theory."<sup>3</sup> Although the use of force is licit for the civil power (*respublica*), Reichberg shows that, for Aquinas, peacemaking is the appropriate response to evil for the "agency" of the church whose members' actions proceed directly from charity, and therefore "steadfastly... [avoid] any responsibility whatsoever for the shedding of blood."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Peace as "tranquility of order" is to be distinguished from evil peace (*ST* II-II q. 40, a. 1, ad. 3). The idea that peace is not simply the absence of war is not an original concept, since this line of thinking can be traced to the Stoics, Neo-Platonists, Aristotle, and Plato. James Turner Johnson, "Peace, War, and the Rejection of Violence in the Middle Ages," in *The Quest for Peace: Three Moral Traditions in Western Cultural History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 5:39 (NRSV). The idea of a dual agency in regard to evil should not be misunderstood as two separate spheres of activity, one secular and the other sacred. As Elizabeth Phillips points out, premodern authors "used the term 'secular' not to mean that which is not 'sacred', but to mean that which is temporal and not eternal." See her discussion of the relation of Aquinas's political theology to Augustine's in *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 26, 32–36.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory M. Reichberg, "Thomas Aquinas between Just War and Pacifism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 219–41. One of the merits of Reichberg's essay is that he demonstrates that Aquinas's comments concerning the permissibility of armed violence are scattered throughout the *Summa Theologiae* and biblical commentaries. After a thorough analysis of the texts, he concludes that the most focused attention to the "dual exigencies" of church (*ecclesia*) and state (*respublica*) appears in Aquinas's commentary on Matthew. Just war and nonviolence are "...represent ways of dealing with evil, the first by active resistance especially on behalf of the innocent under attack, the second by the voluntary acceptance of harm, assumed out of love for the spiritual good of the attacker. The first pertains first and foremost to the kingdoms (*respublicae*) of this world ...[and] the second pertains to a kingdom that transcends this world, the Church (*ecclesia*), led by Christ, who directs actions of all its members to the goal of eternal life ...the unity of the Church is constituted by the bond of charity; hence, only what proceeds directly from charity, as poured into human hearts by the Holy Spirit, is properly speaking 'of the Church'. Acts of violence, even licit violence, as with just war, cannot be attributed to the Church as such." Reichberg, "Thomas Aquinas," 238–9. Reichberg admits that Aquinas's approval of knightly religious orders (made up of lay brothers) sits in tension with this interpretation, but argues Aquinas viewed such measures as a provisional exception to the general rule that warfare pertains to the civil power, whereas the church, *per se*, "steadfastly avoids any responsibility whatsoever for the shedding of blood." Reichberg, "Thomas Aquinas," 235.

Based on a thorough examination of relevant texts in the *Summa Theologiae* and commentary on Matthew, Reichberg argues that, for Aquinas, the church “has a natural affinity, with respect to its own proper order of activity, with a nonviolent, ‘redemptive’ response to evil.”<sup>5</sup>

This essay takes Reichberg’s treatment of war and peace in Aquinas as a point of departure and explores the concept of an ecclesial “affinity” for peace in two of Aquinas’s commentaries that contain teaching on peace as it relates to the church: the commentary on the Gospel of John, and the commentary on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.<sup>6</sup> I examine these commentaries in order to address a specific problem. Though Christians enjoy the civic peace often highlighted in discussions of “true-but-imperfect” peace in Aquinas, it is not clear in what sense the church has been given the particular peace that Christ said he gave to the disciples in John 14:27 (“my peace I give you.”), and referenced in the Rite of Peace in the Roman Catholic Liturgy of the Eucharist. Since any peace we have in this life is subject to disturbance and conflict how can we say we have received Christ’s own peace? Is there a sense in which the church, which is obviously imperfect, possesses Christ’s own peace now?

In what follows, I argue that in addition to the frequently discussed idea of a true-but-imperfect civic peace in Aquinas, there exists a true-

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<sup>5</sup> Reichberg does not think this affinity for nonviolence can be limited to priests and bishops: “Aquinas typically frames this response by reference to the expectations incumbent upon ordained priests, since, on the sacramental rationale ...they especially represent Christ within the Church. Yet this call to nonviolence, as embodied in the ‘counsels of perfection’, was not understood by him to be a prerogative of priests alone, for he was well aware of the numerous female and lay martyrs. As a consequence, the distinction between nonviolence and just war does not neatly parallel the related distinction between clergy and laity.” Reichberg, “Thomas Aquinas, 235.”

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Kevin Hughes, Gregory Reichberg, and William Mattison for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay. All citations of Aquinas’s commentaries are from the Latin/English Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine edition, which is based on Fabian Larcher’s translation of the Marietti edition of the commentaries. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* vol. 39 (Lander, Wyoming: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012); *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 9–21*, vol. 36 (Lander, Wyoming: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013). In order to simplify citation and reference, citations consist of the abbreviated Latin titles for the commentaries (*In Ioannem* and *Ad Ephesios*). Citations also employ the Marietti edition’s numbers for chapter and lecture, which are commonly used when citing the commentaries. According to the Aquinas Institute editors, Aquinas appears to be familiar with more than one translation of scripture, often quotes from memory and paraphrases. The closest available version of scripture to Aquinas’s text is the Clementine Vulgate of 1598, and the closest translation of the Clementine Vulgate in English is the Douay-Rheims version. Therefore scripture citations, aside from the above reference to the NRSV, are of the Douay-Rheims.

but-imperfect ecclesial peace that, despite being subject to disturbances, can be described as “of Christ.” Christ’s gift of peace in John 14:27, for Aquinas, refers not only to the perfect state to be enjoyed in heaven but also to a true-but-imperfect ecclesial peace possessed by the saints now. Furthermore, because Aquinas understands virtuous activity as constitutive of happiness, Christ’s gift of peace to the church is not merely a state of affairs. The preservation of peace is also a human activity. I argue that Aquinas understands the faithful to be called by God to preserve Christ’s ecclesial gift of peace through the development of what might be called four peacemaking virtues: humility, meekness, patience, and mercy.<sup>7</sup>

Below, I present this Christological peace in Aquinas in four steps. First, I show how this peace compliments Aquinas’s thought in the *Summa Theologiae*, by briefly outlining the four categories of peace discussed in II-II q. 29. Second, I focus attention on the “multivoiced literal sense” of Aquinas’s interpretation of scripture<sup>8</sup> in order to show that Aquinas employs the same literal meaning of John 14:27, “my peace I give you.” to explain the meaning of Paul’s words about Christ in Ephesians 2:14. Aquinas understands “For he is our peace,” to refer not to the perfect peace to be enjoyed in heaven but to a form of imperfect ecclesial peace had by the saints on earth. Third, I explain the sense in which this peace can be described as being “of” or “from” Christ by identifying what Aquinas understands as the cause, purpose, and bond of the peace of the saints. Lastly, I show how this true-but-imperfect state of ecclesial peace includes the activity of preserving peace through the cultivation of four virtues that Aquinas says prevent peace from disappearing among members.

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<sup>7</sup> I am not claiming that peace is a virtue. Aquinas clearly teaches otherwise in *ST II-II* 29, a. 4. However, peace is an activity. In particular, it is an act of charity. When it is combined with other forms of virtuous activity (humility, meekness, and patience) it preserves the ecclesial state of peace that is the body of Christ. The overlooked ecclesiological dimension of true-but-imperfect ecclesial peace in Aquinas’s thought might serve as a resource for contemporary calls for a Catholic peace theology and ethics of peacemaking. See Scott Appleby, Robert J. Schreiter, and Gerard Powers, eds. *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (Orbis Books, 2010); and Robert John Araujo’s discussion of contemporary Catholic thought on these themes in *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions*, ed. Gregory M. Reichberg and Henrik Syse (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> The idea that the literal sense can refer to a number of realities. Stephen E. Fowl, “Thomas Aquinas and the Multifaceted Literal Sense of Scripture,” Paper presented at the SBL Annual Meeting, Christian Theology and the Bible Section: The Literal Sense of Scripture According to Various Interpreters, Chicago, November 17, 2012. Fowl goes into greater detail concerning the multivoiced or multifaceted literal sense of scripture in his essay, “The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas,” in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam et al. (Baker Academic, 2006), 35–50.

A brief comment on Aquinas's approach to scripture might help the reader to appreciate Aquinas's interpretation of peace in the biblical commentaries. That Aquinas was a theologian deeply shaped by reading scripture is evidenced in his upbringing in liturgical and biblical-patristic culture<sup>9</sup>; his training in the monastic tradition of *lectio divina*; his attraction to the Order of Preachers; and his discussion of scripture in the "inaugural sermons" (presented at the ceremony for his installment as *magister in sacra pagina* or master of the sacred page) at the university of Paris, not to mention the requirements of the office of *magister* itself.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the clearest indication that Aquinas was a theologian of scripture is the frequent use of the Word of God in the *Summa Theologiae*<sup>11</sup> as highest authority (a commonplace practice in the scholastic hierarchy of sources),<sup>12</sup> and the fact that Aquinas wrote commentaries on five Old Testament books (Psalms, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations); two commentaries on the Gospels (Matthew and John); and all of the Pauline letters.<sup>13</sup>

For Aquinas, the literal sense (*sensus litteralis*) of the biblical text was the basis for all theology.<sup>14</sup> The literal sense (to be distinguished

<sup>9</sup> Fergus Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas," in *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period*, ed. G. R. Evans, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 201–220.

<sup>10</sup> The office of the *magister in sacra pagina* in the twelfth-century consisted of a threefold function: *legere* (to read scripture and comment verse by verse); *disputare* (to teach through objections and responses on a given theme); and *praedicare* (to preach). Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 1. The Person and His Work*, Revised (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 54. The inaugural sermons can be found in *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerney (Penguin Classics, 1999), 3–17.

<sup>11</sup> Pim Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, v. 6 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 207.

<sup>12</sup> Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, "The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas," in Stephen J. Pope, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, eds. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 252–268. Aquinas's "biblical commentaries" are actually lectures designed for the medieval classroom. The lectures would be taken down by a cleric who Aquinas thought would be capable of the work. Aquinas is thought to have lectured on Paul's letters twice, 1265–68 and 1272/3. The lecture on John is dated around 1270–2. Christopher T. Baglow, "*Modus Et Forma*": A New Approach to the Exegesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas with an Application to the *Lectura Super Epistolam Ad Ephesios*, *Analecta Biblica* 149 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2002), 120; 165.; See Thomas Weinandy et. al., *Preface*, "Aquinas on Doctrine, x.

<sup>14</sup> Fowl points out that although this was not unique, Aquinas was "in a decided minority in his day." Fowl, "Thomas Aquinas and the Multifaceted Literal Sense of Scripture." See also Mark Johnson, "Another Look at St. Thomas and the Plurality of

from the *sensus spiritualis* or spiritual sense) refers to concepts in scripture that have some referent in reality. “To know the literal sense is to know the reality intended by the author and signified by those words.”<sup>15</sup> The literal sense is “the first important level of signification” since it is the basis for any spiritual interpretation of the text.<sup>16</sup>

What is important for my purpose here is to point out that Aquinas thought the literal sense of scripture could refer to a number of realities. As Stephen Fowl observes, “any particular passage of scripture may legitimately support a diversity of interpretations, each of which counts as the literal sense of that passage.”<sup>17</sup> What Fowl calls the “multivoiced literal sense” of scripture is evident in how Aquinas interprets Christ’s words, “my peace I give you.” since this verse becomes the interpretive key for his reading of Paul’s words about Christ as peace of the church in Ephesians 2:14: “For he is our peace.”

In the next section, I discuss Aquinas’s view of peace in the *Summa Theologiae* and then summarize his interpretation of John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” in lecture 7 of his commentary on John. Following my discussion of Aquinas’s reading of this verse, I focus on how Aquinas employs the same literal meaning of “peace” from the commentary on John to explain the meaning of Paul’s phrase, “For he is our peace,” in the Ephesians commentary.

#### FOUR TYPES OF PEACE IN THE *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*

Before examining Aquinas’s interpretation of peace in the commentary on John it is helpful to observe that in the *Summa Theologiae* II-II 29, Aquinas teaches that there exist four types of peace: 1) concord; 2) apparent or false peace; 3) true but imperfect peace; and 4) perfect peace. “Concord” is simple agreement among the wills of various persons concerning one thing. However, when concord is focused

the Literal Sense of Scripture,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 118–42. For Aquinas’s comments on hermeneutics see Ia 1 a. 10 ad. 2; *Quaestiones de quodlibet*, 7.6.1–3, 145–48; *Super epistolam ad Galatas lectura*, 4.7; *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, 4.1. Busa, *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*.

<sup>15</sup> John Boyle, “St. Thomas Aquinas and Sacred Scripture,” Aquinas Lecture, presented at the Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, April 8, 2011). This “reality” could include history, etiology, and analogy. When this first level of reference is employed to point to another level of meaning it pertains to the spiritual.

<sup>16</sup> The spiritual sense is organized into three variations informed by three periods of salvation history: Old Testament figures of Christ; moral action of Christians (based on action of Christ); and the anagogic meaning as foreshadowing future glory. “All three spiritual meanings interpret the objects of a certain status in salvation history as a sign of a subsequent status . . .” Boyle, “St. Thomas.” Aquinas does not always provide a spiritual interpretation of a verse of scripture. See Thomas Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, *The Theology Of Thomas Aquinas* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 393–4.

<sup>17</sup> Fowl, “Thomas Aquinas and the Multifaceted Literal Sense of Scripture,” 2.

on evil as its object, such concord is only apparent peace or what Aquinas calls the “peace of the wicked.”<sup>18</sup> Peace includes the simple agreement on something (concord) but adds to it. For Aquinas, there is a difference between true and false peace: “There can be no true peace except where the appetite is directed to what is truly good...Hence true peace is only in good men and about good things. The peace of the wicked is not a true peace but a semblance thereof.”<sup>19</sup> It is well known that Aquinas considers the civic peace sought in a just war as a good but imperfect peace: “Those who wage war justly aim at peace, and so they are not opposed to peace, except to the evil peace.”<sup>20</sup> Yet Aquinas also explains that truly good peace is when the “chief movement of the soul finds rest in God.”<sup>21</sup> True peace can therefore be had in two ways. It can be possessed imperfectly and perfectly. In the vulnerable condition of faith, peace in this life is always possessed imperfectly since there are certain things within and without which disturb peace. In the invulnerable condition of the beatific vision (seeing God face to face), good peace is possessed perfectly.<sup>22</sup>

### CHRIST’S PEACE IN AQUINAS’S *COMMENTARY ON JOHN*

In the commentary on John, Aquinas follows Augustine’s interpretation of John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” when he explains that the two references to the term peace may communicate a twofold meaning. In this verse, “peace” can mean true-but-imperfect peace enjoyed on earth as well as perfect peace enjoyed in heaven. This twofold meaning of peace mirrors Aquinas’s treatment of the term in *ST II-II*, q. 29. In the commentary on John, Aquinas says Christ’s words, “Peace I leave with you,” refers to true-but-imperfect peace, whereas, Christ’s words, “my peace I give you” refers to the perfect peace of the invulnerable condition.

#### *“Peace I Leave with You”*

##### *Our Present and Imperfect Peace in this Life*

The first form of peace—the peace Christ *leaves* with the disciples here on earth—brings order to “three things,” which he says must “be put in order within us” (the intellect, will, and sensitive appetite).<sup>23</sup> The peace that Christ leaves with the disciples effects a “calmness of mind.” This calmness of mind consists of the following: 1) a reason

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<sup>18</sup> An example of apparent peace might be concord among thieves concerning a plan to rob a particular house.

<sup>19</sup> *ST II-II* q. 29, a. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *ST II-II* q. 40, a. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *ST II-II* q. 29, a. 2, ad. 4. Aquinas also states that without sanctifying grace, peace is not real but merely apparent. *ST II-II* 29, a. 3, ad. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *ST II-II* q. 29, a. 2, ad. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.7.1962.

liberated from disordered affections; 2) a tranquility of soul, which is defined as not being harassed by emotional states; 3) a simplicity of heart, which refers to the will entirely set toward God and neighbor. It is important to recognize that this first form of peace (“peace I leave with you”), which orders the interior disposition of the person, is a peace that is had now, in this present life.<sup>24</sup>

However, there is a downside to this peace. Because it is a peace that is had in this world it is also subject to disturbance. Therefore, following Augustine, Aquinas reasons that since this peace—although it is true peace had now—is an imperfect peace, and therefore *cannot* be described as the peace that belongs to Christ. This first description of the peace Christ left us in this world emphasizes that true-but-imperfect peace is *not* Christ’s but ours. The peace that belongs *to* Christ (perfect peace) is not yet a peace that the saints share.

“*My Peace I Give You*”

*Our Future, Perfect Peace in the Heavenly Jerusalem*

Next, Aquinas comments upon Christ’s words, “my peace I give you.” and explains that this phrase refers to the perfect peace possessed by Christ. Nevertheless, Christ’s own peace is, again, not ours in this world because Christ’s peace is undisturbed and “has always been perfect.” Indeed, how could any peace that belongs to Christ be imperfect? Christ always had this second kind of peace because he was “always without conflict.” Therefore, when Christ says “*my peace* I give you.” he refers to the perfect peace to be obtained in our “native land,” the heavenly Jerusalem.

“*My Peace I Give You*”

*Christ as Author of the Present Peace of the Saints in this Life*

However, Aquinas seems to think this interpretation of “my peace I give you.” is lacking an important distinction.<sup>25</sup> Aquinas writes, “Since whether in this world or in our native land, all the peace possessed by the saints comes to them through Christ ...why does our Lord, when speaking of the peace of the saints in this life not say, my peace I give to you, instead of reserving this for the peace of our native land?”<sup>26</sup> Here, Aquinas is concerned to articulate how the peace of the

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<sup>24</sup> It is this form of peace as ordering of intellect and will that McMahon identified as “from Christ” in his discussion of peace in charity in “A Thomistic Analysis of Peace,” 186–7.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas seems to be taking up Augustine’s speculations about the “my” of Christ’s gift of peace. Aquinas cites Augustine’s comment on verse 27 of John 14, which he includes in the *Catena Aurea*. Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected Out of the Works of the Fathers* (Southampton, England: Saint Augustine Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.7.1963.

“church militant” or saints *in this life* (*pace sanctorum in via*) can be described as a peace that is *also of Christ* despite our imperfect condition. The difficulty is that it seems Christ’s peace cannot be the peace the saints possess now because their present peace can be disturbed. How can a disturbed peace, which the church clearly experiences in schism and conflict, also be described as Christ’s peace? Is there any sense in which the peace of the saints is a sharing in the peace that belongs to Christ? Matthew Levering summarizes the problem as follows: “[I]s it not theologically erroneous to suggest that ‘my peace [I give you]’ refers solely to perfect peace of heaven, since any peace that followers of Jesus enjoy on earth also comes from Jesus and is a real sharing in his peace?”<sup>27</sup>

Aquinas does not reject the first interpretation of “my peace I give you.” (perfect peace enjoyed by the saints) but he does add a distinction which provides an important shade of meaning to the literal sense of Christ’s words since the distinction makes theological room for speaking about how the pilgrim church truly shares in Christ’s peace in the present.

Aquinas explains that the *present peace* of the saints can indeed be described as “of Christ” in the sense that Christ is the author (*auctoris*) or originator of this peace: “We should say that each peace, of the present and of the future, is that of Christ. But our present peace is Christ’s because he is only its author.”<sup>28</sup>

Although we do not hold Christ’s peace in the same way Christ himself possesses peace, the peace that the church has now is still a peace that is of Christ.<sup>29</sup> The present peace of the saints—despite its imperfect condition—is also Christ’s peace because, it is a peace authored by Christ.<sup>30</sup> It is in this sense that the peace of Christ can also be described as belonging to the church now. Here, Aquinas’s move deepens the notion that the church, although it exists under the two

<sup>27</sup> Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Reading John With St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 116.

<sup>28</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.7.1963. Aquinas actually explains that there are *two* ways in which Christ’s own peace is present in the lives of the saints here and now. First, there is peace that is authored by Christ and had now by Christians; second, there is peace that is authored by Christ and had now by Christians as well as peace of Christ in future glory (this second is essentially a restatement of his first interpretation of “. . . my Peace I Give you” as the future peace of the saints. I list only the first to simplify the presentation.

<sup>29</sup> *In Ioan.* 14.7.1963.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas also explains that the present peace of the saints is different from the peace of the world in that the peace of the world is a “pretended peace” since it is only on the outside. “The peace of Christ,” writes Aquinas, “is true, because it is both on the outside and the inside.” The peace of Christ brings tranquility both within and without. *In Ioan.* 14.7.1963.

conditions of faith (now) and beatific vision (future) is one church. The church that hopes to share Christ's perfect peace is also the church established by Christ's gift of peace.

In the commentary on Ephesians, Aquinas deploys this second interpretation of "my peace I give you." (as present peace which Christ causes among the saints) in order to articulate a rich ecclesial vision of Paul's phrase in Ephesians 2:14, "For he is our peace." It should become clear that a communal or ecclesial concept of true-but-imperfect peace emerges in these two commentaries and compliments Aquinas's concise categories of peace in the *Summa Theologiae*.

### **THE CAUSE, PURPOSE, AND BOND OF THE PEACE OF THE CITY OF THE SAINTS IN THE COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS**

In the second chapter of his commentary on Ephesians, Aquinas comments upon the blessings of Christ. Included among the blessings is the truth that the Gentiles have been "converged with the Jewish people" and were reconciled to God."<sup>31</sup> It is in this context of his discussion of Christ's reconciliation of Gentiles and Jews that Aquinas draws upon his second interpretation of "my peace I give you." which emphasizes Christ as author or cause of peace. Indeed, when Aquinas interprets Paul's words in Ephesians 2:14, "For he is our peace, who has made both one," his commentary includes discussion of what might be called the "cause, purpose, and bond of the saints," and consists of the following: 1) Christ as cause of the present peace of the saints; 2) the purpose of the present peace of the saints as the unification of two peoples into "one body," which Aquinas says, is peace; 3) how this ecclesial peace is preserved among the faithful.

#### *Christ as Cause of the Peace of the Saints*

Aquinas identifies Christ as cause of the convergence between Gentiles and Jews. He states that this convergence is precisely what Paul refers to when he says, in Ephesians 2:14, "For he is our peace, who has made both one." Aquinas explains Paul's reason for saying this:

Christ is the cause of this drawing together, [and] for [this] reason he affirms *for he is our peace, who has made both one*. This is an emphatic way of speaking to better express the reality, as though he said: rightly do I say that you are drawn near each other, but this occurs

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<sup>31</sup> Aquinas, *Ad Ephesios* 2.5.111. As Christopher Baglow has observed, for Aquinas, the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians becomes the major theme of chapter two and serves as a concrete pole that bounds his exposition of the entire epistle. Baglow, 165.

through Christ since *he is himself our peace*, that is, he is the cause of our peace.

Immediately after his explanation of “for he is our peace,” Aquinas cites John 14:27, “my peace I give you.” He explains further that, “It is useful to adopt this way of speaking, when the totality of the effect depends on its cause.”<sup>32</sup> As he did in the commentary on John, Aquinas identifies Christ as cause of the peace that belongs to the church now, in the era of grace. Drawing together Jews and Gentiles in one body is an effect caused solely by Christ.

*Reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in One Body  
as the Purpose of the Peace of the Saints*

However, the material in Ephesians concerning how the blessing of Christ affects the church (Eph. 1–2) allows Aquinas to elaborate upon how and why Christ has caused peace for the church. Aquinas comments that Paul makes the purpose of this convergence between Jews and Gentiles clear when he says, “that he might make the two in himself into one new man, making peace.”<sup>33</sup> The end (*finis*) of the convergence effected by Christ is that the “two peoples would be formed into one people.”<sup>34</sup> Commenting upon Paul’s metaphor for the convergence of Jews and Gentiles as a structure being built into a holy temple (Eph 2:21) with Christ as the cornerstone, Aquinas says Christ is called a cornerstone on account of the convergence of both Jews and Gentiles, whom he refers to as “two walls” joined to a corner.<sup>35</sup> “As two walls are joined at the corner,” he writes, “so in Christ the Jewish and pagan peoples are united.”<sup>36</sup> Aquinas therefore understands the present peace of the saints as Christ’s creation of a new social situation of Jews and Gentiles united into the temple of Christ’s body.

The ecclesial unity of these two peoples united in one body is peace because Christ “killed hostility” between them and between these people and God: first, “[Christ] killed the hostility that had arisen through

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<sup>32</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.5.111. The manner of the convergence includes Christ’s fulfillment and destruction of the ceremonial law, a source of enmity between the two peoples. The theological difficulty surrounding this issue of a destruction of the ceremonial law is discussed at length in Matthew Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: A Study of the Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.5.111.

<sup>34</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.5.116.

<sup>35</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.6.131. That Aquinas assumes Paul’s building metaphor as contained within the literal sense of scripture is clear when he pauses to explain that the building metaphor can also be understood allegorically.

<sup>36</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.6.129.

the law between the Jews and the gentiles” by fulfilling the Old Testament symbols, and, second, he “killed in himself” the hostility that existed between God and men through sin. The purpose of the convergence is Christ’s reconciliation of humankind and God. It is for this reason that Paul states, “that he might reconcile us both... in one body of the Church.”<sup>37</sup> Christ made both peoples into one body by “joining into unity both the Jews who worshiped the true God and the gentiles who were alienated from God’s cult.”<sup>38</sup>

In addition to Aquinas citing John 14:27, “my peace I give you.” to explicate Eph. 2:14, there is a second key intertextual connection where Christ as literal cause of the peace of the church is referenced. Immediately after commenting on “he hath made both one ...” (Eph. 2:14) Aquinas cites John 10:16: “And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold; them also I must bring. And they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” This connection runs both ways between the commentaries, since the commentary on John also contains a citation of Ephesians 2:14. In Lecture 4 of Ch. 10 of the commentary on John, Aquinas draws upon Ephesians 2:14 to explain Christ’s teaching that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and gathers them into his fold: “I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” Aquinas understands Christ’s first reference to the sheep that he gathers into his fold to refer to the Jews, “who regarded themselves as God’s sheep—‘We thy people, the flock of thy pasture’ (Ps. 79:13).” He explains that the Jews were kept as his sheep by the precepts of the Old Law: “For as sheep are enclosed in a fold, so the Jews were enclosed within the precepts of the Law.”<sup>39</sup> This “enclosure” in worship of the God of Israel is explained as the second of a twofold *ratio* of the ceremonial law in the *Summa Theologiae*. The first, and primary *ratio* of these precepts was to prefigure Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Aquinas says that Christ could have said that he laid down his life for them alone. But he does not. Christ has come not only to gather the Jews but also the Gentiles: “Our Lord adds that it is not only for them, but for others too.” When Christ says, “I have other sheep,” Aquinas explains that he is referring to “the Gentiles, that are not of this fold, i.e., of the family of the flesh of Israel... other sheep, I say, that is, the Gentiles, I have from my Father through an eternal predestination.”

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<sup>37</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.5.118.

<sup>38</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.5.111.

<sup>39</sup> *In Ioan.* 10.4.1417.

<sup>40</sup> *ST I-II* q. 102, a. 5.

The Jews and Gentiles are likened to two flocks that Christ gathers together to bring into grace when they heed Christ's voice in three ways.<sup>41</sup> Aquinas understands each of these three ways are "necessary for righteousness": Jews and Gentiles heed Christ's voice when they are 1) obedient to the commandments of God; 2) unified in charity as one flock; and 3) unified in faith in one shepherd. It is the second way of heeding Christ's voice (union in charity as one flock), which Aquinas thinks Paul refers to in Ephesians when he writes that, "he is our peace." Aquinas attaches Ephesians 2:14 to his description of the unity of charity between these two peoples that Christ teaches them, when he says, "So there shall be one flock." Therefore, the two peoples being brought under Christ into one flock is the way in which the peace of the saints is also Christ's peace. Aquinas then writes (in the commentary on John), "For he is our peace, who has made us both one" (Eph. 2:14).<sup>42</sup>

That Aquinas thinks the preservation of peace among Jews and Gentiles requires the virtuous activity of the faithful is evident when he explains Paul's use of the phrase "one body." By this phrase, Paul means, "be united in the bond of peace that you may be one body." It is to his view of this vital virtuous activity that we now turn.

#### *The Virtues that Preserve the Peace of the City of Saints*

When Aquinas moves on to comment upon what is often referred to as the "ethical material" in Ephesians (Ch. 4–6), and especially Paul's words that the Ephesians ought to "walk worthy of the vocation to which [they] were called" (Eph. 4:1–2), he describes their vocation, and he does so using the political terms borrowed from Ephesians 2: "[Y]ou should be attentive to the dignity to which you are summoned, and you ought to behave in a way conformable to it ... you are called to be fellow citizens with the saints (Eph. 2:19)."<sup>43</sup>

This civic language is prompted by Paul's words that Gentiles are no longer "aliens" to the "commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12) and are now "citizens with the saints" (Eph. 2:19). Aquinas explains that here, the Apostle draws a conclusion concerning the present state of the church. In Aquinas's view, Paul's description of the community of the faithful as fellow citizens is described by Augustine in the *City of God*: "two loves have formed two cities. For the love of God, even to the contempt of self, namely, of the man loving builds the heavenly

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<sup>41</sup> *In Ioan.* 10.4.1418.

<sup>42</sup> *In Ioan.* 10.4.1419. See also Aquinas's two interpretations of Matt. 20:1–16 in David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *The Theological Reading of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Steven Fowl (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 32–33.

<sup>43</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.190.

city of Jerusalem. But the love of self, even to the contempt of God, builds the city of Babylon.” After citing these famous words from Augustine, Aquinas writes, “Everyone, then, either is a citizen with the saints if he loves God to the contempt of self... or, if he loves himself even to the contempt of God, he is a citizen of Babylon.”<sup>44</sup> This society of saints is therefore not only established by Christ’s gift of peace but its members are animated by the activity of the theological virtues. Indeed, for Aquinas, the community of the faithful *is* a city (*civitas*) because its members possess the infused virtues: “If the [community of the faithful is] considered in themselves, it is a city since they have in common with one another the particular acts of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the community is a civil one.”<sup>45</sup>

The citizens of this body of peace are expected to behave in a manner worthy of God’s calling to maintain “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>46</sup> Seeking to explicate Paul’s words in Ephesians 4: 2 (“With all humility, mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity ...”), Aquinas explains that, “Four virtues must be cultivated” in order to preserve the peace of the city: humility, meekness, patience, and charity.<sup>47</sup> Cultivation of these four virtues preserves the present peace of the city of the saints against four vices that cause “dissension,” “disturbances,” and “turmoil.” Without the cultivation of these virtues, peace “disappears” from the society. Aquinas then comments on each of the four virtues that must be cultivated as well as the corresponding vices to be shunned.<sup>48</sup>

First, the city of the saints must guard against pride, the queen of all vices, because it “causes dissension among members of the body.”<sup>49</sup> Aquinas understands pride as “the disordered desire for exaltation.”<sup>50</sup> “When one arrogant person decides to rule others, while the other proud individuals do not want to submit, dissension arises in the society and peace disappears.”<sup>51</sup> In order to eliminate this obstacle to ecclesial peace, the city of the saints must cultivate the virtue of humility, which Aquinas identifies elsewhere as mutual submission to one another out of reverence for God.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.6.125.

<sup>45</sup> *Ad Eph.* 2.6.126.

<sup>46</sup> There is also a thematic correlation in the commentary between 2.5.121, which discusses the cause and form of peace, and the explication of “careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” in 4.1.187.

<sup>47</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.191.

<sup>48</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.191.

<sup>49</sup> *ST* II-II q. 162, a. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *ST* II-II q. 62, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.193.

<sup>52</sup> *ST* II-II q. 161, a. 1, ad. 1; a. 3; a. 5 ad. 1; q. 162, a. 6. Aquinas considers humility as one of the potential parts of the virtue of temperance.

In addition to pride, anger (defined as the desire to punish or to have revenge) is a threat to maintaining peace of the church.<sup>53</sup> “An angry person is inclined to inflict injury, whether verbal or physical, from which disturbances occur.”<sup>54</sup> Anger, explains Aquinas, is the result of sorrow, which scripture also refers to as bitterness. At the root of this bitterness is memory of how others have harmed us—all bitterness arises from “the memory of past injuries”<sup>55</sup> and produces “a craving for revenge.” However, Aquinas interprets Paul’s words, “Be angry: and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down upon your anger.” as indicating a good and bad form of anger.<sup>56</sup> Aquinas thinks righteous anger is imperative based on Paul’s statement, “Be angry.” For Aquinas, it is imperative that one should be angry at their own sin as well as the sin of others. Anger is evil when, contrary to justice, it strives for revenge. Regarding the bad form of anger, it may arise in a person but it should not be acted upon: “should it happen that anger wells up within you—which is human—do not sin. You must not be led on to act upon it.” Aquinas says “do not persist in anger, but cast it off before sunset; for although the first impulses of temper are excusable, due to human frailty, it is illicit to dwell on them.”<sup>57</sup> In order for the church to “discard” this bad form of anger, the cultivation of the virtue of meekness is required.<sup>58</sup> Meekness suppresses the passion for revenge.<sup>59</sup> Meekness helps remove anger in two ways: it enables the person to retain control over rational powers and therefore assists in the capacity to speak the truth to others.<sup>60</sup> Aquinas says that cultivating the virtue of meekness among the faithful “softens arguments and preserves peace.”<sup>61</sup>

Impatience is the third obstacle to preserving the peace of the church. Occasionally, explains Aquinas, some who possesses the first two virtues (humility and meekness) and “refrain from causing trouble nevertheless will not endure patiently the real or attempted wrongs done to himself.”<sup>62</sup> Aquinas is aware that pride or anger in some can cause hardship for others—even those who possess humility and meekness. Such hardship can give rise to sorrow, anger, and hatred,

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<sup>53</sup> Anger is not evil when it promotes justice. It can be evil in excess or deficiency. *ST II-II* q. 158, a. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *ST II-II* q. 158, a. 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ad. Eph.* 4.10264.

<sup>56</sup> *Ad. Eph.* 4.8.250. The good form of anger seeks a just vindication.

<sup>57</sup> *Ad. Eph.* 4.8.250.

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas considers meekness as a potential part of the virtue of temperance.

<sup>59</sup> *ST II-II* q. 157, a. 1; a. 3; a. 4, ad. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *ST II-II* q. 157, a. 4, ad. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.191.

<sup>62</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.191

among the members of the church.<sup>63</sup> For this reason, Aquinas says the body must guard against these potential disturbances by cultivating the virtue of patience.<sup>64</sup> Patience is not simply endurance of hardship but is, on Aquinas's account, caused by charity, which proceeds from the love of God above all things.<sup>65</sup> "Now the fact that a man prefers the good of grace to all natural goods, the loss of which may cause sorrow, is to be referred to charity, which loves God above all things."<sup>66</sup> The virtue that the citizens of the faithful must possess in order to endure the hardship of their fellow citizen's real or attempted wrongs is possible only if the faithful cultivate patience by cherishing the good of grace over natural goods. Therefore, Aquinas thinks the peace of the church can be preserved only when its citizens love God above material things.<sup>67</sup>

"Inordinate zeal" is the fourth vice that threatens peace. Such zeal causes members to pass judgment on "the faults of others" or "whatever they see, not waiting for the proper time and place."<sup>68</sup> Zealous judgment of others' failures is the opposite of "bearing with one another in charity" (Eph. 4:2). Aquinas is not discouraging judgment of others' faults along the lines of the contemporary idea that one ought not judge another person's deeds. Rather, charity requires judgment but with the aim of correction. The proper way to bear the failures of others is by means of "fraternal correction," which is chiefly an act of the virtue of charity<sup>69</sup> aimed at the correction of the wrongdoer.<sup>70</sup> Correction of others is part of what it means to "bear with the weak."<sup>71</sup> However, to discern whether and how correction takes place requires prudence: "When someone falls," writes Aquinas, "he should not be

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<sup>63</sup> *ST II-II* q. 136, a. 2, ad. 1.

<sup>64</sup> *ST II-II* q. 136. Aquinas considers patience as a part of the virtue of fortitude.

<sup>65</sup> *ST II-II* q. 136, a. 3, ad. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *ST I-II* q. 136, a. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Aquinas will say further on that the inordinate desire for material goods is a sin that causes corruption of members of the body. The degree to which the members of the faithful desire material goods in an inordinate way will directly impugn their capacity to patiently endure the hardship of living together as a community (because they have learned to desire not God above all things and the grace that God gives but other things).

<sup>68</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.193. *Emended.*

<sup>69</sup> *ST II-II* q. 33, a. 1. It is secondarily an act of prudence, which executes and directs the action. *ST II-II* q. 33, a. 2, ad. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *ST II-II* q. 133. Eleonore Stump points out that, on Aquinas's terms, "there is no obligation to seek out wrongdoers in order to reprove them, or to spy on people in order to know what their wrong actions are." Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 328.

<sup>71</sup> *ST II-II* q. 33, a. 3.

immediately corrected—unless it is the time and the place for it.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Aquinas says that if there is no concern for the circumstances surrounding another person’s moral failure, judging leads to turmoil. Moreover, Aquinas thinks the act of fraternal correction requires the virtue of mercy: “With mercy these should be waited for since ‘charity bears all things’ (1 Cor. 13:7).”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, patient endurance of the faults of others in the community is not enough to preserve peace in the body of Christ. Aquinas thinks the virtue of mercy is necessary to properly address those faults.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to the four virtues that preserve peace, Aquinas also addresses forms of spiritual corruption that can harm the peace of the church, including lying,<sup>75</sup> anger (mentioned two more times), and stealing.<sup>76</sup> Aquinas thinks that Paul’s words “steal no more” are not simply about theft but about the “contaminating desire for transitory goods which he also refers to as the “inordinate desire for temporal goods.”<sup>77</sup> He frequently warns against harmful language among Christians, which he calls, “wicked and injurious words.”<sup>78</sup> Such language consists of false words by which a person says one thing but means another, and vain talk.<sup>79</sup> Such words “upset or sadden other men” and weaken the peace of the society of saints.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief sketch of the peace of the saints in the Ephesians commentary, I have shown that Aquinas’s multi-voiced literal sense of scripture allows him to overcome a difficulty concerning whether the pilgrim church has received Christ’s gift of peace now, in the era grace. How can a peace that belongs to Christ also be described as a peace of the church if such a peace is subject to disturbance? Aquinas reflects

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<sup>72</sup> Stump, *Aquinas*, 328. Aquinas’s discussion of this act of charity includes important distinctions I lack the space to treat here. See Eleonore Stump’s helpful treatment of fraternal correction.

<sup>73</sup> *ST II-II* q. 30. Aquinas thinks fraternal correction is one of the spiritual works of mercy. See *ST II-II* q. 33, a. 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.1.191.

<sup>75</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.8.248. Aquinas says that lying corrupts a person’s rational powers. This is why Paul says “putting away lying, speak the truth” (Eph. 4:25). Paul “bans lying because through this sin of the tongue (*peccatum oris*) the truth of reason is corrupted.”

<sup>76</sup> He refers to these as personal “sins of disorder” and sins that consist in the “disorder of others.” *Ad Eph.* 4.8.247.

<sup>77</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.9.253.

<sup>78</sup> Aquinas’s comments are based on several texts, including the following: “Let no evil speech proceed from your mouth . . .” (Eph. 4:29); “Let all bitterness and anger and indignation and clamor and blasphemy be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another; merciful, forgiving one another . . .” (Eph. 4:31–30).

<sup>79</sup> *Ad Eph.* 4.9.259.

upon this issue as he is commenting upon Christ's words, "my peace I give you." I have argued that Aquinas overcomes this difficulty by articulating what might be called a Christological and ecclesial peace. This true-but-imperfect ecclesial peace is present in Aquinas's description of the cause, purpose, and preservation of the present peace of the saints. Christ's gift of peace is the same reality that Paul refers to when he says, "For he is our peace." This reality is the church—Christ's uniting the "two walls of the temple," Jews and Gentiles, into one body, making peace. Aquinas also thinks God has given this society of saints a distinctive vocation to preserve unity "in the bond of peace" by cultivating the virtues of humility, meekness, patience, and mercy. The ecclesial peace that is Christ's gift to us is not only a state to be held now, albeit imperfectly. It is also an activity constitutive of the happiness of the faithful. Indeed, this Christological and ecclesial peace in Aquinas could be described as "civic" peace, though it is a civic peace sustained by the love of God above material things. **M**