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**THE MEDIATION OF THE INTELLECTUAL SOUL IN
THE INCARNATION IN SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS'S
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, III, Q. 6**

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List of Abbreviations

1. Titles of Works and Series

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| <i>CCSL</i> | <i>Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina</i> |
| <i>CSEL</i> | <i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> |
| <i>De anima</i> | <i>Quaestiones disputatae De anima</i> |
| <i>SC</i> | <i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> |
| <i>SCG</i> | <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i> |
| <i>Sent.</i> | <i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i> (Roman numeral indicates number of a book) |
| <i>ST</i> | <i>Summa theologiae</i> |

2. Other Abbreviations

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|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a., aa. | article, articles |
| ad (with number) | response to an objection (argument) |
| arg. | argument |
| co. | corpus (= body of article) |
| c. | chapter |
| cf. | compare |
| d. | distinction |
| ed. | edition/edited by |
| et al. | and others |
| <i>ibid.</i> | in the same place |
| lect. | <i>lectio</i> |
| n. | number |
| p. | page |
| prol. | prologue |
| q., qq. | question, questions |
| qla | <i>quaestiuncula</i> |
| resp. | response |
| sc. | <i>sed contra</i> |
| transl. | translated by |
| vol(s). | volume, volumes |

Introduction

The Chalcedonian dogma affirms that the Son of God, in order to save man, assumed to the unity of his person a full and complete human nature. This affirmation, which delineates the area of Christian orthodoxy, does not, however, close off any possibility of further investigation. Since Christ's assumed nature is composed of an intellectual soul and a body – one may ask – did the relationship between these components play any role in their assumption by the Word? Saint Thomas Aquinas searches for the answer to this question by interpreting two propositions received from Saint Augustine: “the Son of God assumed the flesh through the mediation of the soul,” and “the Son of God assumed the soul through the mediation of the intellect.”¹ The reference to the theme of the *mediation* of the intellectual soul puts Aquinas into dialogue with a theological tradition dating back to Origen, for whom Christ's pre-existent soul was a sort of bridge between two utterly opposed realities: divinity and the flesh. In this study, we will examine Saint Thomas's account of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the Incarnation with particular attention paid to Aquinas's Patristic sources.

The question of the “function” of the relationship between the soul and the body in the Incarnation, and Saint Thomas's response to it, may seem dissuasively technical, or to have a very loose relationship to the Scriptural data. For this reason, it has not been a subject of a detailed study.² Nonetheless, the question is worth examining, since it reveals the theological consequences of the difference in the anthropological tenets of Saint Thomas as distinguished from his Patristic predecessors. Discussing the mediation of the intellectual soul in the assumption of the flesh, Aquinas takes an issue introduced in the context of Platonic dualistic anthropology and examines it in light of his strict hylomorphic anthropology, which emphasises the unity of man's nature as *both* spiritual *and* corporeal. This raises some interesting questions that we will try to answer in our study. First, why did the theme of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation seem important to the Angelic Doctor? Second, what are the modifications of

¹ *ST* III, q. 6, aa. 1-2. The references to Aquinas's works in which he deals with our subject are taken from the following editions: *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, book 3, ed. Marie Fabien Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1933); *Summa contra gentiles (SCG)*, ed. Peter Marc, Ceslas Pera, et al., 3 vols. (Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1961-67); *Summa theologiae (ST)*: Cura et studio Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis, Editio altera emendata, 5 vols. (Ottawa: Harpel, 1941-45). We use the following English translation of the *Summa theologiae*: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948; reprint: Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981). Bibliographical references to other works of Aquinas mentioned in this study will be given in footnotes.

² In recent scholarship, a short commentary to our subject can be found in Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Encyclopédie: Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2008), 115-118.

the understanding of the function of the soul in the assumption of the flesh by the Word introduced in Aquinas's account? Finally, can Saint Thomas's account provide a deeper understanding of the Incarnation and of Christ's humanity than the older, Platonising theories?

The examination of Saint Thomas's thought will be accomplished in the form of a historical and doctrinal commentary on *ST III*, q. 6: "On the mode of the assumption according to the order" (*De modo assumptionis quantum ad ordinem*). This question contains the final formulation of Aquinas's teaching on the mediation of the intellectual soul in the Incarnation. Since our study focuses on the anthropological presuppositions in Christology, we will leave aside the question on the conception of Christ (*ST III*, q. 33), which shows some consequences of Aquinas's account but is not helpful in explaining the difference between hylomorphic and Platonic anthropology. In analysing question 6, we will consider the *entire* question, and not only the articles which deal explicitly with the theme of the mediation of the soul, in order to observe Aquinas's judgement on the hypothesis of the pre-existence of Christ's soul, ascribed to Origen, and to place Saint Thomas's interpretation in the wider context of his Christology and anthropology. Finally, in order to bring out the originality of Aquinas's propositions, we will refer to his other writings, his Patristic sources, and, where necessary, to some works of his mediaeval contemporaries.

Our study consists of three chapters. In the first, we will present a short summary of Aquinas's anthropology. Here we will delineate the ontological status of the human soul (1.1) and the teaching on man as "open to God" (1.2). The second chapter will be dedicated to the Patristic sources of Saint Thomas's account. Herein, we will consider Origen (2.1), Gregory of Nazianzus – whose thought is the principal source for John Damascene, one of the main authorities evoked in question 6 – (2.2), Augustine (2.3), and John Damascene (2.4). The third chapter, in which we will examine the account of Saint Thomas himself, will constitute the main part of our study. First, we will give a short presentation of the structure and context of question 6 of the *Tertia Pars* (3.1). Then, we will analyse the order of nature in the assumption of a human nature by the Word, that is, the order in which Aquinas situates the mediation of the intellectual soul in the assumption of the flesh (3.2). Further, we will focus on the temporal order of assumption, where Saint Thomas discusses the hypothesis of the pre-existence of Christ's soul and shows the consequences of his account of the function of the soul in the assumption for our understanding of the Incarnation (3.3). Finally, we will present Aquinas's rejection of the mediation of grace in the Incarnation (3.4). The results of our enquiry will be summarized and evaluated in a general conclusion.

1. Fundamental Points of Aquinas's Anthropology

Aquinas's anthropology considers man in two main aspects. First, Saint Thomas examines human nature in itself (*ST I*, qq. 75-89) and, second, he considers man in the context of the history of salvation (*ST I*, qq. 90-102). Accordingly, our presentation of the main points of Aquinas's anthropology will contain two parts. First, we will outline Aquinas's account of the nature of the human soul, which is a formal cause of man (1.1). Then, we will sketch Saint Thomas's explanation of the concept of man as "open to God," which pertains to the final cause of man (1.2).

1.1. The Spiritual Soul is by Its Nature the Form of the Human Body

In this section, we will outline Aquinas's understanding of the ontological status of the human soul. To begin with, we will present Saint Thomas's basic apprehension of the human soul as a form of the body. Next, we will show Aquinas's response to two questions connected with this concept of the human soul. First, we will sketch Saint Thomas's position on the relationship of the human soul, conceived as the form of the body, to the human intellect. Second, since the response to the former question will show that the human soul is "spiritual" or "intellectual," we will present Aquinas's understanding of the relationship between the *spiritual* soul and the body.

The point of departure of Aquinas's anthropology is the conviction that man is a unity of soul and body. This proposition leads Saint Thomas to reject the Platonic concept of man, which identified man with his soul, understood as a spiritual substance, and prompts him to choose Aristotelian anthropology as his main philosophical point of reference. Aristotle defines the soul as "the first actuality of a natural body having in it the capacity of life."³ The soul is the *act* of the body, which makes man a living being. Aristotle explains that the soul is related to the body as form to matter, which means that "there is no need to enquire whether soul and body are one, any more than whether the wax and the imprint are one."⁴ The position which conceived of the soul as a form and not a substance was regarded with suspicion by Christian thinkers, who saw in it a danger for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.⁵ As a matter of

³ Aristotle, *De anima*, II, 1 (412a27-28), transl. Robert Drew Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907. Reprint: Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1990); cf. *SCG II*, c. 61 (Marietti ed., n. 1397); *ST I*, q. 76, a. 5, sc.

⁴ Aristotle, *De anima*, II, 1 (412b6-7).

⁵ Bernardo Carlos Bazán, "The human soul: form and substance? Thomas Aquinas' Critique of Eclectic Aristotelianism," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 64 (1997), 95-126, here 101-103;

fact, the Stagirite recognised the existence of an immaterial and incorruptible principle of intellectual cognition, called the νοῦς (translated into Latin as *mens*, *spiritus* or *intellectus*, which gives in English respectively “mind,” “spirit” and “intellect”).⁶ However, Aristotle did not specify the exact relationship between the human soul, understood as the form of the body, and the νοῦς. Thus it may be argued that the intellect, which exercises its operations independently from the human body, is ontologically separated from the soul, and it is only this impersonal reality that survives death.⁷

Facing the problems mentioned above, Aquinas develops the Aristotelian insight in two interrelated directions.⁸ First, he argues that the intellect belongs to the human soul, which can be a foundation for the relative independence (which we will specify below) of the soul from the body. Second, he shows that this character of the human soul does not compromise the hylomorphic unity of man. Arguing for the first proposition, Saint Thomas shows that if the intellect does not belong to the human soul, it would be impossible to account for the fact that it is a specific man (*this* man) that thinks.⁹ Thus the “intellect” is not a separate entity but a “power” (*vis*, *virtus*, *potentia*) of the human soul.¹⁰ This insight enables Aquinas to achieve two goals. First, he clarifies the meaning of two groups of terms used to designate the human soul. The first group comprises terms like “mind,” “intellect” or “spirit.” These names, which signify primarily the power of intellectual cognition, can also designate the human soul as the *subject and source of this power*. The second group contains adjectives that qualify the human soul as “spiritual,” “rational,” or “intellectual.” Saint Thomas explains that these terms emphasise the

Gilles Emery, “L’unité de l’homme, âme et corps, chez S. Thomas d’Aquin,” *Nova et Vetera* 75/2 (2000), 53-76, here 56.

⁶ Aristotle, *De anima*, III, 5 (430a10-25). It should be noted that Aristotle’s philosophical psychology distinguishes two functions of the intellect called “passive intellect” and “agent intellect.” The former describes the intellect as a power which *receives* intelligible species while the latter as a power to abstract these species from sensual data.

⁷ See Augustin Mansion, “L’immortalité de l’âme et de l’intellect chez Aristote,” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 51 (1953), 444-472, here 467-470.

⁸ In order to emphasise the correlation between two solutions defended by Aquinas, we reverse his order of presentation. Saint Thomas himself discusses the question of the relationship of spiritual soul to human body (see *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1; *Quaestiones disputatae De anima [De anima]*, a. 1, [Leonine edition, vol. 24/1]) before the problem of its relationship to the intellect (*ST I*, q. 79, aa. 2 and 6; *De anima* a. 2). This is because the Angelic Doctor wants to treat the essence of the soul before its powers (see *ST I*, q. 75, prol.). However, Aquinas’s arguments for the subsistence and incorruptibility of the human soul, which belong to the consideration of the essence of the soul, presuppose that the human soul is the principle of intellectual activity.

⁹ See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4, co. (for the agent intellect); *De anima*, a. 2, co. (for the passive intellect). In *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1, co., Aquinas expresses the same idea in a reversed order: the intellectual soul must be a form of human body.

¹⁰ See *ST I*, q. 79, a. 1.

specificity of the human soul based on its highest operation.¹¹ Second, the proposition that the human soul is a principle of intellectual activity enables Aquinas to argue for its subsistence. The Angelic Doctor contends that intellectual operation is independent from the body since it is not exercised through a corporeal organ.¹² Therefore, since the operation of a thing follows its being (*agere sequitur esse*), the soul must be independent from the body also in existence (the soul cannot come into existence without a body to which it is substantially united, but it can subsist after death without its body).¹³

The preceding paragraph showed that, for Aquinas, the human soul is a subsistent spiritual reality. Now, the question is how to make this position compatible with the initial claim that the human soul is a form of the body. Saint Thomas gives a response to this question in his discussion with so called “eclectic Aristotelianism.” This current of thought tried to reconcile the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, maintaining that the human soul is by its *essence* a spiritual substance, which exercises the *function* of the form of the body.¹⁴ In this context, the Angelic Doctor has to show that the human spiritual soul is a form of the body *by its essence*. Aquinas proves this proposition by distinguishing two requirements for being an individual substance (*hoc aliquid*): (1) subsistence, and (2) possession of the *complete nature* of a given species. Although the human soul is something subsistent, it fails to fulfil the second requirement. Saint Thomas argues that, although intellectual cognition is not exercised through corporeal organs, it needs phantasms (*phantasmata*) provided by sensitive powers. Thus, the spiritual soul is an *incomplete* substance (the spiritual soul is a *part* of the essence of man), related *by its nature* to the body in order to achieve its perfection and constitute with it a complete human species.¹⁵

The subsistence of the human soul and its essential relationship to the body makes the human spiritual soul a unique kind of being – a *subsistent substantial form*. This form is independent from matter in the order of existence (*esse*) but dependent on it in the order of

¹¹ *Quaestiones disputate De veritate* q. 10, a. 1, co. (Leonine edition, vol. 22): “[S]ed anima humana pertingit ad altissimum gradum inter potentias animae et ex hoc denominatur, unde dicitur intellectiva et quandoque etiam intellectus, et similiter mens in quantum scilicet ex ipsa nata est effluere talis potentia, quod est sibi proprium prae aliis animabus.” Cf. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 1, ad 1; *ST I*, q. 97, a. 3, co.

¹² See *De anima* a. 1, co.; *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2 and a. 5. For the critical account of Aquinas’s argument for the independence of human intellect from corporeal organs see David R. Foster, “Aquinas on the Immateriality of the Intellect,” *The Thomist* 55 (1991), 435-470.

¹³ See *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2.

¹⁴ Bazán, “The human soul: form and substance?” 106-112.

¹⁵ See *De anima*, a. 1, co.

essence (*essentia*).¹⁶ This concept of the human soul enables Aquinas to surpass the opposition between the autonomy of the soul and the unity of man. The intellectual soul, being the subsistent form of the body, communicates to the body its own act of existence. As a result, the body has no proper substantiality independently from the soul: it is both specified and kept in existence through the intellectual soul. Thus, for Saint Thomas, it is precisely the *priority of the intellectual soul* over the body that makes it possible to account for the unity of man. Moreover, the concept of the human soul as a subsistent substantial form gives Aquinas a conceptual tool to respond to the question of the incorruptibility of the human soul. The Angelic Doctor argues that the corruption of a subsistent being takes place when this being loses its form; now, since the human soul is a subsistent form, it cannot be separated from itself and thus cannot cease to exist.¹⁷ Yet, the human soul bereft of the body cannot achieve the perfection of its nature; this gives credence to claims for the resurrection of the body, which can be accomplished only through God's miraculous action.

1.2. Through the Spiritual Soul, Man is Open to God (*Capax Dei*)

After having shown what, according to Aquinas, the nature of the human soul is, we can present its function in the aspect of the final end of man, which consists in the beatitude flowing from the vision of the divine essence. Accordingly, in this section, we will outline Aquinas's teaching on man as "open to God" (*capax Dei*: literally, "capable of God"), paying attention to the manner in which the human mind accounts for this extraordinary ability of man.

God created man in order to give him eternal life, which consists in the vision of God as he is. From the point of view of man, God's intention is reflected in man's "openness" to God, expressed in the famous sentence of Saint Augustine, "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you."¹⁸ The idea of man as open to God is a part of the concept of man as the "image of God" (*imago Dei*), which indicates the dynamism of the way human beings approach God. Aquinas presents man as the image of God within the framework of the concept of *exitus* and *reditus*, that is, the "coming forth" and "return" of creatures to God. Accordingly, man comes forth from God as created "in God's image, after

¹⁶ See Emery, "L'unité de l'homme, âme et corps, chez S. Thomas d'Aquin," 65; Bazán, "The human soul: form and substance?" 122-123.

¹⁷ See *De anima*, a. 14; *ST I*, q. 75, a. 6.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessiones*, I, 1 (Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina [CCSL] 27, p. 1). Translation according to: Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, translated by Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 347-348.

God's likeness" (cf. Genesis 1:26) and returns to him through tending or inclining to the vision of God in which "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).¹⁹ In this context, man's openness to God constitutes the first degree of human resemblance to God, which consists in human aptitude to know and love God, and which resides in the very nature of the mind.²⁰ The further degrees are resemblance of grace, through which man knows and loves God *actually* but imperfectly, and resemblance of glory, which consists in a *perfect* actual knowledge and love for God.²¹

In what sense is the aptitude to know and love God *natural* for the human mind? Aquinas explains that man is a being that can know and desire the universal good, and who naturally wishes to know the first cause of being. Man cannot be perfectly happy unless he achieves the universal good and knows the essence of the first cause.²² This basic insight is developed in relationship with two other propositions, which remain in some tension with each other. First, since natural desire cannot be vain, there should be some possibility for man to achieve perfect goodness. Thus, the human inclination to the perfect good allows Aquinas to call man "capable of the perfect good" (*capax perfecti boni*).²³ On the other hand, the perfect beatitude of man can consist only in God, since no finite being can satisfy man's striving for the universal good and since only the vision of God as he is can satisfy the desire to know the first cause.²⁴ Thus, the natural desire to know and possess the first good and truth is *implicitly* a desire to see the divine essence. Yet such a vision exceeds the power of any created intellect, since the divine, simple being exceeds the finite beings of creatures.²⁵ As a result, man can achieve perfect beatitude, which he naturally desires only by a supernatural elevation of human nature through divine action.²⁶ This need of divine action to achieve the human final end makes the human soul "naturally capable of grace" (*naturaliter gratiae capax*), that is, open through so-called *obediential potency* (being capable to be elevated *by God* to the fruition of the perfect good) for the reception of grace which develops man's likeness to God up to the point of perfect

¹⁹ See Coleman O'Neill, "L'homme ouvert à Dieu (*Capax Dei*)," in *L'anthropologie de saint Thomas*, ed. Norbert Luyten (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1974), 54-74 here 57-59.

²⁰ *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4, co.: "Unde imago Dei tripliciter potest considerari in homine. Uno quidem modo, secundum quod homo habet aptitudinem naturalem ad intelligendum et amandum Deum; et haec aptitudo consistit in ipsa natura mentis, quae est communis omnibus hominibus."

²¹ See *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4, co.

²² See *ST I*, q. 12, a. 1; *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 8; *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8.

²³ *ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 1, co.

²⁴ See *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 8; *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8.

²⁵ See *ST I*, q. 12, a. 4; cf. *ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 5.

²⁶ See *ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 6.

resemblance of glory.²⁷

We can see that the human aptitude to know and love God is founded in human nature in the desire for universal good and truth and in its ability to be elevated by grace. Now, these two features are natural for the human mind by virtue of its *immateriality*, which distinguishes it from sensitive souls. Knowledge of the universal truth and good is possible for man because the human intellect can apprehend the universals by abstracting them from the conditions of matter. This ability is not shared by the sensitive powers, which can perceive only corporeal beings. For Aquinas, this is the reason why the sensitive powers cannot perceive the incorporeal God.²⁸ Moreover, since good in general can be grasped by the intellect, this good becomes the object of human will. By contrast, the materiality of the sensitive cognitive powers makes them incapable of grasping the universal good, which determines sensitive appetitive powers to particular goods.²⁹ Thus, sensitive appetites can be satisfied by something less than God.

The immateriality of the human intellect can also account for its ability to be elevated to the vision of divine essence.³⁰ Aquinas explains that sensitive powers cannot transcend the particular character of their objects. On the other hand, man, whose connatural object of cognition are corporeal bodies, can consider their forms in themselves by abstracting them from matter. Similarly, angels, whose connatural object is a concrete *esse* in a particular nature, can discern *esse* in itself. Thus, the faculty of apprehending form and *esse* apart from their particularity shows that it is possible for men and angels to be elevated *by grace* to know the separated subsistent *esse*.³¹

1.3. Conclusion

The concept of the human soul enables Aquinas to account for the Christian understanding of man as a corporeal creature called to supernatural communion with God. In

²⁷ *STI-II*, q. 113, a. 10, co. Aquinas's teaching, which maintains both the natural desire to see God and the statement of faith that man cannot achieve the beatific vision on his own power, was a subject of a long discussion on whether the affirmation of the natural desire to see God does not compromise the gratuity of grace. Without entering into this vast debate, which exceeds the subject of this work, we indicate that, for Aquinas, natural desire is insufficient to order *explicitly* human intellect and will to the beatific vision. See Rupert Mayer, "The Relation of Nature and Grace in Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters," in *Dominicans and the Challenge of Thomism*, ed. Michał Paluch and Piotr Lichacz (Warsaw: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2012), 289-311.

²⁸ See *ST I*, q. 12, a. 3, co.

²⁹ See *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3.

³⁰ *ST I*, q. 12, a. 4, ad 3: "Sed intellectus noster vel angelicus, quia secundum naturam a materia aequaliter elevatus est, potest ultra suam naturam per gratiam ad aliquid altius elevari."

³¹ See *ibid.*

order to account for the corporeal dimension, and for the essential/substantial unity of man, Saint Thomas adopts the Aristotelian definition of the human soul as the form of the body. However, Aquinas does not follow the naturalistic interpretations of the Stagirite and manages to integrate the spiritual dimension into the hylomorphic structure of man. Thus, the human soul is a “subsistent substantial form,” that is, an intellectual “incomplete substance” which can exist on its own but which needs the body to achieve the perfection of human nature. This understanding accounts for the primacy of the spiritual dimension of man and its relative independence from the body without compromising the substantial unity of man.

The possession of a spiritual soul enables man to know and to love God, making man “open to God.” Since the human intellect and will are immaterial, man cannot be satisfied by an imperfect cognition of the first cause nor by the possession of a particular good. His desire can be fulfilled only by God Himself, who leads man to the beatific vision by elevating the human spiritual powers through grace and glory. Again, Aquinas explains that it is the immaterial character of the human intellect which enables man to be elevated over the conditions of his nature.

2. The Mediation of the Human Soul in the Incarnation in Aquinas's Patristic Sources

The question of the mediation of the human soul in the Incarnation has its origin in early Patristic thought and was developed during the Christological controversies of the first millennium. In this chapter, we will outline the teachings of four authors. We will begin with Origen (2.1), who was the first to propose that the soul mediates between the Word and assumed flesh. Then, we will turn to Gregory of Nazianzus (2.2), who employed the idea of the mediation of the rational soul in the defence of the completeness of Christ's humanity. Next, we will present the thought of Augustine (2.3) and John Damascene (2.4), who are the principal authorities quoted by Aquinas in the questions on the realities assumed by the Word. We will summarize our presentation in a conclusion (2.5.). Throughout, we will try to detect changes in the teaching on the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation caused by the development of Christology and anthropology.

2.1. Origen

Origen (about 185-254) introduced to theology the conception of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation, explaining the unity of Christ in terms of the union of an intelligent creature with God. In order to make our outline of the Alexandrian's thought clearer, we will begin with a short presentation of Origen's anthropological terminology.

Origen distinguishes in man three components: (1) the "spirit" (πνεῦμα, translated into Latin as *spiritus* or *mens*), (2) the "soul" (ψυχή, *anima*) or "mind" (νοῦς, *mens*), and (3) the "body" (σῶμα, *corpus*).³² The "spirit" is a created participation in the Holy Spirit. This superior part of man judges his deeds, stimulates him to good, and enables him to pray and to know God.³³ The "soul" or "mind" is an incorporeal rational substance endowed with free will. Man is essentially his soul or mind but is inseparably united to the body, which serves as the space of the expression of his mutable free will.³⁴ In its actual state, the soul possesses the *terrestrial*

³² See Origen, *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide*, 7 (Sources Chrétiennes [SC] 67, p. 68-71). Cf. Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier-Éditions Montaigne, 1956), 130; Marie-Joseph Pierre, "L'âme dans l'anthropologie d'Origène," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 34 (1984), 21-65, here 31. We will explain below the distinction between the "mind" and the "soul."

³³ See Jacques Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme: Étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967), 71-76, 98-109, 143-159. When the man sins, his spirit falls asleep. In the case of damnation, the spirit is withdrawn from man and returns to God.

³⁴ See Origen, *Traité des Principes*, IV, 4, 8 (SC 268, p. 422-423) where Origen explains that only God is purely incorporeal.

body given to it by God as a providential means of education and punishment after the fall.³⁵ In this context, the difference between the “soul” and the “mind” concerns the state of man after the fall. “Soul” signifies the rational substance as united to a terrestrial body whereas the “mind” (νοῦς) signifies the rational substance in general. Applied to man, the “mind” refers to the soul as contemplating God and ruling over the body.³⁶ Being the locus of the free will, the soul is the “medium” (μέσον) between the spirit and the flesh (σάρξ), or between virtue and evil.³⁷ If the soul obeys the spirit and governs the body, it becomes the centre of the harmonious human person. The adherence to the flesh introduces a disorder and degradation of the human being.³⁸

In his account of the Incarnation, Origen insists that the Word assumed a complete human nature, composed of the spirit, the soul, and the body, since only in this way could the Word save the entire man.³⁹ The Alexandrian tries to elucidate the mystery of the union of divinity and humanity in terms of *the union of the intelligent creature with God*. In this context, the soul becomes the medium between divinity and the flesh by virtue of its rational nature. The Alexandrian explains that, while it is contrary to nature that God should mingle (*misceri*) with the body without a mediator (*sine mediatore*), it is not contrary to nature that the soul assume the body or that it take on (*capere*) God.⁴⁰ The impossibility of an immediate union of the

³⁵ This point refers to the *hypothesis of the fall of pre-existent souls*. According to this conception, all rational beings (human minds included) lived initially in communion with God. Some of them, satiated with goodness, turned away from God, which caused their fall. The minds whose sin was less serious received terrestrial bodies and became men. Those whose sin was more grave became demons. This interpretation of the hypothesis of the pre-existence of souls is confirmed by the majority of contemporary scholars. Nevertheless, there are some attempts to reinterpret the pre-existence of souls as referring to divine foreknowledge. See Benjamin P. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels: Origen's Doctrine of the Soul* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 157-160.

³⁶ In this sense, it is called the “dominant principle” (ἡγεμόνικον, translated into Latin as *principale cordis*), or “heart” (καρδία, *cor*). Since in the present state the soul does not exercise these two functions by its whole being, the “mind” can be called the higher part of the soul. Cf. Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 85-86, 125-126.

³⁷ See Origen, *Commentaire sur s. Jean*, XXXII, 18, 218 (SC 385, p. 278-279); *idem*, *Traité des Principes*, II, 8, 4 (SC 252, p. 348-349); *idem*, *Commentaire sur l'Épître aux Romains*, I, 7, 4 (SC 532, p. 182-185); *ibid.*, I, 21, 5 (SC 532, p. 252-253); *ibid.*, VI, 1, 4 (SC 543, p. 90-91). Cf. Dupuis, *L'esprit de l'homme*, 47-48. By the “flesh” (σάρξ), Origen understands here the terrestrial body as inclining the soul to the sin. Elsewhere it may signify the terrestrial body in general.

³⁸ See Pierre, “L'âme dans l'anthropologie d'Origène,” 39, 42-43; Blosser, *Become Like the Angels*, 125.

³⁹ Origen, *Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide*, 7 (SC 67, p. 70-71): “Ο τοίνυν Σωτήρ καὶ Κύριος ἡμῶν θέλων ἄνθρωπον σῶσαι, διὰ τοῦτο οὕτως ἠθέλησεν σῶσαι σῶμα, ὡς ἠθέλησεν ὁμοίως σῶσαι καὶ ψυχὴν, ἠθέλησεν καὶ τὸ λείπον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου σῶσαι, τὸ πνεῦμα. Οὐκ ἂν δὲ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος ἐσώθη, εἰ μὴ ὅλον τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀνελήφει.” Cf. *idem*, *Traité des Principes*, II, 8, 2 (SC 252, p. 340-341); *ibid.*, II, 8, 4 (SC 252, p. 348-349); *ibid.*, IV, 4, 4 (SC 268, p. 408-411); *idem*, *Commentaire sur s. Jean*, XXXII, 18, 225 (SC 385, p. 282-283).

⁴⁰ Origen, *Traité des Principes*, II, 6, 3 (SC 252, p. 314-315): “Haec ergo substantia animae inter Deum carnemque mediante (non enim possibile erat dei naturam corpori sine mediatore misceri) nascitur, ut diximus, deus-homo, illa substantia media existente, cui utique contra naturam non erat corpus assumere. Sed neque rursus anima illa,

divinity and the body (or flesh) is founded on the irrational character of the latter.⁴¹ Yet, the soul can mediate between divinity and flesh in two interrelated aspects. First, the soul has some kinship both to God and to the flesh (we will call this the “ontological aspect”). On the one hand, the soul can be united to God since it is created “in the image of God.” The soul possesses the character of an image because of its immateriality and rational faculty.⁴² Being a rational creature, the soul can understand something of divine reality and participate in the Word who is the invisible Image of God.⁴³ On the other hand, the soul is connected to the body in such a way that two realities that are “contrary in nature” (φύσει ἐναντία) form “one mixture” (μία κρᾶσις).⁴⁴ The second aspect (which we can call the “ontological-moral aspect”) consists in the fact that the soul is the medium (μέσον) between the spirit and the flesh. The soul perfects its character of being in the image of God when it is led by the spirit (πνεῦμα) and dominates the body.⁴⁵

The presence of these two aspects and the fact that Origen explains the union of natures in Christ in terms of the union of an intelligent creature with God results in the concept of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation, which accounts for two distinct articles of faith in a way that somehow interweaves them. First, the mediation of the soul accounts for the *personal unity of Christ*. The union of divinity and flesh, which are joined by the soul, results in the birth of a “God-man” (*deus-homo*) and provides a foundation for the communication of idioms.⁴⁶ The mediation of the human soul also justifies the adoration given to Christ’s flesh (σάρξ).⁴⁷ Second, Origen’s conception accounts for the *divinisation of Christ’s human nature*. Christ’s soul, through its perfect love, clings to the Word forming “one spirit” (*unus spiritus*) with it.⁴⁸

utpote substantia rationabilis, contra naturam habuit capere deum, in quem, ut superius diximus, uelut uerbum et sapientiam et ueritatem tota iam cesserat.”

⁴¹ Origen, *In Psalmos*, 131:7, in *Analecta Sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi Parata*, vol. 3, ed. Jean Baptiste Pitra (Venice: Mechitaristae Sancti Lazari, 1883), 1-364, here 330: “Χριστὸν δὲ ἐνταῦθα φημι τὴν λογικὴν ψυχὴν, τὴν μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου ἐπιδημήσασαν τῷ βίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων· μόνη γὰρ σὰρξ οὐ πέφυκε δέχεσθαι Θεὸν, διότι ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν σοφία ἐστίν (...) Οὐδὲν δὲ συνεστάντων ἐκ τῶν τεττάρων στοιχείων γνώσεώς ἐστι δεκτικόν. Γνωστός δὲ ἡμῶν ἐστι ὁ Θεός.”

⁴² See Origen, *Selecta in Genesim*, 25-26 (Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca 12: 93-96); *idem*, *Contre Celse*, V, 63 (SC 147, p. 334-339). Unlike the soul, the body does not bear the image of God.

⁴³ See Origen, *Traité des principes* I, 1, 7 (SC 252, p. 106-107); *ibid.*, III, 6, 3 (SC 252, p. 314-315).

⁴⁴ Origen, *Commentaire sur s. Jean*, XIII, 50, 327 (SC 222, p. 214-215). Cf. Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2007), 60-61.

⁴⁵ See Pierre, “L’âme dans l’anthropologie d’Origène,” 52.

⁴⁶ Origen, *Traité des Principes*, II, 6, 3 (SC 252, p. 314-315). Cf. Michel Fédou, *La Sagesse et le monde: Essai sur la christologie d’Origène* (Paris: Desclée, 1995), 158-162.

⁴⁷ See Origen, *In Psalmos*, 131:7 (*Analecta Sacra*, vol. 3, p. 330).

⁴⁸ Origen, *Traité des Principes*, II, 6, 3 (SC 252, p. 314-317).

The Alexandrian illustrates this point using the images of the metal which becomes glowing because of contact with fire or the shadow that follows all the movements of divine will.⁴⁹

Finally, we should mention Origen's hypothesis on the *temporal order of assumption* of human nature. The Incarnation is the assumption of the terrestrial body by the pre-existent soul united to the Word.⁵⁰ Thus, the *kenosis* of Christ pertains principally to the soul. Yet, by virtue of the communication of idioms, it should be attributed also to the divine person of the Word.⁵¹ The soul of Christ itself was assumed from the moment of its creation (*ab initio creaturae*).⁵² In its pre-existence, the soul of Christ was the spouse of the Church, which is the intermediary between intellectual creatures and the Word.⁵³ In this context, the salvific mission of Christ consists in the restoration of this initial unity.⁵⁴

2.2. Gregory of Nazianzus

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (about 329-390) is one of the Fathers of the Church whose theology is strongly influenced by Origen's thought.⁵⁵ Thus, in his account of the Incarnation, Gregory adopts the Alexandrian's idea of the mediation of the soul. Yet Gregory does not simply

⁴⁹ See Origen, *Traité des Principes*, II, 6, 6 (SC 252, p. 320-323), *ibid.*, II, 6, 7 (SC 252, p. 322-323). Origen emphasizes that Christ's soul remains a *real human soul*: although it is immutably fixed in good, Christ's soul is not essentially different from other souls who are always capable to choose between good and evil. This is because the perfection of its love became a sort of an indestructible habit that, on the one hand, does not abolish the freedom of the will and, on the other hand, makes the soul unsusceptible to sin. According to R. Williams, in the framework of Origen's anthropology, the immutable adherence to good could take place only in the pre-existence. Therefore, he speculates that the rejection of the hypothesis of the pre-existence of the soul make Christ's human soul a sort of concurrence to the Logos which resulted in Arianism and Apollinarianism. See Rowan Williams, "Origen on the Soul of Jesus," in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), 131-137.

⁵⁰ See Origen, *Commentaire sur s. Jean*, XX, 19, 162 (SC 290, p. 234-237).

⁵¹ See Fédo, *La Sagesse et le monde*, 316-318.

⁵² Origen, *Traité des Principes*, II, 6, 3 (SC 252, p. 314-315). It should be noted that Rufinus's translation contains a passage with a claim that the soul of Christ was assumed because of its merits (*Ibid.*, II, 6, 4 [SC 252, p. 316-317]). Yet, H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti argue on the basis of a Greek fragment of this passage related by Justinian that what Origen had actually in mind was the sanctification of the already assumed soul. See Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, *Commentaire et fragments*, in Origen, *Traité des principes*, vol. 2 (SC 253, p. 178, note 25).

⁵³ See Origen, *Matthäuserklärung*, XIV, 17, ed. Erich Benz and Ernst Klostermann, *Origenes Werke*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1935), 325. H. Crouzel detects here an analogy between Origen's doctrine of Christ's soul that occupies the place between God and intellectual creatures and the neo-platonic concept of the "soul of the world" which encompasses other souls without absorbing them. See Henri Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène* (Paris, Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 18-19.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁵ On Origen's impact on Gregory Nazianzen see Christopher Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 271-273.

repeat Origen's thought, but reinterprets it in light of the development of Christology and employs it in defence of the completeness of Christ's humanity.

Gregory espouses the idea of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation from the beginning of his theological career.⁵⁶ The divinity and the flesh (σάρξ), two separate and distant realities (τὰ διεστῶτα), are joined through the intermediary of the soul or mind, which has a kinship (οἰκειότης) to both.⁵⁷ Gregory refers often to the mediation of the soul between divinity and the "thickness" (παχύτης) of the flesh, which expresses at the same time the distance between flesh and divine perfection, as well as divine merciful condescension.⁵⁸ Gregory's account is founded on his anthropology: after the creation of the world of rational substances, which are "akin to divinity" (οἰκεῖον [...] θεότετος), and of the material world, which is "altogether foreign" (ξένον δὲ παντάπασιν) from divine nature, God formed man, who joins these two realms.⁵⁹ Yet, through the rational soul, which bears the image of God, man belongs principally to the spiritual world, while the body is for him the means of a test and an education in humility.⁶⁰ There are two main differences between Gregory's anthropology and Christology and Origen's thought. First, Gregory rejects the hypothesis of the pre-existence of the soul to the body.⁶¹ Second, Gregory accounts for the unity of Christ not in terms of the union of an intellectual nature with God, but as a "mixture" (μίξις, κρᾶσις) of divinity and humanity, without their fusion into a third nature. The second difference has two consequences: firstly, Gregory does not employ, in his account of the Incarnation, the notion of human "spirit"

⁵⁶ See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours* 2, 23 (SC 247, p. 120-121), composed in 362 (date according to Jean Bernardi, "Introduction," in Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours 1-3* [SC 247, p. 14]).

⁵⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours*, 2, 23 (SC 247, p. 120-121). Gregory does not have a fixed terminology of the soul. His most common account of the ontological structure of man is the distinction between the body (σῶμα) and soul (ψυχή). Moreover, Gregory distinguishes between the soul (ψυχή), which vivifies the body, and the mind (νοῦς), which is the intellectual part of the soul (both in the cognitive and the volitional aspect). Gregory ascribes the mediation in the Incarnation to the "mind," to the "rational soul" (νοερά ψυχή), which comprises "soul" and "mind," or simply to the "soul." For the presentation of Gregory's various descriptions of the structure of man see Anne Richard, *Cosmologie et théologie chez Grégoire de Nazianze* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2003), 267-269.

⁵⁸ See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours*, 29, 19 (SC 250, p. 218-219); *ibid.*, 38, 13 (SC 358, p. 132-135); *idem*, *Lettres théologiques*, 101, 49 (SC 208, p. 56-57).

⁵⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours*, 38, 10-11 (SC 358, p. 122-127). Yet, Gregory does not espouse Origen's idea that the intellectual creatures are always united to some kind of body. See Richard, *Cosmologie et théologie chez Grégoire de Nazianze*, 143-164.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours*, 38, 11 (SC 358, p. 126-127); cf. Richard, *Cosmologie et théologie chez Grégoire de Nazianze*, 141-143.

⁶¹ See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discours*, 37, 15 (SC 318, p. 302-305). Cf. Tomáš Špidlík, *Grégoire de Nazianze: Introduction à l'étude de sa doctrine spirituelle* (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1971), 22.

(πνεῦμα) used by Origen to express the union of Christ’s soul with the Word. Secondly, the mediation of the rational soul is not conceived explicitly, as in Origen, as a necessary metaphysical condition of the assumption of the flesh. Gregory shows simply that the distance between divinity and the flesh is somehow bridged by the rational soul, without stating the *impossibility* of an immediate union of the Word and material reality.⁶²

The conception of the mediation of the human soul played an important role in Gregory’s polemics with Apollinarianism. This heresy claimed that, in the Incarnation, the Word assumed only a human soul and body, the divine Word taking the place of the human mind (νοῦς) understood as the intellectual part of the soul.⁶³ The anthropological stake of the Apollinarian controversy concerned *the specificity of the created human mind* that cannot be replaced by the transcendent divine mind.⁶⁴ Gregory responds to Apollinarianism by emphasising the soteriological aspect of the Incarnation: the Word assumed a full and complete humanity – namely the body, the soul, and the mind – since “that which was not assumed, was not saved.”⁶⁵ Moreover, Gregory points out, against Apollinarianism, *the role of the mind as specifying the human body (and, therefore, concrete humanity)*. A body that lacks a human mind is by no means a *human* body. Therefore, if the Word did not assume the mind, it is not man who was saved.⁶⁶

In his polemics with Apollinarianism, Gregory shows that the mind is not an obstacle to the union of two complete natures. First, Gregory points out that the immateriality of divine nature allows God to “mingle” (μίγνυσθαι) with both the corporeal and spiritual nature.⁶⁷ Second, he argues that although the human mind exercises the “dominant” (ἡγεμόνικον) function over the soul and body, it is itself subjected to God.⁶⁸ Therefore, there is no concurrence between divinity and the human mind that would have needed to be solved through the elimination of the human mind. Finally, Gregory employs his conception of the mediation of

⁶² Nevertheless, the presence of the rational soul is necessary supposing the actual order of events where the Word assumed a *human body*. The Incarnation understood as a replacement of the human soul by the divinity would contradict divine impassibility since the soul that moves the body suffers with it. See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Lettres théologiques*, 101, 34 (SC 208, p. 50-51) and *ibid.*, 202, 14-16 (SC 208, p. 92-93) where Gregory claims that the Apollinarians reject Christ’s human mind *and* assert that the Word suffered in its divinity.

⁶³ In another version of this heresy, which did not distinguish between the soul and the mind, Christ was conceived as a composite of the Word and human flesh without the soul.

⁶⁴ See Richard, *Cosmologie et théologie chez Grégoire de Nazianze*, 467-468; Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*, 289-290.

⁶⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Lettres théologiques*, 101, 32 (SC 208, p. 50-51): Τὸ γὰρ ἀπρόσληπτον, ἀθεράπευτον.

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, 101, 34-35 (SC 208, p. 50-51).

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 101, 36-39 (SC 208, p. 52-53).

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, 101, 40-45 (SC 208, p. 52-55).

the human mind in order to turn back the Apollinarian argument: through its spiritual nature, the mind is more closely related (ἐγγυτέρω καὶ οικειοτέρω) to God than the flesh is, and, as a result, is *more* apt to “mingle” with God.⁶⁹

2.3. Augustine

Saint Augustine (354-430) employs the idea of the mediation of the soul in an *apologetical context*, defending the credibility of the faith in the Incarnation. In this section, we will outline two apologetical arguments based on the mediation of the soul, as well as two questions strictly related to the mediation of the human soul, namely Augustine’s account of the “grace of union” and his position in the Apollinarian controversy.

Augustine refers to the mediation of the soul, defending two aspects of the Incarnation: first, the *personal unity* of Christ and, second, the assumption of the *flesh* by the Word. In the first aspect, the Bishop of Hippo shows the credibility of the personal union between divinity and humanity on the basis of the *incorporeality of the soul*.⁷⁰ In his letter to Volusianus, Augustine elucidates the mystery of the Incarnation by drawing a parallel between the union of divine nature and human nature that form the one person of Christ, and the union of the soul and the body that form one human person.⁷¹ In this context, Augustine recalls that the Word assumed the body by the mediation of the soul, and claims that the unity of Christ is even more credible than the unity of the human person. This is because, in Christ, there is a “mixture” (*mixtura*) of two incorporeal natures, namely, of the divinity and the soul, whereas in man, there

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 101, 49 (SC 208, p. 56-57): “Ὁ νοῦς τῷ νοὶ μίγνυται, ὡς ἐγγυτέρω καὶ οικειοτέρω καὶ δία τούτου σαρκὶ μεσπεύοντος θεότητι καὶ παχύτητι.” Gregory also calls the mind an “intermediary wall” (μεσότοιχον) between divinity and the flesh. The context of this term is Gregory’s reply to the accusation of anthropolatry addressed by Apollinarians to those who maintain that the Word assumed the complete human nature. Gregory argues there that following the logic of the accusation, the Apollinarian should be called a “worshiper of the flesh” (σαρκολάτρης). See *ibid.*, 101, 48 (SC 208, p. 56-57). This term may be also connected with the fact that Gregory accuses the Apollinarians of asserting the suffering of the Word in its divinity. Here, the mind would be the “intermediary wall” as the protection of divine transcendence.

⁷⁰ The incorporeality of the soul proceeds from its immateriality which Augustine understands as the negation of spatial dimensions. However, the soul can be called material in sense of having separate existence, or being mutable and not omnipresent. See Augustine, *Epistulae*, 166, 2, 4 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum [CSEL] 44, p. 550-551).

⁷¹ Augustine, *Epistulae*, 137, 11 (CCSL 31B, p. 264): “Nam sicut in unitate personae anima utitur corpore, ut homo sit, ita in unitate personae deus utitur homine ut Christus sit.” Cf. *idem*, *Epistulae*, 140, IV 12 (CSEL 44, p. 164). By the “soul,” Augustine means here the intellectual human soul. Nevertheless, he does not qualify it explicitly in this way since what counts in the analogy is the immateriality of the soul and not its intellectual character.

is a mixture of the incorporeal soul and the corporeal body.⁷² It is important to note that Augustine employs here the idea of the mediation of the human soul in order to defend the *credibility* of the Incarnation and not its metaphysical *possibility*, as we saw in Origen.⁷³

In the second aspect, Augustine refers to the mediating function of the soul replying to the argument that the divinity would somehow be sullied by contact with the body.⁷⁴ Augustine points out that sunbeams, which have a *corporeal* nature, do not suffer contamination from contact with the abominable places of the earth. *A fortiori*, the Word was not contaminated by the flesh, since the Word is incorporeal and assumed the flesh through the mediation of the spirit and the soul. Moreover, Augustine states clearly that the reason why the body can contaminate the soul is not of the ontological but of the *moral* order. The soul is sullied by the body when it follows the disordered lust for corporeal goods, but not when it governs and vivifies the body.⁷⁵

Concerning the temporal order of the assumption, comparing Augustine to Origen, we should note that the Doctor of Grace rejects the pre-existence of the soul to the body.⁷⁶ Moreover, in order to protect the personal unity of Christ, Augustine argues that the flesh, understood as the entire humanity, did not pre-exist its assumption by the Word. This point allows Augustine to show clearly that the assumption of human nature was not caused by its merits. Thus, the Incarnation is the clearest instantiation of the divine grace which is the only cause of the justification of sinners.⁷⁷ This emphasis put on the grace of union distinguishes Augustine from Origen, who underscored the love of Christ's soul in his account of the unity of Christ.⁷⁸ This difference has two causes. First, it is a result of the dissimilarity between the

⁷² See Augustine, *Epistulae*, 137, 11 (CCSL 31B, p. 264-265): "Verum tamen duarum rerum incorporearum commixtio facilius credi debuit quam unius incorporeae et alterius corporeae." Cf. *idem*, *De civitate Dei* X, 29, 42-55 (CCSL 47, p. 305).

⁷³ See Tarcisius J. van Bavel, *Recherches sur la christologie de saint Augustin: L'humain et le divin dans le Christ d'après saint Augustin* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1954), 32-34.

⁷⁴ See Augustine, *De fide et symbolo*, IV, 10 (CSEL 41, p. 14); *idem*, *De agone christiano*, XVIII 20 (CSEL 41, p. 120-121).

⁷⁵ Augustine, *De fide et symbolo*, IV, 10 (CSEL 41, p. 14): "[N]on enim cum regit corpus atque uiuificat, sed cum eius bona mortalia concupiscit, de corpore anima maculatur."

⁷⁶ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XI, 23 (CCSL 48, p. 342-343) and *idem*, *Epistulae*, 166, 9, 27 (CSEL 44, p. 582-584) where Augustine explicitly rejects the hypothesis of the *fall* of pre-existent souls. Nevertheless, Augustine considered for a certain time the "opinion" that pre-existent souls were sent to bodies by God or descended to them by their own will. See *idem*, *Epistulae*, 166, 3, 7 (CSEL 44, p. 555-556).

⁷⁷ See Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XI, 36 (CCSL 46, p. 70). Cf. Marie-François Berrouard, "La grâce d'union de l'incarnation," in Augustine, *Homélies sur l'évangile de saint Jean LV-LXXIX*, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 74A (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1993), 456-458.

⁷⁸ See Origen, *Traité des principes*, III, 6, 4 (SC 252, p. 316-317). Yet, as we have seen in the section 2.1, the most probable interpretation of Origen states that he did not claim that the union was caused by the merit of Christ's soul.

main theological orientations of Augustine, who underlined the role of divine grace, and Origen, who emphasized the free will of the intellectual creature.⁷⁹ Second, Augustine distinguishes more readily than Origen between the personal unity of Christ and the sanctification of his humanity: this enables the bishop of Hippo to assert *without ambiguity* that Christ's love is a *consequence* of the union and not its cause.

Similarly to Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine provides a series of arguments against Apollinarianism without, however, referring to its intermediary function in the Incarnation. Replying to the claim that the Word assumed merely the body, the bishop of Hippo explains that in the statement "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14), that the term "flesh" (*caro*) refers to the entire humanity (*homo*),⁸⁰ and points out that, without a soul, Christ could not experience real human affections.⁸¹ Against the proposition that the Word assumed the body and the soul without the mind, Augustine argues that it is the "mind" (*mens*) or the "rational soul" (*rationalis anima*) that differentiates man from the irrational animals.⁸²

2.4. John Damascene

The teaching of John Damascene (about 655 - about 749, the exact dates are uncertain) on the mediation of the human soul in the Incarnation is based on the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus interpreted in the light of the doctrine of the hypostatic union and the condemnation of "Origenism" by the local council of Constantinople in 543; the emperor Justinian confirmed this condemnation by an edict that seems to have been approved by the pope Vigilius (though this papal approbation is subject to debate).

The doctrine of the hypostatic union provided a definitive account of the unity of Christ, which Damascene interprets through the concept of "enhypostasis:" Christ's humanity has no proper subsistence apart from the person of the Word.⁸³ The condemnation of Origenism included two propositions related to the question of the mediation of the human soul in the Incarnation: (1) the soul of Christ pre-existed its assumption by the Word; and (2) the body pre-

⁷⁹ On the difference between Augustine and Origen on this point, see Henry Chadwick, "Christian Platonism in Origen and in Augustine," in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), 217-230, here 224-226.

⁸⁰ See Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus*, LXXX, 2 (CCSL 44A, p. 233-235).

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, LXXX, 3-4 (CCSL 44A, p. 235-238).

⁸² See *ibid.*, LXXX, 1 (CCSL 44A, p. 232). Cf. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus*, XXIII, 6 (CCSL 36, p. 235-236).

⁸³ See Keetje Rozemond, *La christologie de saint Jean Damascène* (Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal, 1959), 26; Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 157-166.

existed its assumption by the Word and Christ's soul.⁸⁴ Moreover, Damascene mentions and rejects the claim that one can speak of Christ before the assumption of the flesh by the Son of God, since the human intellect (νοῦς) was united to the Word before its union to the body. Damascene dismisses this hypothesis as based on the concept of the pre-existence of the soul.⁸⁵

The influence of this doctrinal development can be found in John's teaching on the conception of Christ. Damascene explains that, instead of assuming a pre-existent hypostasis of the flesh (οὐ γὰρ προϋποστάση καθ' ἑαυτὴν σαρκὶ ἠνώθη ὁ θεὸς λόγος), the Word formed for itself the body animated by the rational and intellectual soul (συνέπεξεν ἑαυτῷ [...] σάρκα ἐψυχωμένεν ψυχῇ λογικῇ τε καὶ νοερᾷ). John adds that this formation was accomplished in an instant (ὕφ' ἐν τελειωθέντος) and not through a series of small successive changes (οὐ ταῖς κατὰ μικρὸν προσθήκαις ἀπαρτιζομένου τοῦ σχήματος).⁸⁶ The error John wants to refute here is the claim of the pre-existence of Christ's body maintained by Origenism. Yet the theological stake of Damascene's teaching is the rejection of Nestorianism (or Christological theories associated with Nestorianism): Christ is God made man and not a divinized man.⁸⁷

In his account of the mediation of the rational soul in the Incarnation, Damascene formulates the clearest summary of the Patristic teaching on the link between the mind (νοῦς) and both God and flesh: "For the mind stays in the intermediary position between God and the flesh as the companion (σύνουκος) of the flesh and the image (εἰκόν) of God."⁸⁸ Moreover, John affirms the mediation of the mind as the "dominant principle" (ἡγεμόνικον): the mind governs the soul and the body, being itself obedient to God.⁸⁹ However, there is an important difference between John and earlier authors caused by the adoption of the doctrine of the hypostatic union: John Damascene does not employ this conception in order to account for the unity of Christ,

⁸⁴ See *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 37th ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau, Basle, Rome, Wien: Herder, 1991), n. 405-406. The most probably, these propositions do not express Origen's actual thought.

⁸⁵ John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, c. 79, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), 177. For the rejection of the pre-existence of the soul see *ibid.*, c. 26 (Kotter ed., p. 76).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, c. 46, (Kotter ed., p. 109-110).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, c. 46 (Kotter ed., p. 110). Cf. Rozemond, *La christologie de saint Jean Damascène*, 26.

⁸⁸ John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, c. 62 (Kotter ed., p. 157-158): "Νοῦς γὰρ ἐν ματαιχμίῳ ἐστὶ θεοῦ καὶ σαρκὸς, τῆς μὲν ὡς σύνουκος, τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ ὡς εἰκόν." John Damascene asserts the instrumental relationship between the soul and the body. Moreover, he claims that, absolutely speaking, only God is incorporeal. Angels, demons, and human souls are incorporeal "by grace" and relatively to the "thickness" of the matter. See *ibid.*, c. 26 (Kotter ed., p. 77).

⁸⁹ John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 121). Cf. *ibid.*, c. 62 (Kotter ed., p. 158).

but *in order to defend the completeness of Christ's humanity*.⁹⁰ The mediation of the mind is used in order to strengthen the argument that “that which was not assumed was not saved” and to show that the assumption of the soul without the mind would be the assumption of the soul of an irrational animal.⁹¹

It is important to note the place of the “flesh” (σάρξ) in John's account. First, Damascene opposes the “purity” (καθαρότης) of divinity and the “thickness” (παχύτης) of the flesh.⁹² Here, the mind is described as the purest part of the soul by virtue of its “dominant” function.⁹³ Thus, in Christ, the mind mediates between the divinity and the flesh in such a way that the “thickness” of the latter is absolutely subjected to the divine will and does not incline Christ to sin. Second, the doctrine of the hypostatic union makes clear that the mediation of the mind does not separate the flesh from divinity. Arguing that the mind that mediates in the Incarnation is the “place” or “space” (χωρίον) and not merely a “companion” (σύνοικος) of the divinity united to it hypostatically, Damascene adds that the term “space of divinity” pertains also to the flesh (ὡσπερ δηλαδὴ καὶ ἡ σάρξ).⁹⁴

2.5. Conclusion

This overview of the Patristic teaching on the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation can be summarized in five points:

1. The rational soul exercises the mediation between the divinity and the body for a double reason. The principal reason of this mediation is the affinity of the soul with both divinity and the body. The incorporeal and rational soul is created “in the image of God” and connected to the body that serves as its instrument (the ontological aspect). The second reason of the mediation proceeds from the character of the rational soul as the “medium” (μέσον) between the flesh and the spirit (ontological-moral aspect). The rational soul guides the body in obedience to God and thus regains its resemblance to its Creator.

⁹⁰ See John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 119-122) where Damascene argues that the complete divine nature was united in one of its hypostases to the *complete human nature*; and *ibid.*, c. 62 (Kotter ed., p. 157-160) where he shows that Christ has a real human will.

⁹¹ See *ibid.*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 121) and c. 62 (Kotter ed., p. 157-158).

⁹² *Ibid.*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 121) and c. 62 (Kotter ed., p. 158).

⁹³ See *ibid.*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 121).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 121): “Χωρίον ὁ νοῦς γέγονε τῆς καθ'ὑπόστασιν ἠνωμένης θεότητος ὡσπερ δηλαδὴ καὶ ἡ σάρξ, οὐ σύνοικος, ὡς ἡ τῶν αἰρετικῶν ἐναγῆς πλανᾶται οἴησις: « οὐ γὰρ ἂν μεδιμναῖον » λέγουσα, « χωρήσει διμέδιμνον », σωματικῶς τὰ ἄλλα κρίνουσα.” Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Lettres théologiques*, 101, 37-39 (SC 208, p. 52-53).

2. The material reality assumed by the Word through the mediation of the soul is called the body (σῶμα, *corpus*) or the “flesh” (σάρξ, *caro*). The former signifies the organic reality vivified and governed by the soul. The latter designates the body either in the aspect of its material “thickness” and irrational nature or in the aspect of the force disposing to sin. The rational soul mediates between divinity and the flesh, in the first aspect, as a rational substance free from material constraints. In the second aspect, the soul mediates between divinity and the flesh through its domination over the body in such a way that the divinized flesh of Christ has no inclination to sin.

3. The *function* of the conception of the mediation of the human soul in the Incarnation underwent a significant evolution due to the development of Christology. In Origen, who conceived the union of divinity and humanity in terms of the union of a rational creature with God, the mediation of the soul accounts for the personal unity of Christ and the sanctification of Christ’s humanity. Moreover, for the Alexandrian, the mediation of the soul is a necessary condition of the union of God with material reality. For Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine, the mediation of the rational soul pertains rather to the fittingness of the union of divinity to the flesh (yet they do not explicitly use the categories of necessity and fittingness). What is more, they employ the conception of the mediation of the soul in order to *defend the completeness of Christ’s humanity*. The second shift can be found in the theology of John Damascene. Since he adopts the position that the hypostatic union accounts for the unity of Christ, the conception of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation loses definitively its original function and is used only to account for the completeness of Christ’s humanity.

4. The hypothesis of the pre-existence of the soul has no essential impact on the ontological aspect of the mediation of the human soul. Origen himself, who claimed that the assumption of Christ’s soul by the Word preceded the assumption of the flesh, did not assert that the soul pre-existed its assumption by the Word. For later authors, who rejected the pre-existence of the soul, the important point was the claim that Christ’s human nature as such (the body animated by the rational soul) did not pre-exist the assumption.⁹⁵

5. All the authors examined above assert the *instrumental relationship between the soul and the body* adopted from the Platonic philosophy. This anthropology allows Augustine to raise an argument for the personal unity of Christ, in which the bishop of Hippo regards the incorporeal soul as closer to God than to the body. Nevertheless, this philosophical

⁹⁵ The relationship between the pre-existence hypothesis and the mediation of human soul may be much closer in the ontological-moral aspect, if the hypothesis of R. Williams is true. See p. 14, note 49.

presupposition does not lead the pre-cited authors to compromise the essential teaching of the Christian faith: the Word truly became flesh. The fact is that the flesh assumed through the rational soul is worthy of adoration (Origen) and becomes the “space of divinity” (Damascene). Moreover, the defense of the completeness of Christ’s humanity contains the claim that a body that lacks a human mind is not a human body. This argument advanced against Apollinarianism by Gregory Nazianzen and Augustine was not integrated, however, into the account of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation, but rather juxtaposed to it. This raises the question of whether Aquinas’s anthropology, which affirms a stronger and deeper relationship between the rational soul and the body, can express more clearly the reality of Christ’s humanity. With this question in mind, we will begin an analysis of Aquinas’s account of the mediation of the rational soul in the Incarnation.

3. The Order of the Assumption of the Human Nature by the Word in the *Summa theologiae*

The preceding chapter showed that, in its final development in the Patristic period, the theme of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation was used to defend the completeness of a human nature united hypostatically to the Son of God, and that the fact that a body is a human body only when united to the intellectual soul was not assimilated into the consideration of our topic. Aquinas, for whom the hypostatic union remains the foundation and criterion of Christological reflexion, differs from the Patristic authors in his understanding of human nature. Accordingly, in this chapter, we will examine the question on the order of the assumption of the human nature by the Word from the *Summa theologiae*, asking how Aquinas's anthropology, presented in chapter 1, enables the Angelic Doctor to deepen his account of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the assumption of the body, and thus to elucidate the reality of Christ's humanity. This chapter will contain five sections that will follow the distinction on the order of nature (*ordo naturae*) and the temporal order (*ordo temporis*), which delineates the general framework of Aquinas's examination of the order of the assumption. We will begin with a presentation, in summary form, of the context and the structure of the sixth question of the *Tertia Pars* (3.1). In the second section (3.2), we will analyse three articles in which Saint Thomas discusses the order of nature (*ST III*, aa. 1, 2, and 5). Next, we will look at two articles (*ST III*, q. 6, aa. 3-4) that concern the temporal order (3.3). The fourth section will contain a short presentation of article 6, which closes the examined question but does not pertain directly to the question of the mediation of the soul (3.4). Finally, we will summarise the results of our examination in the conclusion (3.5).

3.1. The Context and the Structure of Question 6 of the *Tertia Pars*

In this section, we will present the structure of question 6 and the method used by Aquinas in the section of the *Tertia Pars* to which the question under analysis belongs. This will enable us to determine the theological issues at stake in Saint Thomas's account of the order of assumption, which will show one of the reasons of the insertion of the theme of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the Incarnation into the Christological treatise of the *Summa theologiae*.

Question 6 of the *Tertia Pars* belongs to a larger section in which Aquinas examines the

mode of the union of the Incarnate Word (*ST III*, qq. 2-15)⁹⁶. Within this section, questions 4 to 15 present the mode of union from the point of view of assumed nature⁹⁷. The immediate context of the question analysed in our study is the discussion of the so-called “assumed realities” (*assumpta*), where Aquinas examines the assumption of human nature as a whole, as well as of its constitutive parts (*ST III*, qq. 4-6). These articles are distinguished from the examination of the “co-assumed realities” (*coassumpta*), that is, the realities that do not constitute human nature as such but delineate the *actual condition* of the human nature assumed by the Son of God (*ST III*, qq. 7-15).⁹⁸

The article that sets the theological principles of the entire section is *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, on the fittingness of the assumption of the human nature.⁹⁹ This article constitutes a link with the section on the mode of union from the point of view of the assuming person¹⁰⁰, which is crowned by the article on the fittingness of the assumption of humanity by the Son of God, and not by another divine person (*ST III*, q. 3, a. 8).¹⁰¹ This composition shows that Aquinas is concerned with the *actual order of the history of salvation* that can be elucidated by the philosophical and theological consideration of human nature. In this context, Saint Thomas gives two reasons for the fittingness of the assumption of a human nature rather than an angelic or irrational one.¹⁰² The first reason is founded on the *dignity of human nature*. Human nature, being rational and intellectual (*rationalis et intellectualis*), can attain somehow the Word itself through the operation of the intellect and the will.¹⁰³ The dignity of human nature makes it more apt to be assumed than an irrational nature. The second reason proceeds from the *necessity of restoration*: human nature needs to be healed, since it is subjected to original sin.¹⁰⁴ This kind

⁹⁶ *ST III*, q. 1, pro., and q. 2, pro.: “De modo unionis Verbi incarnati.”

⁹⁷ *ST III*, q. 4, pro.: “De unione ex parte assumpti.”

⁹⁸ See Ghislain Lafont, *Structures et méthode dans la « Somme théologique » de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 348.

⁹⁹ *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1: “Utrum natura humana fuerit magis assumptibilis a Filio Dei quam aliqua alia natura.”

¹⁰⁰ *ST III*, q. 3: “De unione ex parte personae assumptis.” This discussion comes after the consideration of the union itself (q. 2). The study of the hypostatic union is thus structured as follows: (1) the fittingness of the Incarnation, (2) the mode of union according to the union itself, (3) the mode of union from the point of view of the assuming person, (4) the mode of union from the point of view of the assumed nature, that is, (4a) from the point of view of the *assumpta* and then (4b) from the point of view of the *coassumpta*.

¹⁰¹ See Lafont, *Structures et méthode*, 348.

¹⁰² See *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, co. It should be noted that Aquinas refers here to the “fittingness” (*congruentia*) of the human nature to be assumed. This is because the personal union with divine person transcends the order of nature which means that this union cannot follow the natural capacity of human nature, not even a passive natural capacity.

¹⁰³ *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, co.

¹⁰⁴ See *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, co. and ad 3.

of fittingness does not pertain to angelic nature, since the sin of an angel is irreparable. The incorporeal angel knows things immutably (*immobiliter*) and, as a result, makes only one *irrevocable* decision consisting in the acceptance or rejection of God.¹⁰⁵

The pivotal role of *ST* III, q. 4, a. 1 is that this article delineates the perspective of the entire discussion on assumed realities. Questions 4-6 are directed towards the *defence of the belief that the Word, in order to save human kind, assumed to the unity of his own person a real human nature*. Accordingly, in question 4, Aquinas shows that the Word assumed a singular human nature issued from Adam, which, however, has no proper subsistence. In question 5, Saint Thomas shows that the Son of God assumed all the constitutive parts of human nature: the body made up of the terrestrial flesh and the intellectual soul. Finally, in question 6, Aquinas regards the order in which the essential parts of human nature were assumed. Saint Thomas wants to show here that the *relationship between them* also plays a role in the Incarnation of the Word. This gives us the first reason why Aquinas deals in his synthesis with the question of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the assumption of the flesh by the Word. This question is a traditional theme, which Aquinas finds useful to elucidate the congruity between divine assumptive action and the soul-body relationship. The affirmation of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation enables Saint Thomas to account for the main presupposition of question 6, that is, the belief that *the Incarnation respects the internal structure of human nature*.

The structure of question 6 is organised according to the distinction between the “order of nature” (*ordo naturae*) and the “temporal order” (*ordo temporis*).¹⁰⁶ The order of nature arranges elements according to their proximity to the principles of a given nature.¹⁰⁷ Its function in the assumption of human nature is summarised by Aquinas in the following sentence: “through what is prior in nature, that is assumed which is posterior in nature.”¹⁰⁸ The second order concerns the hypothetical succession in time of the assumption of the constitutive parts of human nature. In the first two articles, Saint Thomas examines the order of nature in the assumption in the context of the relationship between the body and the intellectual soul. Then Aquinas turns to the temporal order and argues that the soul and the body of Christ were assumed simultaneously (aa. 3-4). In the last two articles, Saint Thomas considers human nature

¹⁰⁵ See *ST* III, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3; cf. *ST* I, q. 64, a. 2.

¹⁰⁶ See *ST* III, q. 6, a. 1, co.

¹⁰⁷ *Quodlibet* V, q. 10, a. 1, co., (Leonine ed., vol. 25/2, p. 384): “[I]n ordine naturae dicitur aliquid esse prius per comparationem ad naturae principia.”

¹⁰⁸ *ST* III, q. 6, a. 5, co.: “[P]er id quod est prius in natura, assumitur id quod est posterius.” Translation (slightly modified): Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2058.

taken as a whole. First, he argues that, according to the order of nature, human nature in its entirety mediates in the assumption of its constitutive parts (a. 5). Second, Aquinas shows that human nature was not assumed by the mediation of grace (a. 6).¹⁰⁹

3.2. The Order of Nature in the Assumption of Humanity by the Word

In this section, we will analyse three articles in which Aquinas examines the order of the assumption from the point of view of the internal structure of human nature (*ordo naturae*). We will examine here the first two articles from the question on the order of assumption, in which Saint Thomas explains the mediation of the human “soul” in the assumption of the flesh (3.2.1) and the mediation of the human “spirit” in the mediation of the soul (3.2.2), as well as the fifth article, in which Aquinas focuses on the relationship between the whole and the parts of human nature in its assumption by the Word (3.2.3). The discussion of the fifth article, along with those that deal with the mediation of the soul and the intellect, will allow us to see more clearly the soteriological context of Aquinas’s account of the order of assumption. We will end this section with a brief conclusion (3.2.4).

3.2.1. The Assumption of the Flesh *mediante anima* (ST III, q. 6, a. 1)

The first article of the question on the order of the assumption is of special interest for our subject, since Aquinas provides here his basic answer to the question of the function of the

¹⁰⁹ The distinction of the sixth question into six articles shows a significant difference from the *Commentary on the Sentences* (Book III, d. 2, q. 2). The question on the order of the assumption in the *Commentary* is divided into three articles, each one composed of three *quaestiunculae*: article 1, on the assumption of one part of the human nature through the mediation of others, discusses the mediation of the soul (qla 1), of the spirit (qla 2), and of the whole (qla 3); article 2, on the assumption of the human nature through the mediation of something external to it, discusses the mediation of the grace (qla 1), of the Holy Spirit (qla 2), and of the hypostatic union (qla 3); article 3, on the temporal order of the assumption, discusses the temporal priority of the conception of Christ’s flesh to the assumption (qla 1), the temporal priority of the assumption of Christ’s flesh to its animation (qla 2), and the temporal priority of the assumption of Christ’s soul to its union to the body (qla 3). The most important modifications concern the second article in the *Commentary*: The *quaestiuncula* on the mediation of grace is transferred at the very end of the question (ST III, q. 6, a. 6); the *quaestiuncula* on the mediation of the Holy Spirit is reduced to one objection in the article on grace (ST III, q. 6, a. 6, ad 3), and the last *quaestiuncula* is totally removed. In the last article, Saint Thomas transfers the first and the second *quaestiunculae* to the question on the conception of Christ (ST III, q. 33, aa. 1-3) and replaces them with the article discussing the pre-existence of Christ’s body (ST III, q. 6, a. 4). The composition of the question in the *Summa* gives priority to the order of nature: the essential part of the question is included between aa. 1 and 5, setting the article on the mediation of grace apart from the articles on the mediation of realities belonging to the human nature. Moreover, the articles on the temporal order of the assumption are surrounded by the articles on the order of nature.

soul in the Incarnation and establishes the conceptual framework of his account of the order of assumption.

Saint Thomas gives a general affirmation on the mediation of the soul in the assumption of the flesh in the *sed contra*, where he evokes the authority of Saint Augustine: “The greatness of the divine power fitted to itself a rational soul (*animam sibi rationalem ... coaptavit*), and through it a human body (*et per eandem corpus humanum*), so as to raise the whole man to something better.”¹¹⁰ In the *corpus*, the Angelic Doctor specifies his position, showing which kind of mediation in the Incarnation can be applied to the human soul. Aquinas explains that the “medium” is a notion relative to the “principle” and the “term,” and that these realities constitute some *order*.¹¹¹ The question is therefore *in what order the soul is the medium*. Saint Thomas distinguishes two kinds of order: “the temporal order” and “the order of nature” (*Est autem duplex ordo: unus quidem temporis; alius autem naturae*).¹¹² The mediation of the soul cannot pertain to the temporal order since the Word assumed the whole of human nature simultaneously.¹¹³ The “order of nature” can be conceived according to two distinct but interrelated formal reasons (*ratio ordinis*).¹¹⁴ The first formal reason is found in the *degree of dignity* (*secundum gradum dignitatis*), which arranges things from the most to the least perfect; and the second formal reason is found in *causality* (*secundum rationem causalitatis*), which arranges beings from causes to effects.¹¹⁵ Aquinas gives a priority to the order of dignity (*secundus ordo aliquo modo consequitur primum*) on the basis of a rule taken from the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius according to which God acts on substances that are more distant from him through the mediation of those that are closer to him. We should note that, in Pseudo-Dionysius, this rule deals with the illumination of the lower angels by the higher ones, who lead the lower

¹¹⁰ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, sc. Cf. Augustine, *Epistulae*, 137, 8 (CCSL 31B, p. 262). Translation: Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2054-2055.

¹¹¹ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, co.: “[M]edium dicitur respectu principium et finis. Unde sicut principium et finis important ordinem, ita et medium.”

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*: “Secundum autem ordinem temporis, non dicitur in mysterio incarnationis aliquid medium, quia totam humanam naturam simul sibi Verbum Dei univit, ut infra patebit.” The argumentation for this claim is given by Aquinas in the articles 3 and 4 of question 6.

¹¹⁴ For Aquinas, the notion of order comprises three aspects. First, it signifies a certain priority or anteriority of some elements. Second, it presupposes the distinctness of these elements. Third, the elements are ordained according to the *ratio* of the order, which accounts for the specificity of each order. See *I Sent.* d. 20, q. 1, a. 3, co.; and Edward A. Pace, “The Concept of Order in the Philosophy of Saint Thomas,” *The New Scholasticism* 2 (1928), 51-72, here 58-61.

¹¹⁵ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, co.

angels to God.¹¹⁶ Thus it accounts for the *exitus-reditus* framework.

Aquinas answers that *the soul mediates between God and the flesh in both types of the order of nature*. Considering the degree of dignity, the Son of God united the flesh to himself by the mediation of the soul (*mediante anima*), since the soul is somehow in a middle position between God and the flesh. Considering the order according to causality, the soul is somehow the cause of the fact that the flesh was united to the Son of God (*ipsa anima est aliquantulum causa carnis uniuendae Filio Dei*).¹¹⁷ The reason for this function of the soul is the fact that it specifies a human body: “For the flesh would not have been assumable, except by its relation to the rational soul, through which it becomes human flesh. For it was said above that human nature was assumable before all others.”¹¹⁸ The point of departure for the argument is the special position of the human nature that God chose to assume. Now, the body is a part of human nature only inasmuch as it is actually informed by the rational soul. It is by the soul (as the substantial form of the body) that a human body *exists*, that this body is a *body*, and that it is a *human* body. Thus, the soul mediates in the assumption of the flesh by the Word inasmuch as it mediates in the “hominization” of the flesh. It is important to note that this understanding of the mediation of the soul implies that, in the examined article, Aquinas means by “soul” (*anima*) the *intellectual soul*: the soul conceived generally, as the principle of life, would not make flesh human.¹¹⁹

In the article under discussion, Saint Thomas answers to three difficulties. We will focus on the first and the third ones.¹²⁰ The first objection questions the mediation of the human soul

¹¹⁶ See Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste*, XIII, 3 (SC 58, p. 150-156).

¹¹⁷ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, co.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*: “Non enim esset assumptibilis nisi per ordinem quem habet ad animam rationalem, secundum quem habet quod sit caro humana; dictum est enim supra quod natura humana prae ceteris est assumptibilis.” Translation: Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2055.

¹¹⁹ In his Biblical commentaries, Aquinas does not refer explicitly to the mediatory function of the soul or the intellect in the Incarnation. Nevertheless, we should note that the most important passage in Saint Thomas’s Biblical commentaries defending the fullness of Christ’s humanity, that is the exegesis of John 1:14, contains arguments based on the idea of the mediation of the rational soul. The Angelic Doctor discusses there the heresies of Arius (the Word assumed flesh without the soul) and Apollinaris (the Word assumed flesh and an animal soul without any intellectual soul). Against Arius, Aquinas argues that flesh (*caro*), be it human or animal, when not animated by the soul is not, properly speaking, real *flesh*. Thus Saint Thomas can show that *the sentence “the Word became flesh” does not exclude the soul but rather requires it* as the principle that assures the reality of the assumed flesh. Against Apollinaris, the Angelic Doctor points out that the flesh without a human intellectual soul is not a *human* flesh. As a result, the rejection of the intellectual soul in Christ makes it impossible to assert that “God became man.” See *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, c. 1, lect. 7 (Marietti ed., n. 167-168).

¹²⁰ The second objection argues that the body is prior to the soul in the *hypostatic* union, since the body is the principle of individuation that constitutes a distinct hypostasis. Aquinas replies that this argument is not valid for Christ, since his hypostasis is not constituted by his human nature. See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, arg. 2 and ad 2.

in the Incarnation, pointing out that God is in creatures immediately (*immediate*) through essence, power and presence.¹²¹ Aquinas explains that divine omnipresence pertains to the order according to which creatures are caused by God and are dependent on him as on the principle of their existence. The mediation of the human soul, on the contrary, belongs to the order according to which creatures return to God as to their end.¹²² This order is based on the rule formulated by Pseudo-Dionysius, who claimed that “lower creatures are directed to God by the higher.”¹²³ The mediation of the human soul pertains to the second order, since the Incarnation consists in the assumption of a human nature by the Word, who is the *term* of the assumption.¹²⁴ Aquinas’s response can be read on two levels. First, in the immediate context of the objection discussed here, the distinction between the order of creation and the order of finality enables Aquinas to show that the mediation of the soul in the assumption of the flesh is compatible with the *immediacy* of God’s causal presence in *both* soul and body. Second, this response places the theme of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation within Aquinas’s conception of the order of the universe. The Dionysian rule that the lower creatures are led to God through the hierarchy of intermediaries is regarded by Aquinas as the “law of divinity” (*lex divinitatis*) that expresses divine government in the return of creatures to God.¹²⁵ This reveals that Aquinas conceives of the mediation of the human soul in the Incarnation in analogy to the *exitus-reditus* framework, that is to say, within the frame of the exercise of God’s Providence. According to Aquinas, the creation through which the world goes forth from God (*exitus*) is an exclusively divine action. Yet, God effectuates the return of the creature to him (*reditus*) through hierarchically-ordained intermediaries.¹²⁶ Analogically, in *one* and *instantaneous* assumptive action accomplished by the entire Trinity, we can distinguish two aspects: the creation of Christ’s humanity and its union to the person of the Son as to the term of the Incarnation. While the first aspect does not allow any intermediary, the second can include some mediation. This mediation, however, is very particular. First, in the assumption of the flesh, the soul is a medium not as an efficient but as a

¹²¹ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, arg 1.

¹²² *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 1: “Alius autem ordo est secundum quod res reducuntur in Deum sicut in finem.”

¹²³ *Ibid*: “inferiores creaturae reducuntur in Deum per superiores.” Translation: Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2055. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste*, IV, 3 (SC 58, p. 98).

¹²⁴ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 1.

¹²⁵ See, for example, *ST I*, q. 106, a. 3. For more references, see Wayne John Hankey, “Dionysian Hierarchy in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident*, ed. Ysabel de Andia (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 405-438, here 431, note 64.

¹²⁶ See Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen, Cologne: Brill, 1988), 359-360; T. C. O’Brien, “Appendix 3: The Dionysian Corpus,” in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 14 (London and New York: Blackfriars, 1975), 182-193, here 188-189.

formal cause. Second, the soul causes only the *aptitude* of the flesh to be *conveniently* assumed (that is to say, to be assumed in a way that is consistent with the ontological constitution of human nature). Thus, for Aquinas, the assumption of a human nature to the unity of a divine person transcends the natural powers of human nature but, at the same time, is coherent with the internal structure of human nature and with the way of divine government over creatures.

The last objection claims that the soul cannot be a medium of the union of the Word to the flesh since, after the death of Christ, which consisted in the separation of the soul and the body, the union of the Word to the flesh did not cease.¹²⁷ In his response, Aquinas argues that the first supposition of the objection does not apply to a mediation based on aptitude and congruity (*quantum ad aptitudinem et congruitatem*). In such cases – for example, in the initial motivation of a friendship or the beauty of a woman that leads to a marriage – the removal of the initial medium does not destroy the union.¹²⁸

The originality of Aquinas’s account can be grasped when one compares the article just examined with its parallel in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and with other thirteenth-century explanations of this subject. In his first systematic writing, Aquinas adopts a framework of explanation based on a distinction between the “medium of necessity” (*medium necessitatis*) and the “medium of fittingness” (*medium congruitatis*), which was used widely in thirteenth century theology.¹²⁹ The medium of necessity joins two extremes in such a way that, without this medium, conjunction is impossible and, consequently, the removal of this medium dissolves the conjunction. The medium of fittingness makes the extremes appropriate to the conjunction, and can cease to exist without any disintegration of the conjunction.¹³⁰ The opinion of the vast majority of thirteenth-century theologians was that the mediation of the soul in the

¹²⁷ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, arg 3.

¹²⁸ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3. See also *ST III*, q. 50, a. 2, ad 2.

¹²⁹ See *III Sent.* d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, resp. This distinction was introduced in the *Summa theologica* attributed to Alexander of Hales. It can be found with some changes in commentaries on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* by Bonaventure and Albert the Great. The latter replaces the term *medium necessitatis* with the expression *medium rei* (“the real medium”). Bonaventure repeats literally the distinction between medium of necessity and medium of fittingness in the discussion on the union of Christ’s divinity to the body after Christ’s death. In his account of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation, Bonaventure replaces “medium of necessity” with a less abstract conception of the “medium of fastening” (*medium colligantiae*) which denotes a thing that binds together two extremes. Since the absence of the “medium of fastening” results in the division of the union, this medium can be understood as a kind of the “medium of necessity.” See Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, lib. III, tract. 1, q. 4, tit. 1, dist. 1, cap. 3 (Quaracchi ed., p. 53); Bonaventure, *III Sent.*, d. 2, a. 2, q. 1, co., and ad 3 (Quaracchi ed., p. 50-51); *ibid.* d. 21, a. 1, q. 2, ad 1 (Quaracchi ed., p. 439); Albert the Great, *III Sent.*, d. 2B, a. 10 (Vivès ed., vol. 28, p. 34). Cf. Artur Michael Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, part 2, *Die Lehre von Christus*, vol. 1 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1953), 169-171.

¹³⁰ See *III Sent.* d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, resp.

Incarnation can be described *only* in terms of the mediation of fittingness, since the dissolution of the union of the soul and the flesh does not destroy the union of divinity and the flesh.¹³¹ Nevertheless, Aquinas, following, to some extent, Albert the Great, argues that the soul is *also* a medium of necessity: not as a medium of the union *in act* but as the formal cause of the *capacity* of the body to be assumed (*sicut causans formaliter unibilitatem in corpore*).¹³² Aquinas explains that the body is apt to be assumed congruously only inasmuch as it participates in the image of God through the soul.¹³³ We can see here that, because of his strict hylomorphic anthropology, Aquinas can provide a stronger foundation to the mediation of the soul than his contemporaries: there is some kind of necessity of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the union of divinity to the flesh. Moreover, we should note that the essential idea of Aquinas's account of the mediation of the intellectual soul does not change over his career. Nevertheless, the *Summa theologiae* contains a new scheme of presentation that enables the Angelic Doctor to insert the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation into the general framework of divine action in creatures.¹³⁴

3.2.2. The Assumption of the Soul *mediante spiritu* (ST III, q. 6, a. 2)

As in the first article, the subject of the second article on the question of the order of the assumption is taken from the writings of Saint Augustine. Here, Aquinas considers a passage where the Bishop of Hippo gives a more detailed account of the order of assumption than in the preceding article. The quotation from Augustine in the *sed contra* asserts not only that the Son of God assumed the flesh through the soul but also that *he assumed the soul through the spirit*.¹³⁵

In order to understand Aquinas's arguments, we must begin with two terminological clarifications. The first is given in the replies to objections 1 and 3. Saint Thomas explains that

¹³¹ Albert the Great, *III Sent.*, d. 2B, a. 10 (Vivès ed., vol. 28, p. 34).

¹³² *III Sent.* d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 1, co.

¹³³ *Ibid.* The difference between Saint Thomas and Albert concerns the foundation of this function of the soul. Albert's argument emphasises the soteriological function of Christ's humanity: the soul causes the capability of the body to be assumed since the body without the soul is not a man and therefore is not capable of reparation of the debt of sin. Aquinas, who explains that the soul is the formal cause of the aptitude of the body to be assumed, underlines the fact that, through the soul, the body participates in the human nature. See Albert the Great, *III Sent.*, d. 2B, a. 10 (Vivès ed., vol. 28, p. 34).

¹³⁴ In the framework given in the *Summa theologiae*, our interpretation is that the mediation according to the degree of dignity corresponds to the mediation of fittingness, while the mediation according to causality corresponds to the mediation of necessity. As we can see in the response to the third objection, Aquinas does not completely abandon the notion of the medium of fittingness. Another reference to the medium of fittingness can be found in *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 3, arg 5 and ad 5 (Leonine ed., vol. 24/2, p. 34 and 45).

¹³⁵ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 2, sc.: "Invisibilis et incommutabilis Veritas per spiritum animam, et per animam corpus accepit." Cf. Augustine, *De agone christiano*, XVIII, 20 (CSEL 41, p. 120-121).

the formula “the Word assumed the soul through the mediation of the spirit” makes sense if one understands the terms “soul” (*anima*) and “spirit” (*spiritus*) not as referring to the essence of the soul (in this sense there is no difference between them) but as referring to the *potential parts of the soul*. Accordingly, the “spirit” signifies the highest power of the soul (the intellectual power that is proper to the human being), while the “soul” signifies the lower powers common to all souls (in the case of the human being, these lower powers are ordered and subordinated to the intellectual power).¹³⁶ Second, we should note that, according to his usual practice, Saint Thomas treats the terms “spirit” (*spiritus*), “mind” (*mens*), and “intellect” (*intellectus*) as equivalents.¹³⁷

After these clarifications, we can examine how the intellect mediates in the assumption of the other parts of the soul. In the main body of the article, Saint Thomas searches for the reasons of the mediation of the spirit in two areas presented in the preceding article, that is, in *dignity (propter ordinem dignitatis)* and in the *congruity of assumption (propter congruitatem assumptionis)*.¹³⁸ Concerning the second aspect, Aquinas refers to the fact that, through the spirit, man is open to God:

For the soul is assumed congruously only inasmuch as it has a capacity for God, being in his likeness: which is in respect of the mind that is called the spirit, according to Ephesians 4:23: “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”¹³⁹

The argument refers to the *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, where Aquinas argued for the fittingness of the assumption of the human nature on the basis of its capacity to know and to love God.¹⁴⁰ It is important to note that Aquinas describes the mediation of the spirit as belonging to the “congruity of the assumption” and not to the “order of causality,” as he does in the account of the assumption of the flesh through the soul. This difference is due to the fact that the spirit is not related to the lower soul as form to matter. In this context, the formula “the Son of God assumed the soul through the mediation of the spirit” means that the human intellectual soul, which also exercises the functions of the vegetative and the animal soul, is apt to be congruously assumed by reason of its *spiritual* powers and not the lower ones.

¹³⁶ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 2, ad 1 and 3. Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Encyclopédie: Jésus le Christ chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 116, note 86.

¹³⁷ See p. 5-6.

¹³⁸ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 2, co.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*: “Non enim anima est assumptibilis secundum congruitatem nisi per hoc quod est capax Dei, ad imaginem eius existens; quod est secundum mentem quae spiritus dicitur, secundum illud Ephes. IV 23: ‘Renovamini spiritu mentis vestrae.’” Translation (slightly modified): Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2055-2056.

¹⁴⁰ See *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, co. and ad 1.

Concerning the order of dignity, Aquinas refers to the authority of John Damascene:

So, too, the intellect is the highest and noblest of the parts of the soul, and the most like to God, and hence Damascene says that “the Word of God is united to flesh through the medium of the intellect; for the intellect is the purest part of the soul, God himself being an intellect.”¹⁴¹

The mediation of the intellect in the order of dignity consists in the fact that this part of the soul possesses higher perfection than the lower faculties and, therefore, is situated in the hierarchy of perfection, so to speak, “between” God and the lower part of the soul. Aquinas grounds his argument on the authority of Saint John Damascene. Yet, his quotation is not literal, and the differences between Saint Thomas’s version and the original text reveal two significant features of Aquinas’s account.¹⁴² First, while Damascene claims that “the intellect is the guide of the soul and of the flesh, being the purest part of the soul” and that “God is the guide for the intellect,” emphasizing the “dominant” function of the mind, Aquinas focuses on the mediation of the soul based on the similitude of the human intellect to God who “himself is an intellect.” The possible reason for the omission of the “dominant” function of the intellect in the account of the mediation of the intellectual soul is the fact that Aquinas discusses the mediation of the soul in the question on the order of assumption. Here, Aquinas does not treat the *condition* or the *operations* of the assumed humanity but only what is *essential* to it. The account of Christ’s soul that dominates the lower parts of the soul and the flesh in obedience to divine will can be indeed found in Aquinas, but it is found in the questions on Christ’s human will and on the assumed defects.¹⁴³

Second, in his quotation, Saint Thomas does not mention the contrast between the “purity” of God and the “thickness” of the flesh. This is a sign that *Aquinas does not conceive*

¹⁴¹ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 2, co.: “Similiter etiam intellectus inter ceteras partes animae est superior et dignior et Deo similior. Et ideo, ut Damascenus dicit in III libro, ‘unitum est carni per medium intellectum Verbum Dei: intellectus enim est quod est animae purissimum; sed et Deus est intellectus.’” Translation (slightly modified): Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2056.

¹⁴² John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, c. 50 (Kotter ed., p. 121): “Ἦνωται τοῖων σαρκὶ διὰ μέσου νοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ μεσιτεύοντος θεοῦ καθαρότετι καὶ σαρκὸς παχύτετι. Ἦγεμονικὸν μὲν γὰρ ψυχῆς τε καὶ σαρκὸς νοῦς, τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ καθαρώτατον, ἀλλὰ καὶ νοῦ ὁ θεός.” Cf. the Latin translation of Bugrundio used by Aquinas, in John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa: Versions of Burgundio et Cerbanus*, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert (Saint Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1955), 189: “Unitum igitur est carni per medium intellectum Verbum Dei, mediante Dei puritate et carnis grossitie: higemonikon enim (id est dux principalis) quidem et animae et carnis intellectus; intellectus autem quod animae purissimum, sed et intellectus Deus.” The ending of the Latin version contains an ambiguity. If one understands the word *intellectus* as genitive, the text means, just as in the Greek original, that God is the guide of the intellect. If, however, one understands the same word in the nominative, the text means that God *is* an intellect. In his quotation, Aquinas chooses the second option.

¹⁴³ See especially *ST III*, q. 18, aa. 5-6. See also *ST III*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 2; *ST III*, q. 15, a. 2; *ST III*, q. 18, a. 2; and *ST III*, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3.

of the similitude between God and the intellect in the context of an opposition between the spiritual and the corporeal world. This observation can be reinforced by a comparison with a passage from the *De rationibus fidei*, in which the Angelic Doctor draws an analogy between the union of God and human nature and the union of the soul and the body. The central point of the analogy is the fact that both unions are brought to being through the power (*virtus*) of a spiritual nature. Yet Aquinas also notes a major difference: the weakness of the spiritual nature in comparison with divine simplicity is much greater than the weakness of the corporeal nature in comparison with the spiritual nature (*omnis tamen creatura spiritualis deficit a simplicitate divina multo amplius quam corporea creatura a simplicitate spiritualis naturae*). As a result, by the strength of his power (*per efficaciam suae virtutis*), God can unite to himself both spiritual and corporeal nature.¹⁴⁴ It is significant that Aquinas differs here from Augustine, who claimed that the union of God with the incorporeal soul is more credible than the union of the soul with the corporeal body.¹⁴⁵ The metaphysical tool that enables Aquinas to make it clear that the distinction between created and Uncreated being is more fundamental than the one between spiritual and material nature is the doctrine of divine simplicity, based on the concept of *esse* as the act of being. Although the spiritual creature is not composed of form and matter, its existence is always really distinct from its essence. Only in God are essence and existence identical.

In the article examined here, Aquinas discusses three objections. We referred to the first and third ones at the beginning to this subsection, explaining the use of the terms “intellect” (*intellectus*) and “soul” (*anima*). The second objection concerns the distinction between human and angelic nature. This difficulty hinges on the idea that the spirit is not more likely to be assumed than the soul. The basis of this claim is the proposition that the angelic spirit is not capable of being assumed.¹⁴⁶ In his response, Aquinas explains that the incapability of the angelic nature to be assumed does not follow an alleged defect in dignity but the fact that the fall of an angel is irreparable. On the other hand, a man is capable of conversion as long as he remains alive.¹⁴⁷ Saint Thomas’s response shows that the term “spirit” as applied to man and

¹⁴⁴ See *De rationibus fidei ad Cantorem Antiochenum*, c. 6 (Leonine ed., vol. 40, p. B 62).

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *Epistulae*, 137, 11 (CCSL 31B, p. 264-265); cf. *supra* p. 17-18. The theme of the mediation of the intellect in the Incarnation can also be found in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Aquinas argues there that, since the intellectual creatures can participate and delight in the Word and have some kinship of similitude to the Word (*ex quadam similitudinis affinitate*), the Word can unite himself to them in a more excellent and more ineffable way (*eminentius et ineffabilius*) than to an irrational creature. See *SCG IV*, c. 41 (Marietti ed., n. 3797-3800).

¹⁴⁶ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 2, arg. 2. Cf. *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1.

¹⁴⁷ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 2, ad 2. Cf. *ST I*, q. 64, a. 2.

angels cannot be understood univocally. Thus, Aquinas protects the specificity of man as a being that is both spiritual *and* corporeal. It should be noted here that, as the *Commentary on the Sentences* shows, *the fact that the human spirit is apt to be assumed, since it is united to the flesh, does not mean that the spirit is assumed through the mediation of the flesh.* As with form, in which the fact that it gives existence to matter is prior to the fact that it cannot exist without matter, in the human spirit, the fact that it gives to the flesh the aptitude to be assumed is prior to the fact that it cannot be assumed without the flesh.¹⁴⁸

3.2.3. Mediation of the Whole Human Nature in the Assumption of Its Parts

(ST III, q. 6, a. 5)

The last article in which Aquinas analyses the order of nature in the assumption of human nature is ST III, q. 6, a. 5, where he asks “whether the whole human nature was assumed through the medium of the parts.”¹⁴⁹ The question Saint Thomas tries to answer here is whether the assumption of a human nature by the Word should be understood as a consequence of the assumption of the soul and the body or, inversely, the assumption of the soul and the body makes sense only insofar as they are conceived of as parts of human nature.

In the main body of the article, Aquinas explains that mediation in the Incarnation does not pertain to the temporal order but to the order of nature, which can be regarded from the point of view of the agent and from the point of view of matter, which are two causes that pre-exist a thing. Concerning the agent, Aquinas distinguishes what is prior absolutely (*simpliciter*) and relatively (*secundum quid*). In the first aspect, priority belongs to the first object of intention (*est simpliciter primum id quod primo cadit in eius intentione*), whereas, in the second, it belongs to the first object of the operation (*est primum illud a quo incipit eius operatio*), the intention being prior to the operation (*intentio est prior operatione*). Concerning matter, priority belongs to the component that results as the first from the transmutation of matter (*est prius illud quod prius existit in transmutatione materiae*).¹⁵⁰

After this general explanation, Aquinas considers the case of the Incarnation. He argues that, in the case under discussion, the point of view of the agent is the most important. This is because the Incarnation, transcending as it does the order of nature, depends entirely on divine

¹⁴⁸ See *III Sent.* d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 2, arg. 3 and ad 3.

¹⁴⁹ ST III, q. 6, a. 5: “Utrum tota humana natura sit assumpta mediantibus partibus.”

¹⁵⁰ See ST III, q. 6, a. 5, co.

omnipotence.¹⁵¹ Now, the intention of the agent relates to the complete before the incomplete (*secundum intentionem facientis prius est completum quam incompletum*), and therefore to the whole before its parts (*et per consequens totum quam partes*). Thus the Word of God assumed the parts of human nature through the mediation of the whole (*Verbum Dei assumpsit partes humanae naturae mediante toto*).¹⁵²

A comparison of the article analysed here with the parallel passage in the *Commentary on the Sentences* shows the development of Aquinas's thought. In his earlier text, Saint Thomas distinguishes two aspects of the relationship of the parts and the whole in the assumption. Inasmuch as the whole is constituted by the parts, the latter mediate in the assumption of the former. On the other hand, since the *ratio* of human nature, which is by itself apt to be assumed, is principally in the whole (*ratio humanae naturae, quae per se assumptibilis est, per prius invenitur in toto, et per hoc in partibus*), it is the whole human nature that is the medium in the assumption of its parts.¹⁵³ His adoption of the point of view of the agent in the *Summa* enables Aquinas to give priority to the second aspect, which situates the analysed question in the context of the divine plan of salvation and of divine agency.¹⁵⁴ The modifications added in the *Summa theologiae* allow Aquinas to give a properly theological account of the assumption, where philosophical analysis is employed to manifest the soteriological sense of the examined mystery of faith: the Word assumes a human soul and body, since they are components of the human nature whose restoration is the principal aim of the Incarnation.¹⁵⁵

3.2.4. Conclusion

Aquinas's understanding of the order of nature in the assumption is a clear synthesis of his concept of human nature and his teaching on the convenience of the assumption of humanity by the Word. The foundation of Saint Thomas's account is the divine decree to assume human nature in order to save it. On this basis, Aquinas tries to discern how the metaphysical structure of human nature is inscribed in the order of divine assumptive action.

¹⁵¹ Aquinas quotes here Augustine's sentence: "in such things the whole reason of the deed is the power of the doer" (*in talibus rebus tota ratio facti est potentia facientis*). Augustine, *Epistulae*, 137, 8 (CCSL 31B, p. 263). Translation: Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2058.

¹⁵² See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 5, co.

¹⁵³ *III Sent.*, d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 3.

¹⁵⁴ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 5, ad 3.

¹⁵⁵ The answer to the third objection in the *Summa* explains why the first aspect in the *Commentary* is less important than the one emphasised in the *Summa*: the "term" of the assumption of human nature is the person, and not the nature that results from the union of its parts. See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 5, ad 3.

The mediation of the intellectual soul in the Incarnation has two aspects. The first concerns the *degree of dignity*. Here the soul mediates between God and the flesh, since it is somehow between them in the hierarchy of perfection. Regarding the internal structure of the soul itself, the intellect – as the part of the soul which is the most similar to the intellectual nature of God – mediates in the assumption of the lower parts of the soul. Nevertheless, this last point does not compromise the essential unity of the human soul and, as is shown by the comparison with the *De rationibus fidei*, does not blur the difference between a created being and the Uncreated Being. The second aspect concerns the *fittingness of the assumption*. The human soul is apt to be assumed, since it is created in the image of God. Now, since it possesses this quality through the intellect, the soul was assumed through the mediation of the intellect. Moreover, the intellectual soul, since it specifies a human body, makes this body apt to be assumed. Since the soul is the substantial *form* of the body, it can be said that the soul is the *cause* of the body's aptitude to be assumed, and its mediation can be described as pertaining to the *order of causality*.

An important role in Aquinas's account is played by the principle of divine government taken from Pseudo-Dionysius, according to which God acts on lower substances through the mediation of higher ones in order to bring them back to himself as to their end (final cause). The use of this principle allows Saint Thomas to show the relationship between two aspects of the mediation of the soul: the specification of the human body by the soul (order of causality) follows from the fact that the soul is more perfect and closer to God than the body (order of dignity). Moreover, through this principle, Aquinas can clarify the relationship between the mediation of the soul and divine omnipresence and inscribe the assumption of human flesh into the order of divine action in creatures.

Finally, we should note the omission by Aquinas of the mediation of the soul based on its function of domination over the body. The most probable reason for this modification of Patristic thought is the fact that Saint Thomas analyses the mediation of the human soul in the context of the essential elements of human nature, and not in the context of its condition or operation. Accordingly, the idea of the soul that governs the flesh in obedience to the soul, although present in Aquinas's Christology, is not explained in terms of the *mediation* of the soul.

3.3. Christ's Soul and the Temporal Order of the Assumption

In this section, we will analyse two articles in which Aquinas argues for the simultaneity

of the assumption of the soul and body by the Son of God. These passages are important for our study, since the crucial points of Saint Thomas's arguments presented in these articles are based on the concept of the intellectual soul as the only substantial form of the human body. First, we will examine the third article of the sixth question, in which Saint Thomas rejects the pre-existence of the soul to the assumption of the body (3.3.1). Then, we will examine the fourth article, which contains a defence of the proposition that the assumption of the body did not precede the union of the body to the soul (3.3.2). The results of our analysis will be presented in a short conclusion (3.3.3).

3.3.1. The Refutation of the Pre-existence of Christ's Soul (ST III, q. 6, a. 3)

The third article of the sixth question "Whether the soul was assumed before the flesh by the Son of God" (*Utrum anima a Dei Filio prius fuerit assumpta quam caro*) contains a discussion of the hypothesis, attributed to Origen, of the pre-existence of Christ's soul.¹⁵⁶ In the *sed contra*, Aquinas quotes a passage from John Damascene, who rejects formally the assumption of the soul by the Word before the assumption of the body, which was the claim ascribed by Damascene to Origen.¹⁵⁷

In the main body of the article, Aquinas begins with a short presentation of Origen's hypothesis of the pre-existence of souls. Saint Thomas explains that, according to the Alexandrian, all souls, including Christ's, were created at the beginning (*in principio*).¹⁵⁸ The Angelic Doctor discusses the theological consequences of an account of the assumption based on Origenian anthropology distinguishing two hypothetical cases: (1) the soul pre-existed both the assumption by the Word and the union with the body (we will call this "the assumption of the pre-existent soul"), (2) the soul was assumed at the moment of its creation and pre-existed only the union to the body ("the pre-existence of the assumed soul"). After a short presentation of Aquinas's arguments against the first case, we will focus on the second, since this part of Saint Thomas's argumentation contains an important reference to his anthropology.

The hypothesis of the assumption of the pre-existent soul is rejected by Aquinas as "inconvenient" (*inconueniens*) in the strong sense. Saint Thomas argues that this hypothesis implies that Christ's soul had its own subsistence before the assumption. This opens up two possibilities, neither of which is acceptable. The first possibility is that the assumption would

¹⁵⁶ ST III, q. 6, a. 3. On the reception of Origen's thought in Aquinas, see Guido Bendinelli, "Tommaso d'Aquino lettore di Origene: un'introduzione," *Adamantius* 15 (2009), 103-120.

¹⁵⁷ See ST III, q. 6, a. 3, sc. Cf. John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, c. 79 (Kotter ed., p. 177-178).

¹⁵⁸ ST III, q. 6, a. 3, co.

leave the subsistence of Christ's soul intact. In this case, in Christ, there would be two subsistent subjects: the Word and the soul. This claim excludes union according to subsistence and, therefore, pushes the hypothesis of the pre-existence of the soul into Nestorianism. In the second possibility, the assumption would destroy the subsistence of the soul, which is also unfitting.¹⁵⁹

More important for our study is the discussion of the hypothesis of union from the very moment of the creation of Christ's soul, followed by Christ's assumption of his body. This hypothesis corresponds most probably to Origen's actual teaching. Like the preceding one, this claim is dismissed by Aquinas as inconvenient:

So likewise it is not fitting to suppose that this soul was united to the Word from the beginning, and that it afterwards became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin; for thus it seems that his soul would not be of the same nature as ours (*sic eius anima videretur esse non eiusdem naturae cum nostris*), which are created at the same time that they are infused into bodies. Hence Pope Leo says in the Epistle to Julian that "Christ's flesh was not of a different nature to ours, nor was a different soul infused into it in the beginning than into other men."¹⁶⁰

According to Aquinas, *the discussed hypothesis is incompatible with the principle of the consubstantiality of Christ's soul to our souls*, stated in the quotation from Leo the Great. For Origen, who opted for the pre-existence of human souls, the hypothesis of the pre-existence of Christ's soul accounted for the belief that Christ's soul was indeed like our souls. For Aquinas, however, the souls are created at the very moment of their embodiment. Accordingly, the pre-existence of the assumed soul would imply that the beginning of Christ's soul would differ from the beginning of the souls of other men, which entails that Christ's soul would be of a different nature than our souls.¹⁶¹

The rejection of the pre-existence of the human soul by Aquinas is based on the proposition that the soul is the substantial form of the body.¹⁶² In the *Summa contra Gentiles*,

¹⁵⁹ See *ibid.* We can find the reasons of Aquinas's claim by analogy to the argument for the incapacity of the angelic nature to be assumed. The destruction of the subsistence of the pre-existent soul contradicts the incorruptibility of the soul and the goodness of God, who should preserve all the perfections of the assumed nature. See *ST III*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁶⁰ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 3, co.: "Similiter etiam est inconveniens si ponatur quod anima illa fuerit a principio Verbo unita, et postmodum in utero Virginis incarnata. Quia sic eius anima videretur esse non eiusdem naturae cum nostris, quae simul creantur dum corporibus infunduntur. Unde Leo Papa dicit in epistola *Ad Iulian.*, quod 'non alterius naturae erat caro eius quam nostra: nec alia illi quam ceteris hominibus anima est a principio inspirata.' " Translation (slightly modified): Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2056. Cf. Leo the Great, *Epistola* 35, 3 (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina* 54: 809).

¹⁶¹ See Bordinelli, "Tommaso d'Aquino lettore di Origene," 108-109.

¹⁶² Aquinas explains that the pre-existence of the human soul would make some sense if this soul were not the substantial form of the body and therefore united to the body only accidentally (Platonic anthropology).

Aquinas gives three main philosophical arguments against this hypothesis. First, the soul is the *act* of the body, and, considering the temporal order, the act is posterior to potency in one and the same thing.¹⁶³ Second, what belongs to a thing *per se* is always prior to what belongs to it accidentally. Accordingly, the state of separation from the body, which is accidental for the soul, must be posterior to the state of its union to the body.¹⁶⁴ Third, the soul bereft of a body is in a state of imperfection. Now, since perfect is prior to imperfect in the order of natural beings (*in rerum naturalium ordine*), the creation of a pre-existent soul is incompatible with this order.¹⁶⁵ In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas raises only the third argument and emphasises its theological dimension. He shows that the creation of a soul without its body, as opposed to the nature of the soul as the substantial form of the body, would entail a contradiction or an inconsistency in God's creative act.¹⁶⁶

In the article under examination, Aquinas discusses three objections. The most important for our study are the first and second ones.¹⁶⁷ In his response to the first objection, Aquinas explains that the fact that the soul is the medium in the order of nature does not imply that it is also the medium in the temporal order.¹⁶⁸

The second objection defends the hypothesis of the assumption of a soul pre-existent to the body at the moment of its creation on the basis of the belief that Christ's soul is more noble

Nonetheless, even in this case the pre-existence of the soul is judged by Aquinas to be inconvenient since it is impossible to find a plausible reason why the soul would descend into the body. See *ST I*, q. 118, a. 3, co.

¹⁶³ See *SCG II*, c. 83 (Marietti ed., n. 1658). In the following section we will see that this does not imply that Christ's body pre-existed his soul.

¹⁶⁴ See *SCG II*, c. 83 (Marietti ed., n. 1659).

¹⁶⁵ *SCG II*, c. 83 (Marietti ed., n. 1660).

¹⁶⁶ See *ST I*, q. 90, a. 4, co.; cf. *ST I*, q. 118, a. 3, co. The emphasis on the theological dimension can be found also by comparison with the article on the pre-existence of Christ's soul in the *Summa theologiae* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*. In the latter, Aquinas rejects Origen's hypothesis, pointing out that human souls do not pre-exist their bodies. The *Summa* employs the same idea, but it underlines the theological principle of the consubstantiality of Christ's soul with our souls. In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Saint Thomas's argument is based on the mediation of human nature taken as a whole: the soul has an aptitude to be assumed only inasmuch as it is a part of human nature. See *III Sent.* d. 2, q. 2, a. 3, q1a 3, co.; *SCG IV*, c. 33 (Marietti ed., n. 3693).

¹⁶⁷ The third objection argues for the pre-existence of Christ's soul on the basis of the universal mediation of Christ. Being the cause of salvation for the saints living from the beginning of the world, Christ's soul, endowed with the plenitude of grace, should pre-exist all men that receive grace through it. In his response, Aquinas indicates the eternal "design of divine grace" (*propositum gratiae Dei*) as the pre-existent cause of justification of those who lived before the existence of Christ's soul, in such a way that the saints who lived before the Incarnation were saved by faith in Christ to come: "Sicut autem nos in ipsum credimus ut incarnatum, ita antiqui crediderunt in ipsum ut nasciturum, *habentes enim eundem spiritum credimus* (...). Habet autem fides quae est in Christum virtutem iustificandi ex proposito gratiae Dei (...). Unde, quia hoc propositum est aeternum, nihil prohibet per fidem Iesu Christi aliquos iustificari antequam eius anima esset plena gratia et veritate." *ST III*, q. 6, a. 3, arg 3 and ad 3.

¹⁶⁸ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 3, arg. 1 and ad 1.

than the angels, which were created at the beginning.¹⁶⁹ Aquinas's reply is based on the words of Leo the Great, that Christ's soul "surpasses our souls not by diversity of genus but by sublimity of power."¹⁷⁰ Saint Thomas answers that the aspect in which Christ's soul excels the angels is the plenitude of grace and truth. Moreover, Aquinas explains that the superiority of Christ's soul over the angels does not concern the mode of creation, since this mode corresponds to the genus to which a given being belongs. Now, since Christ's soul is of the same kind as our souls, which means that it is the substantial form of the body, it was created at the moment of its union to the body. This mode of creation does not pertain to the angels, since they are totally without bodies.¹⁷¹

3.3.2. The Refutation of the Pre-existence of Christ's Body to the Soul (ST IIIa, q. 6, a. 4)

In the fourth article of the sixth question, Aquinas discusses a hypothesis opposite to the one rejected in the preceding article. Saint Thomas asks here "whether the flesh of Christ was assumed by the Word before being united to the soul" (*utrum caro Christi fuerit prius a Verbo assumpta quam animae unita*).¹⁷² In this article, Aquinas searches for a solution to the apparent incoherence between the traditional affirmation of the simultaneity of the assumption of the soul and the flesh by the Word, on the one hand, and the priority of the disposition of matter over the completive form, on the other. In Aquinas, this principle is linked to his conception of the delayed animation of a human being (discussed at greater length in question 33 in the context of the mode and order of Christ's conception). According to the latter theory, based on the Aristotelian biology, the body of the human embryo receives a rational soul only a certain time after conception, when it is sufficiently developed. Before this moment, the body is informed successively by the vegetative soul and the sensitive soul, correspondingly to the degree of its development.¹⁷³ An uncritical application of this theory to Christ results in the

¹⁶⁹ See ST III, q. 6, a. 3, arg. 2.

¹⁷⁰ ST III, q. 6, a. 3, ad 2: "[E]xcellit nostras animas non diversitate generis, sed sublimitate virtutis." Translation: Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2056. Cf. Leo the Great, *Epistola* 35, 3 (Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina 54: 809).

¹⁷¹ See ST III, q. 6, a. 3, ad 2.

¹⁷² ST III, q. 6, a. 4.

¹⁷³ The delayed animation theory is based on the philosophical axiom that matter is proportionate to form, and on Aristotle's embryology, according to which the embryo has no internal principle of development: the body is built out of menstrual blood by the power of the father's semen. The discovery of female gametes, which makes it possible to regard conception as fertilization, and of the genes that govern the development of the human body, disproves the biological presuppositions of the delayed animation theory. See Stephen J. Heaney, "Aquinas and the Presence of the Rational Soul in the Early Embryo," *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 19-48, here 29-37; Robert Plich,

proposition that the assumption of the body by the Word would precede the assumption of the soul.¹⁷⁴

In the main body of the article, Aquinas gives a fundamental argument against the pre-existence of Christ's body to his soul. Saint Thomas states that the human flesh has the aptitude to be assumed only inasmuch as it is ordered to the rational soul as to its proper form.¹⁷⁵ Now, the ordination of the human flesh to the soul cannot precede the reception of the soul, since whenever some matter is suitable for a form, it receives this form.¹⁷⁶ Hence, the flesh should not have been assumed before it became *human* flesh, that is, before the reception of the rational soul.¹⁷⁷ The focal point of Aquinas's argument is the claim that human flesh can be conveniently assumed only as actually informed by the soul. This means that *Saint Thomas rejects the pre-existence of Christ's body to the soul on the basis of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation according to causality*, as explained in the first article of question 6.

At the end of the *corpus* of the article, Aquinas provides a recapitulation of the articles on the temporal order of the assumption:

Therefore, since the soul was not assumed before the flesh, inasmuch as it is against the nature of the soul to be before it is united to the body, so likewise the flesh ought not to have been assumed before the soul, since it is not human flesh before it has a rational soul.¹⁷⁸

This passage shows clearly that the hylomorphic conception of the relationship between the soul and the body is the main philosophical instrument used by Saint Thomas in the articles on the temporal order of the assumption. The pre-existence of the soul to the body is against its nature, since the soul is by its nature the substantial form of the body. Moreover, since human flesh is specified as such by the rational soul, it is not, properly speaking, *human* flesh at any time before the reception of this soul.

“St. Thomas Aquinas on the Beginning of Human Life,” in *Dominicans and the Challenge of Thomism*, ed. Michał Paluch and Piotr Lichacz (Warsaw: Instytut Tomistyczny, 2012), 313-324, here 313-316.

¹⁷⁴ On the history of this problem in scholastic theology before Saint Thomas, with reference to the question of the mediation of the soul, see Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, part 2, vol. 1, 150-171.

¹⁷⁵ *ST* III, q. 6, a. 4, co.: “[C]aro humana est assumptibilis a Verbo secundum ordinem quem habet ad animam rationalem sicut ad propriam formam.”

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: “Hunc autem ordinem non habet antequam anima rationalis ei adveniat, quia simul dum aliqua materia fit propria alicuius formae, recipit illam formam; unde in eodem instanti terminatur alteratio in quo introducitur forma substantialis.”

¹⁷⁷ See *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: “Sicut igitur anima non est prius assumpta quam caro, quia contra naturam animae est ut prius sit quam corpori uniatur; ita caro non debuit prius assumi quam anima, quia non prius est caro humana quam habeat animam rationalem.” Translation: Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 4, 2057.

The refutation of the pre-existence of Christ's body to his soul in the main body of the article leaves one problem unanswered: the claim rejected by Saint Thomas is related to the delayed animation theory, which itself is accepted by the Angelic Doctor in his general anthropology. This is the reason why, in the responses to the first two objections, Saint Thomas shows that the exceptional origin of Christ does not compromise the philosophical principles of the delayed animation theory (ad 1), and that this origin does not contradict the consubstantiality of Christ's body with the bodies of other men (ad 2).¹⁷⁹

The first objection confronts the belief in the simultaneous assumption of the soul and the body with one of the main philosophical suppositions of the delayed animation theory: in generation, the matter or disposition precedes the completing form (*materia vel dispositio prior est in via generationis quam forma completiva*).¹⁸⁰ Given this supposition, it seems that Christ's flesh was conceived before its union to the soul. Now, since the flesh was not conceived before its assumption by the Word, it seems that the assumption of the flesh preceded its union to the soul.¹⁸¹ Aquinas's reply consists of two steps. First, Saint Thomas recalls that the flesh that is not yet informed by a human soul is not human flesh but merely a *dispositio* to human flesh. The reason for this claim is the fact that human flesh receives existence from the soul (*caro humana sortitur esse per animam*).¹⁸² In the second step, Aquinas solves the problem posed by the claim that, in generation, disposition precedes form: the Holy Spirit, being an agent possessing infinite power (*virtus*), disposed the matter and gave it the final perfection in the same instant.¹⁸³

The second objection is that the simultaneity of the assumption of the soul and the body would compromise the consubstantiality of Christ's soul and body with our souls and bodies.

¹⁷⁹ The last objection claims that the union of the *first cause* (the Word) to the effect (the flesh) should be prior to the union of the *second cause* (the soul) to the effect (the flesh). Aquinas explains that this argument is valid for the common mode of the union of God to creature since the fact that the flesh is some being (*quoddam ens*) is prior to the fact that it is animated. In the union in person, however, the union of the soul to the flesh is first, since *the flesh is apt to be united to the Word in person according to its union to the soul*. See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 4, arg 3 and ad 3.

¹⁸⁰ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 4, arg 1.

¹⁸¹ See *ibid.*

¹⁸² *ST III*, q. 6, a. 4, ad 1.

¹⁸³ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 4, co.: "In conceptione tamen Christi, Spiritus Sanctus, qui est agens infinitae virtutis, simul et materiam disposuit et ad perfectum perduxit." In this argument, Aquinas manages to adjust the philosophical principles of the delayed animation theory to the belief of the simultaneous assumption of the soul and the body by the Word. The only way in which he can do so requires the affirmation that Christ's body was formed from the first instant of the conception, which means that Christ's body possessed a unique completeness from the beginning (see *ST III*, q. 33, a. 1).

This objection argues that, since the soul and the body are parts of human nature, they did not have a different beginning of existence (*principium sui esse*) in Christ than in our human souls and bodies. Now, according to the delayed animation theory, our flesh is conceived (as informed by a vegetative form and then by a sensitive form) before its union to the rational soul. Thus the same should apply to Christ, which implies that the assumption of his flesh by the Word preceded the union of the flesh to the soul.¹⁸⁴ Aquinas begins his response with a philosophical examination of the possibility of the pre-existence of form and matter to the nature of the species they constitute. Aquinas explains that the form *in act* yields the species (*forma actu dat speciem*). As a result, it is against the *ratio* of the form to pre-exist the nature of the species, which achieves its perfection through the union of this form to matter. On the other hand, nothing prevents the matter, which is *in potency* to the species, from pre-existing the nature of the species. Next, Saint Thomas applies this explanation to the assumption of a human nature by the Word: *the discussed difference between Christ and us does not concern the nature, but that which precedes the achievement of perfection by this nature*. Aquinas reinforces his argument, recalling that the same applies to the fact that, unlike us, Christ is not conceived from a man's semen (*sicut et quod nos concipimur ex semine viri, non autem Christus*).¹⁸⁵ This example shows that the difference in the *efficient cause* of the conception does not change the *form* of the conceived man. Finally, Saint Thomas adds that a difference concerning the origin *of the soul* would cause a difference of nature.¹⁸⁶

3.3.3. Conclusion

In the articles on the temporal order of the assumption, Aquinas argues that only the simultaneity of the assumption of the constitutive parts of the human nature by the Word is compatible with the personal unity of Christ and with the reality of his humanity. Concerning the hypothesis of the pre-existence of Christ's soul, the assumption of the pre-existent soul at the moment of its embodiment leads either to a position similar to Nestorianism or requires the corruption of the pre-existent human personality. The affirmation of the pre-existence of the already-assumed soul to the body compromises the consubstantiality of Christ's human soul to our souls. Discussing the claim that the assumption of the body preceded the union of the body to the soul, Aquinas, referring to the mediation of the soul in the order of causality, points out

¹⁸⁴ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 4, arg 2.

¹⁸⁵ *ST III*, q. 6, a. 4, ad 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: "Sed differentia quae esset quantum ad originem animae, redundaret in diversitatem naturae."

that the body cannot be assumed unless it is actually specified by the human soul, and shows that the simultaneous assumption of the soul and body does not compromise the philosophical principles of the delayed animation theory. The reference to the mediation of the human soul in this point enables us to detect a second reason for the insertion of our theme into Aquinas's Christological synthesis: Saint Thomas has to show that the intellectual soul mediates in the assumption of the flesh, since that is, for him, the only way to show that the assumption of Christ's body did not precede the assumption of Christ's soul.¹⁸⁷

Aquinas's theological argumentation in the articles considered here is strongly influenced by his anthropology. The rejection of the pre-existence of the assumed soul is based on the doctrine of the soul as the substantial form of the body, created simultaneously with its infusion into the body. Moreover, in the rejection of the hypothesis of the pre-existence of Christ's body to his soul, the Angelic Doctor emphasises the fact that the body is a real human body only when it is informed by the rational soul. Finally, the comparison of the respective relationships of form and matter to the nature of the species they constitute enables Aquinas to show that a modification of the origin of the soul would also modify its nature, while the exceptional origin of the body does not influence its nature.

3.4. The Refutation of the Mediation of Grace in the Assumption of a Human Nature by the Word (ST III, q. 6, a. 6)

In the last article discussing the order of the assumption, Aquinas denies any medium of the assumption found outside the nature of man, namely in grace. Nevertheless, we should briefly present this article, since it reveals some consequences of Aquinas's understanding of the order of assumption and of the unity of man.

In the *corpus* of the article, Saint Thomas distinguishes three senses of the term "grace" that can be applied to Christ. These are (1) the "grace of union," that is, the personal existence of the divine person given gratuitously to Christ's human nature (*ipsum esse personale quod gratis divinitus datur humanae naturae in persona Verbi*), (2) the "habitual grace" which sanctifies Christ's humanity, and (3) the divine will inasmuch as it makes or gives something gratuitously.¹⁸⁸ Aquinas says that in none of these senses could grace be the *formal* medium of the assumption. The first type of grace, the grace of union, is not the medium but the union itself, so that the person of the incarnate Word is the *term* of the assumption. The second type,

¹⁸⁷ For the first reason see p. 26.

¹⁸⁸ See ST III, q. 6, a. 6, co.

the habitual grace, is an *effect*, a consequence, of the union pertaining to the sanctity of Christ and not to the ontological unity of his person.¹⁸⁹ Finally, divine will conceived as grace is the *efficient cause* of the assumption. Aquinas explains that, in this third sense, it can be said that the union took place “by grace” (*per gratiam*), but this does not mean that grace was the medium of the assumption (*non sicut per medium*).¹⁹⁰ We should note here the link between the strong rejection of the mediation of habitual grace in the Incarnation in the *Summa theologiae* and the temporal order of the assumption. This rejection entails a strict application of the truth that the human nature did not pre-exist its assumption by the Word. The simultaneity of the creation and the assumption of Christ’s humanity excludes even a conceptual priority of habitual grace over the assumption.¹⁹¹

In the article under consideration, Aquinas discusses three objections. We will focus on the second of them, since it concerns the relationship of the soul and the body.¹⁹² This objection argues for the mediation of (habitual) grace in the Incarnation, proposing a strict correspondence between the soul, which vivifies the body and makes it apt of being assumed, and grace, which vivifies the soul and thus should give it the fittingness to be assumed.¹⁹³ Aquinas replies that there is an essential difference between the relationship of the soul to the body, and the one of grace to the soul: the soul is the *substantial* perfection of the body, while grace is an *accidental* perfection of the soul. Therefore grace cannot make the soul ordained to the personal union.¹⁹⁴ We should note that Aquinas can give this response since, for him, the soul not only moves and vivifies the body (which would be possible also if the relationship between these two principles were accidental) but also determines *what* the body is and makes the human body exist as a human body.

¹⁸⁹ See *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 6, co.

¹⁹¹ As P. Conforti shows, the evolution of Aquinas’s account of the grace of Christ includes the clarification of the idea that habitual grace is a *consequence* of the union. See Patrizia Conforti, *La grazia di Cristo in Tommaso d’Aquino: Evoluzione della dottrina dalle “Sententiae” alla “Summa theologiae,”* Licence thesis (Fribourg, 1997), 10-26.

¹⁹² In the response to the first objection, Aquinas explains that the union of Christ’s humanity to the Word of God is not founded on operation (knowing and loving God, which would entail the mediation of grace): this union takes place according to *personal existence* (*secundum esse personale*). Replying to the third objection, Saint Thomas shows that the Holy Spirit who formed Christ’s body is not a formal medium of the union. See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 6, ad 1 and ad 3.

¹⁹³ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 6, arg 2.

¹⁹⁴ See *ST III*, q. 6, a. 6, ad 2.

3.5. Conclusion of the Third Chapter

The examination of the Aquinas's discussion of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the Incarnation can be summarised in four points:

1. There are three characteristic points of Saint Thomas's account. First, Aquinas does not use the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation to elucidate the perfect obedience of Christ's soul and body to divine will. He focuses on the ontological aspect of our topic. Second, within this aspect, the Angelic Doctor builds his argumentation on the basis of the *convenience of the assumption of a human nature* by the Word. Aquinas elucidates the divine design to assume a human nature by showing that this nature has dignity as the image of God and, at the same time, is in need of restoration. This understanding of the assumption gives Aquinas some criteria to demonstrate the hierarchy of mediations in the constitutive parts of human nature. The intellect, through which the soul bears the image of God, is the medium in the assumption of the lower parts of the soul. The intellectual soul mediates in the assumption of the body, since through the intellectual soul the body belongs to human nature. The last proposition leads us to the third characteristic point of Aquinas's account. The Angelic Doctor argues that the soul is the formal cause of the aptitude of the flesh to be assumed. In this claim, Aquinas joins a theological account of the Incarnation (human nature is more apt to be assumed than other natures) with his anthropology, which conceives of the intellectual soul as the only substantial form of the body.

2. The specificity of Aquinas's account is due not only to his hylomorphic anthropology but also to two other important points of his theology. The first of them is the teaching on the divine government over creatures, based on Pseudo-Dionysius. Saint Thomas understands the mediation of the human soul in analogy to the theme of the return (*reditus*) of the creature to God, in which higher creatures lead lower creatures to God. The soul, which is more perfect than the body, makes the body apt to attain the person of the Son, which is the term of the assumption. Thus the mediation of the soul in the assumption of the flesh accounts for the *ordination* of this divine action *ad extra*. The second point is the doctrine of divine simplicity, based on the philosophical concept of *esse* as the act of being. Although this doctrine is not mentioned explicitly by Aquinas in question 6 of the *Tertia Pars*, it forms a presupposition of his account that clearly delineates the distinction between God and the spiritual soul.

3. In searching for the answer to the question of how Aquinas's *anthropology* helps him to improve his theological account of the assumption of the humanity by the Word, we should remark on three points. First, a strict hylomorphic anthropology enables Aquinas to give a

stronger foundation for the mediation of the soul than his contemporaries could. The intellectual soul mediates in the assumption of the flesh not only because it occupies a higher place in the hierarchy of perfection but also because it *causes* in the flesh the aptitude to be assumed. Second, the Angelic Doctor integrates into his account of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation an idea that underlies the Patristic argument for the assumption of the soul by the Word. Authors like Augustine or Gregory of Nazianzus taught that the Word assumed the flesh animated by the human soul, since the flesh without the soul is not human flesh. For Aquinas, this idea is in fact the reason for the mediation of the human soul in the order of causality: the flesh can be conveniently assumed only insofar as the intellectual soul makes it *human* flesh. Finally, his hylomorphic anthropology helps Saint Thomas to demonstrate the simultaneity of the assumption of the soul and the body. Any pre-existence of Christ's soul would compromise the reality of his humanity, because, according to what the soul *is* (and not only according to what the soul does), a soul pre-existing its body could not be the substantial form of the body and therefore could not be a *human* soul. Similarly, since the body without the soul is not a human body and therefore not apt to be assumed, it is inconvenient that the Word would assume a body without a soul even if this body might be animated in the future by the human soul, as was postulated by the delayed animation theory.

4. The study of the structure and the content of question 6 enable us to answer why Aquinas undertook the examination of the theme of the mediation of the intellectual soul in the assumption of the flesh by the Word. First, this topic involves the consideration of the relationship between the soul and the body in the context of the Incarnation. Thus it is useful to elucidate the harmony between the metaphysical structure of the human nature and the assumption of this nature by the Son of God. Second, the affirmation of the mediation of the human soul in the assumption of the flesh is necessary for Aquinas to be able to reject the pre-existence of Christ's body to his soul.

General Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine Aquinas's teaching on the mediation of the intellectual soul in the Incarnation in the context of his own anthropology and that of his Patristic predecessors. We attempted to find out the reasons for the introduction of this theme into Aquinas's theological synthesis, the modifications of its understanding due to a strict hylomorphic anthropology, and the theological advantages of Saint Thomas's account.

In the first chapter, we sketched the principal tenets of Aquinas's anthropology. The concept of the soul as a subsistent substantial form enables Saint Thomas to maintain, at the same time, the unity of man and the priority of the spiritual dimension of his nature. Moreover, the relative independence of the human mind from the body (that is, the specificity of man's intellectual soul by comparison with the substantial form of other corporeal beings) opens man to a supernatural union with God.

In the second chapter, we conducted an overview of four Patristic authors (Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine and John Damascene) whose thought constitutes an implicit or explicit source of Aquinas's account. The teaching of these theologians has two common points. First, they acknowledge a double reason for the mediation of the soul in the assumption of the flesh, based on a *double opposition* between divinity and the flesh (σάρξ, *caro*). As a spiritual and rational substance united instrumentally to the flesh, the intellectual soul mediates between, on the one hand, the irrational and material flesh and, on the other hand, spiritual and intellectual divinity (the ontological aspect). Further, as the "dominant principle" (ἡγεμόνικον) in man, the intellectual soul mediates between the essential goodness of divinity and the sinful inclination of the flesh, by subjecting the flesh to divine government (ontological-moral aspect). Thus the mediation of the soul accounts for the fact that Christ was free from the inclination to sin. Second, Patristic authors assert an instrumental relationship between the soul and the body. This claim is an obstacle for the integration of their proposition that the real human body *must* be animated by the rational soul into their accounts of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation. Apart from these common points, we detected an evolution in Patristic thought. For Origen, the pre-existent soul of Christ assured the personal unity of Christ. Later authors reject the pre-existence of Christ's soul and used the mediation of the soul to account for the intelligibility and credibility of the Incarnation (Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine), and, finally, for the completeness of Christ's humanity (John Damascene).

The third chapter, which constituted the main part of our study, enabled us to achieve three goals. The first of them was the identification of three significant points of Aquinas's account in which he differs from his Patristic predecessors. First, Aquinas deals only with the ontological aspect of the mediation of the soul. The ontological-moral aspect, although present in Saint Thomas's thought, is not included in the question of the mediation of the human soul in the *act of the assumption* of a human nature by the Word. Second, Aquinas subordinates the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation to the question of the assumption of a human *nature* conceived as a whole. In this context, the mediation of the soul shows an *order* in the divine assumptive action. Third, apart from the traditionally-admitted mediation of the intellectual soul (as contributing to the convenience of the union of divinity and the flesh), Aquinas argues that the soul is the *formal cause* of the aptitude of the flesh to be assumed. Moreover, we found two reasons why Aquinas included the theme of the mediation of the soul in the assumption of the flesh in his Christological synthesis. First, this is a way to account for the belief that the Incarnation respects the internal structure of human nature. Second, the mediation of the soul enables Saint Thomas to reject the hypothesis of the pre-existence of Christ's body to his soul. Finally, we detected two tenets of Aquinas's theology that form the implicit or explicit background of his account. These are (1) the doctrine of divine simplicity, and (2) the conception of divine government over creatures, taken from the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.

The examination of Aquinas's account of the order of assumption of a human nature by Christ permits us to indicate three points in which his philosophical apparatus enables him to deepen our understanding of the Incarnation. The first point concerns the account of *the Incarnation as a work of divine Wisdom*. Platonising accounts tend to consider the mediation of the intellectual soul as an *overcoming of the opposition* between divinity and the flesh. The main reason for this scheme is the fact that (apart from Gregory of Nazianzus) the Patristic authors examined use the distinction between "immaterial" and "material" to account for the difference between "Uncreated" and "created". Thus, the relatively immaterial soul is a *creature* that mediates the union between an absolutely immaterial God and material flesh. For Aquinas, the crucial point is the distinction between God's self-subsistence (*ipsum esse subsistens*) and the participated existence of creatures. Thus, what is most metaphysically astonishing in the mystery of the Incarnation is not the assumption of the *flesh* (understood in its crude materiality) by the divine person, but the assumption of a *created human nature* as such. In this context, the key ideas of Aquinas's account are *order* and *hierarchy*: the soul, which is prior to the body in the constitution of human nature, accounts for the aptitude of the

body to be assumed in conformity with the divine salvific design. We should note that the ideas of order and hierarchy are elements of the widely-understood Platonic tradition. The main point here is that Aquinas's metaphysics enables him to reinterpret this tradition in order to maintain the hierarchy of perfection descending from God to the flesh without assuming a fundamental opposition of "material" and "spiritual."

The second point, which is the most important contribution of Aquinas's account to our understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation on our topic, concerns the *valorisation of human nature*. Patristic accounts of the Incarnation affirmed the assumption of all essential elements of human nature, since that was required for the salvation of the whole man. Moreover, they recognised that flesh not animated by a rational soul cannot be real human flesh. Nevertheless, their account of the mediation of the soul in the assumption of the flesh did not pay sufficient attention to this fact and focused on the relationship between the soul and the body as the *conjunction of an immaterial substance and a material substance*. For Aquinas, the soul mediates between God and the body inasmuch as it "mediates" between the body and human nature. This proposition is based on the claim that the human nature as a whole mediated in the assumption of its essential parts. It is also based on a hylomorphic anthropology, according to which the body is a part of the human nature through the soul, which is its substantial form. Thus Aquinas can show that the flesh alone is not assumable, not because it is somehow opposed to the divine nature, but because, without a soul, it cannot be part of a *human nature*. The inconvenience of the assumption of the flesh alone does not lie in the fact that it is "ungodly," but that it is "unhuman." Thus Aquinas can demonstrate more clearly the link between the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation and the divine design to assume a *human nature*.

The third point concerns the *temporal order of the assumption*. The theme of the mediation of the soul in the Incarnation was introduced by Origen, who contended that Christ's soul was assumed by the Word before its embodiment. In later theology, the rejection of the pre-existence of the human soul in general entailed the negation of the pre-existence of *Christ's* soul. Yet it is Aquinas's strict hylomorphic anthropology that manifests the deepest reason for the rejection of the pre-existence of Christ's soul: since the intellectual soul is, by its very nature, the substantial form of the body, it is against the nature of the intellectual soul to pre-exist the body. Accordingly, a soul pre-existent to its body *cannot* be a *human* soul. Saint Thomas's rejection of the pre-existence of Christ's soul displays therefore the harmony between Christological dogma and a philosophical consideration of human nature.

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