

TRUTH THRIVES IN DIVERSITY:
BATTISTA MANTOVANO AND LORENZO VALLA
ON THOMAS AQUINAS

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Renaissance humanists tended to disregard medieval scholasticism. But most of humanist anti-scholasticism was directed against late medieval exaggerations in the areas of conceptualism and nominalism. Therefore, it is interesting to find out whether these humanists had a precise and justified view of medieval philosophers and theologians, and especially of Thomas Aquinas. Two writings of humanists, which expressly deal with Aquinas, namely the *Encomium S. Thomae Aquinatis* by Lorenzo Valla (1457) and the *Opus aureum in Thomistas* (1490s) by Johannes Baptista Spagnoli Matnovano give witness of the humanist philosophical approach to the saint and teacher of the Church. A look at these two treatises discloses some basic features of humanist thought, and *ex negativo* of the importance and specific value of Thomas Aquinas in the post-medieval culture. They also show samples of how monopolizing one authority might endanger its very acceptance.

It is a commonplace that Renaissance humanists disliked medieval scholasticism ever since Francesco Petrarch's invective against university learning at Padua and other Italian universities.¹ However, it is also evident that most humanist anti-scholasticism was directed against late medieval exaggerations in the areas of conceptualism and battles about words. On the other hand, words, language, was what humanism was about; so it must have been the mistaken way of fighting about

¹ E. Rummel, *The Humanist–Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1995. Special thanks to John Betz for correcting my English (remaining errors are mine).

words that they criticized. But one has also to check whether these humanists had a precise and justified view of medieval philosophers and theologians, and especially of Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, there are two writings of humanists, which expressly deal with Aquinas, namely the *Encomium S. Thomae Aquinatis* by Lorenzo Valla, written in 1457, and the *Opus aureum in Thomistas* by Johannes Baptista Spagnoli, known as Mantuanus/Mantovano, written in the early 1490s. A look at these two treatises discloses some basic features of humanist thought, and *ex negativo* the importance and specific value of Thomas Aquinas in post-medieval culture. I will discuss these two in reversed chronological order, because it helps to know the outcome when discussing the prior events.

Giovanni Battista Spagnoli Mantovano (1447–1516) was a Carmelite monk, who was prolific in literary writings, engaged in the reform of his religious order, and a true heir of Renaissance humanism.² In spite of his vigorous attack on Thomism³ he was beatified by Pope Leo XIII, who in his encyclical letter *Æterni Patris* (1880) had declared Thomas Aquinas the leading teacher of the Catholic Church. As a Carmelite he was involved in polemics against the Dominicans, which concentrated on the interpretation of the Holy Blood of Christ. As a part of this controversy he wrote the pamphlet against the Thomists, *Opus aureum in Thomistas*. We should note that he, indeed, speaks of such a sect of “Thomists.” Thus Battista not only takes sides against the Dominicans and in favor of John Duns Scotus, as we will see: he also joins the movement of those thinkers who identified philosophy and theology with a bunch of schools or sects, which in itself is significant as regards his treatment of the authorities.

The Thomist school is identified by a number of tenets, which Battista is resolved to refute, namely (1) that Aquinas is the only authority not alone of the Dominican Order but also of the Church, (2) that

² For some biographical data and for a bibliography see P.O. Kristeller, *Le thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, Vrin, Montréal & Paris, 1967, pp. 80–90; this book contains on pp. 127–185 the critical edition of Mantovano’s work discussed here; reference is made to this edition. The text of the lectures, to which the edition is an appendix, is available in English in: P.O. Kristeller, *Medieval Aspects of Renaissance Learning*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1974, pp. 29–91; on Mantuanus, pp. 65–71. For biographical information and overview on *In Thomistas*, see Romano Rosa, ‘Tomismo e antitomismo in Battista Spagnoli Mantovano (1447–1416),’ *Memorie Domenicane* 7, 1976, pp. 227–264. As for the name, it should be noted that Carmelites, like in some other religious orders, abolished their civil or family name and were called by their Christian name plus the place of origin, in this case Mantua.

³ It had remained almost unknown until Paul Oskar Kristeller’s edition.

Christ himself had said that Thomas was right in what he wrote about him, and (3) that there is only one true theology.

Mantovano's counter-arguments can be summed up in two assumptions: Truth consists of variety, and truth evolves in history. His key commonplace to express both aspects is Seneca's saying: "Veritatem dies aperit."⁴ He uses this motto after having discussed some apparent contradictions in the interpretation of Thomas' teaching and before discussing "degrees of approbation" of a doctrine. Therefore Mantovano's strategy is to show that the inherent truth in Aquinas' theology depends on further research, so that eventually it might "come to daylight." But this saying is quite akin to the well-known motto "Veritas filia temporis" (truth is a daughter of time), which goes back to the Greek myth of Saturn (Kronos/Chronos) as the God of Time,⁵ and was a mode of thought frequently applied in Renaissance literature.⁶ This means that for the critic there cannot be a definite and a historical truth, since truth evolves over time. Therefore one might render the motto as: Truth is a "secular" phenomenon. Indeed earlier in his pamphlet Battista states that truth shows up more and more over time: "Quod in dies veritas magis apparet" (p. 170). His reason is that many teachings of theologians at times have been accepted and later rejected. He illustrates this by a quotation from Psalm 19 that says: "Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge." The learned Carmelite understands this verse as saying that the days "spit out" what the previous day had said, while it is night and darkness that purport to teach knowledge—which is quite opposite to the common reading of the Psalm.⁷ It is crucial to Mantovano that "a truth" can be falsified in later times, it may thrive and eventu-

⁴ In *Thomistas* p. 180; Seneca, *De ira*, II 22. Kristeller in his footnote refers to a similar remark in *Epistulae morales* 33, 11. However, there is no connection between Mantovano's and Seneca's usage, as Seneca then refers to gullibility and patience.

⁵ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 12, 11, 7: "Alius quidam veterum poetarum, cuius nomen mihi nunc memoriae non est, Veritatem Temporis filiam esse dixit." Laurentius Beyerlinck, *Magnum theatrum vitae humanae*, Huguetan, Lyon, 1665, vol. 7, letter V, col. 84 E, refers to Plutarchus.

⁶ F. Saxl, 'Veritas filia temporis,' in R. Klibansky and H.J. Paton (eds.), *Philosophy and History. Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1936, pp.191–222, esp. p. 200 n. 1.

⁷ Psalm 19 (18), 2 (Caeli enarrant gloriam dei), King James Version; In *Thomistas*, 170: "Nam dies diei eructat verbum, et nox nocti indicat scientiam." The negative reading might be justified by the equally negative observation on time by Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2, 2, 5: "Opinionis enim commenta delet dies, naturae iudicia confirmat."

ally may even “die”, this is one of his “axioms” of humanity.⁸ Time is critical since knowledge is only acquired over years and by accumulation.⁹ Thus the author dares to add some of his own, namely a bold interpretation of the well known “spiritus ubi vult spirat” (John 3, 8): Combining this with Paul (1 Cor. 12, 11) he suggests that the Spirit granted some revelation to Aquinas, some other to others, to the effect that it is true for all believers, i.e., for the totality of Christianity, because “the temple of God [...] this is you all.”¹⁰ This is a statement of highly debatable implications. For it might lead from the common understanding that no individual may attain perfect knowledge, to the thought that every individual does have access to some revelation (a clearly Protestant teaching), and from there to the eschatological ideal that the whole of the community of Christians by the fullness of time will have the perfection of the revelation. Battista tries to downgrade Aquinas by making truth an ongoing work in progress.

Of course, it was not Battista’s intention to secularize truth; rather, he holds that it was God’s intention to spread knowledge over all humanity. But this entails that knowledge of the one truth is diversified through the centuries and among the peoples.¹¹ Consequently, there cannot be one authority alone; and even in minor authors there is some truth. Mantovano’s text collects a great number of classical arguments on the plurality and unity of wisdom. It connects human fallibility with freedom, and authority with eclecticism. He was evidently influenced by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola¹² who also had defended the plural-

⁸ “Hoc assioma [sic] declarandum assumo: genus omne sermonis et vocabula, quibus animorum conceptus exprimimus, simul cum ceteris rebus humanis patitur cariem, senium et mortem.” Quoted from his *Contra calumniatores epistula* in Rosa (note 2), p. 231.

⁹ In Thomistas, 170: “succeedentibus annis per additamenta inventas.” Aulus Gellius and Cicero are both referred to in Polydorus Vergilius, *De inventoribus rerum* (late 15th, early 16th cent.); see Polydore Vergil, *On Discovery*, ed. and transl. Brian Copenhaver, Harvard University Press, Cambridge & London, 2002, ‘Preface,’ p. 4.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 3, 17 (my translation); In Thomistas, 171: “singulis dividit prout vult et non solum Thomae. Sed omnibus fidelibus est dictum: templum [...] dei [...] quod estis vos.”

¹¹ This thought is not alien to Renaissance thinkers: Nicholas of Cusa defends it in order to explain the existence of competing truth claims in religion; see P.R. Blum, “‘Salva fide et pace.’ Religionsfrieden von Cusanus bis Campanella,” in M. Thurner (ed.), *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 2002, pp. 527–554 (also in Slovenian in: *Poligrafi* 6, 2001, pp. 231–258).

¹² Three letters of Pico’s to Battista Spagnoli are extant, see E. Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*, Sansoni, Firenze, 1961, 2nd ed., 1979, p. 265. Here Pico reports on his project to reconcile Aristotle and Plato, and talks about his readings.

ity of learning for the sake of Christian doctrine in his “Nine hundred Theses” and in his “Oration” that served as a program to it.¹³ In his defense against the condemnation of some of his theses, the young count had even claimed that contradiction is the essence of theological endeavors so that heresy is either congenial with the search for the truth of revelation or there is no such thing as heresy; and he adduced St. Augustine as his ally who had called it extremely hard to tell a heresy.¹⁴ One reason is, again, that since all men strive for illumination, none accomplishes it fully.

Pico is, indeed, quoted indirectly in the text, when Battista invokes a number of medieval theologians who easily can compete with Aquinas, such as Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus. Each of them was seen as head of one “sect” out of many that derived like rivers from the mighty fountain of theology.¹⁵ “Battles are their threshing of scriptures, and the Catholic truth’s rich and abounding commerce.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the Carmelite does not even refrain from calling upon the “ancient theology”, as fostered in part by Pico and advocated by Marsilio Ficino, in order to make his point that theology thrives in diversity. Pico’s testimony is cited when it comes to the fallibility of human science: Aquinas cannot possibly have proven every doctrine scientifically, otherwise he would not have been contradicted so frequently. Moreover, most sciences lack apodictic proofs of their tenets, even mathematics—at least insofar as astrology is concerned that had been utterly refuted by Pico.¹⁷

¹³ S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, MRTS, Tempe, Arizona, 1998. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. E. Garin, Vallecchi, Firenze 1942.

¹⁴ ‘Apologia’, in: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia*, ed. E. Garin, Bottega d’Erasmus, Turin, 1971, vol. 1, p. 145: “Item etiam discordant [...] sic quod sibi contradicendo, unus necessario falsum dicit: et tamen ex hoc neuter eorum hereticus reputatur. [...] Dicta ergo istorum, non innituntur infallibili veritati, cum sibi contradicant; quorum una pars necessario est falsa: ut patet per philosophum 4. Methaphisice.” *Ibid.*: 144: “Possunt ergo dicta Augustini egregii et divini doctoris, non semper in omnibus continere indubiam veritatem, cum ipse circa ea dubitet erraverit necne. Et quod dictum est de Augustino, dictum intelligatur similiter de aliis doctoribus.” *Ibid.*: 126: “ut et illud Augustini dictum in libro de Haeresibus verificari videamus, Nihil esse difficilius, quam definire, hoc est haereticum aut non haereticum.”

¹⁵ In Thomistas, 163, and Kristeller’s notes.

¹⁶ In Thomistas, 164: “Lites enim eorum tritura quaedam est scripturarum et veritatis catholicae opulenta mercatura.”

¹⁷ In Thomistas, 141. Reference is made to Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni: *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, ed. E. Garin, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1946–1952.

As for Thomas Aquinas' role, Mantovano assigns him his place among other teachers:

Thomas is great and deserves high praise, as he was more than average in some sciences and specifically in the best. But as for genius he cannot compete with John [Duns] Scotus, Aristotle, and Augustine; as for intensity in writing, and as for appropriateness and variety of speech he cannot be compared with Jerome and most others; and as for number of books he does not beat Chalcidius, Varro, Augustine and Origen. So, he has his place among the teachers of the third rank; because the first rank belongs to the Apostles and Evangelists, the second to the older Eastern and Western Church Fathers, while the third rank is for those younger doctors who have chewed some gist of truth out of the texts of the Fathers and the Bible by a flowerless new and raw mode of talk and by intricate questioning.¹⁸

We not only see the anti-scholastic polemics of the humanists in full flower, we may also note that Mantovano esteems John Duns Scotus more highly than Aquinas, even though Scotist language was definitely more "flowerless and raw" than that of Aquinas.

So the Carmelite friar maintains a position within the internal controversy among the scholastics and an external view as a defender of elegant language and humanist devotion to ancient authorities, including such pagan writers as Varro, of whom we know only on account of the polemics of St. Augustine.

What we have seen in Battista Spagnoli is a beginning of historicizing and temporalizing truth and specifically Christian dogmatics, which has its origin in humanist learning. It was the humanists who first developed a sense of the historical differences of language and learning, first in secular fields like grammar and rhetoric, then also in matters that were essential to Christian life. Before the Protestant Reformers deplored the alleged aberrations of Church tradition from the original meaning of Holy Scripture, humanists like Battista Mantovano

¹⁸ Kristeller (1974: 183ff): "Magnus ergo Thomas et magna laude dignissimus, qui in quibusdam et eis quidem excellentissimis scientiis non mediocris fuit. Sed de ingenio cum Johanne Scoto, cum Aristotele, cum Augustino non contendat, de scribendi labore et utilitate copiamque dicendi Hieronymo et plerisque aliis non se aequiparet, de librorum numero cum Calcidio Varrone Augustino et Origine non certet. Sedeat inter tertii ordinis doctores, primi namque ordinis, ut in primo libro dictum est, sunt Apostoli et Evangelistae, secundi ordinis veteres orientalis et occidentalis ecclesiae patres, tertii vero ordinis sunt hi iuniores qui sine flore sermonis novo et rudi genere dicendi et problematicis quaestionibus de scripturis patrum et legis aliquem succum veritatis emungunt."

and, before him, Lorenzo Valla sought to put things in a chronological order and even to relate them to ancient sources, which were deemed closer to truth. The notion that truth may evolve over the centuries, as well as the notion that truth reveals itself in various guises according to historical circumstances, are both parallel to the seemingly contrary image, that truth loses its force over the course of tradition and decays through human conversation with it.

The most important humanist to call into question human access to divine truth and to justify the specific human approach to wisdom through language was Lorenzo Valla (1406/07–1457). He was involved in polemics against all authorities of his time, including fellow humanists, as he challenged Aristotelian metaphysics and logic, traditional sources of the Church, including the text of the Bible, and defended language as the only way in which the world is accessible.¹⁹ Shortly before his death in 1457 he was invited by the Dominicans of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the main convent of this Order in Rome, to give the annual lecture in praise of Thomas Aquinas.²⁰ The circumstances of this invitation remain unclear, and the text survived only in a few manuscripts.²¹ (So it is unlikely that Mantovano had read it.) The humanist

¹⁹ P.R. Blum, 'Lorenzo Valla: Humanismus als Philosophie,' in P.R. Blum (ed.), *Philosophen der Renaissance*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1999, pp. 33–40 (incl. bibliography).

²⁰ L. Valla, 'Encomium Sancti Thomae Aquinatis', in: J. Vahlen, 'Lorenzo Valla über Thomas von Aquino', *Vierteljahrsschrift für Kultur und Literatur der Renaissance* 1, 1886, pp. 384–396 (Reprinted in: L. Valla, *Opera omnia*, Basel 1540, ed. E. Garin, Bottega d'Erasmo, Torino, 1962, vol. 2); a French translation in: P. Mesnard: 'Une application curieuse de l'humanisme critique à la théologie: L'Éloge de saint Thomas par Laurent Valla', *Revue thomiste* 55, 1955, pp. 159–176; Mesnard underscores Valla's impact on Reformation. On the history of those annual Thomas lectures in the 15th/16th centuries see J.W. O'Malley, 'Some Renaissance Panegyrics of Aquinas', *Renaissance Quarterly* 27, 1974, pp. 174–192, and J.W. O'Malley, 'The Feast of Thomas Aquinas in Renaissance Rome, A Neglected Document and its import', *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia* 35, 1981, pp. 1–27. (Just a sample of late enlightenment criticism is the academic address by Pietro Ragnisco: Della fortuna di S. Tommaso d'Aquino nella università di Padova durante il Rinascimento, Randi, Padova 1892.)

²¹ Kristeller (1967: 72–79; 1974: 63f); H.H. Gray, 'Valla's Encomium of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Humanist Conception of Christian Antiquity', in H. Bluhm (ed.), *Essays in History and Literature, Presented by Fellows of The Newberry Library to Stanley Pargellis*, Newberry Library, Chicago, 1965, pp. 37–51; M. Fois, *Il pensiero cristiano di Lorenzo Valla nel quadro storico-culturale del suo ambiente*, Università Gregoriana, Roma, 1969, pp. 456–469; G. Di Napoli, *Lorenzo Valla: Filosofia e religione nell'umanesimo italiano*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 1971, pp. 115–122; S.I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo e teologia*, Istituto Palazzo Strozzi, Firenze, 1972, p. 3, starts his treatment with this piece of Valla's paradoxical prose, cf. pp. 3–5 and passim; very much in detail, includ-

has a twofold agenda in his oration: to discuss the very nature of an *encomium* (and, consequently of the exemplary person) and to treat the relationship between theology and philosophy.

The talk begins with a series of digressions, first on the legitimacy of invoking God in an exordium, then on the quality of witnesses. He emphasizes that such invocation is proper to rite and cult and therefore can be employed to non-divine affairs; consequently even evil spirits can be implored. But the true meaning, he insists, is to invoke the help of God himself. Concluding this initial excursus the speaker turns to the “Ave Maria” as an apt way to begin an encomium in praise of the Saint.²² As for the form, we here encounter a classical intertext. For Valla integrates that what he is set to do into the ancient tradition and distances himself from it at the same time. He gives the current practice a traditional meaning and interprets this same tradition from his humanist historical point of view. The beginning is an adequate prelude to the speech, inasmuch as it creates the expectation that there is only one who deserves praise, namely God — however, by the intercession of Our Lady.

In the second digression he identifies martyrs, witnesses (testimonies) and confessors, drawing upon the etymology of the word *martyr*.²³ On philological grounds he argues that there is no difference between martyrs and confessors, because whoever confesses Christ is a martyr. Again the speaker follows a double strategy: on the one hand, he levels out any hierarchy among the saints, on the other hand, he fulfils the expectations of his audience in placing Aquinas on the supposedly higher level of a martyr.

ing the history of this genre and Renaissance Thomism: S.I. Camporeale: *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo, Riforma e Controriforma*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma, 2002, pp. 123–176 (first in: *Memorie Domenicane* 7, 1976); he maintains (p. 152ff) that after Valla had been suspect of heresy by Dominicans in Naples, in 1444, now the invitation by the Roman center of the same order was a move in a debate on Thomism within the Dominicans, and that, consequently, Valla was even expected to criticize Aquinas. O'Malley (1981) shows that it was the “Humanist Pope” Nicholas V to establish the annual celebrations on the 7th of March; he also mentions that a “sermo sacer et evangelicus” (no reference for this quote given) was to be delivered during a solemn Mass at the Minerva (p. 9; with a list of eight panegyrics between 1449 and 1510 that are extant), but he does not discuss how it was possible that a lay person, as Valla was, could be invited to deliver this sermon (if it was a sermon what Valla produced), and how a homily was to be replaced by a panegyric.

²² *Encomium*, p. 390ff.

²³ *Encomium*, p. 391.

This exordium must have appeared to his audience as patchwork (“*pannus consutus et ex varietate pannorum confectus*”), so that some declared him to be “insane.”²⁴ Probably this reaction was prompted by the fame of the philologist, of whom one might well have expected a polemic similar to the later one of Mantovano, or even worse. In fact, Valla had criticized Aquinas’ comments on St. Paul for his ignorance of the Greek language.²⁵ It was one of the humanist’s strategies “to coerce truth to emerge by various reasons, contradictions, examples, and comparisons.”²⁶ The hidden truth that Valla’s digressions are intended to put forth, is the uniqueness of veneration, as it is due to God, and to stress that any other praise is legitimate only as a derivative from and in function of the true praise of God. In the same way as he Highest Good is the ultimate measure of lust, so has the cult of saints to be related to true holiness, if the panegyrist shall be justified.

Approaching more closely his topic, Valla plays with the name of Thomas by observing that in Hebrew this name may signify either abyss or twin brother (p. 392). Figuratively speaking, *this* Thomas was an abyss of learning; and he was in himself science and virtue intertwined. This allows Valla to liken Aquinas to Cherubs and Seraphs, because in his combined virtues of knowledge and charity he is, indeed, the Angelic Doctor, a title Valla presupposes as known without mentioning it (p. 392). Having thus consciously played with the rhetorical devices of eulogy,²⁷ the speaker expresses his embarrassment that he is not able to applaud Thomas for those achievements for which his hosts consider him to be famous, namely for having shaped scholastic

²⁴ Vahlen, 1886, ‘Introduction’, p. 385, quotes Gaspar Veronensis, *De gestis tempore P.M. Pauli II*: “cum audivisset Laurentium Vallam [...] illum insanire iudicavit [...]. Nam [...] evagatus est atque stulte digressus [...]. Fuit ergo illius oratio velut pannus consutus et ex varietate pannorum confectus.” O’Malley (1981) calls it a “counter-panegyric” (p. 22).

²⁵ Cf. Poggio Braccionlini, ‘Invectiva quinta’ in L. Vallam, in: Poggio Braccionlini, *Opera*, Basel, 1538 (Reprinted as *Opera I*, ed. R. Fubini, Bottega d’Erasmus, Turin, 1964), p. 246: “[Valla] qui Aristotelem et caeteros graecos, e nostris Albertum Magnum, et Thomam Aquinatem ut ignaros philosophiae reprehendat, qui beatum Hieron. et Augustinum duo fidei nostrae luminaria, male de doctrina Christiana sensisse suis prophanissimis vocibus et scriptis dicitet [...].” Thus might have been the expectations, when Valla was invited to talk about Aquinas. Valla’s critical remarks on Aquinas’ New Testament commentaries in Camporeale (2002: 266–330).

²⁶ L. Valla: ‘On pleasure—De voluptate’, ed. A. Kent Hiatt & M. Lorch, Albaris, New York, 1977, III, XII, 1977, §6, p. 272: “At orator multis et variis rationibus utitur, affert contraria, exempla repetit, similitudines comparat et cogit etiam latitantem prodire veritatem.”

²⁷ *Encomium*, p. 392: “quid tu cum ista hyperbole vis [...]?”

theology.²⁸ Referring to a lecture that was given previously on the same occasion by another speaker, he admits that among the Dominicans Aquinas is considered “second to none.” This eulogist had even reported of a dream in which St. Augustine—doubtless the greatest theologian—declared Aquinas equal to him in glory. But the main reason for Thomas’ priority over any other theologian would be that he—as distinguished from earlier theologians—had applied logic, metaphysics, and all natural philosophy to proving theology. But here Valla has a problem. Even though he claims to like Aquinas’ subtlety and his diligence, as well as the vastness, variety and ‘resoluteness’ of his learning, he despises “the so called metaphysics and the modes of signification” etc. introduced by the more recent theologians.²⁹ It should be noted that the encomiast is not accusing Aquinas of such terminology; rather, he interrupts his praise (“Ista autem . . .”) in order to chastise the abuses of the later developments in scholastic theology.³⁰ While Valla’s contemporaries admire them like new heavenly spheres or planetary epicycles, Valla deems them indifferent if not injurious to research and alien to the ancient theologians, in any case. To him, the author of the “Trenching (or grafting, or reparation) of logic and philosophy”,³¹ these “barbaric” terms such as “ens, entitas, quiditas, identitas, reale, essenziale, suum esse” are both pointed and pointless (p. 394). Not only did the Church fathers ignore this terminology, given that it did not exist in Greek; it also fails to foster any knowledge of the divine. According to Valla, there is only one way of doing theology, that of St. Paul: The Fathers “se totos ad imitandum Paulum apostolum contulerunt, omnium theologorum longe principem ac theologandi magistrum” (p. 394).

Well then, what to do with Aquinas? It seems he has to find his place among the venerated theologians. The names given here include Cassianus, Anselm and other medieval scholars, including John Duns

²⁸ *Encomium*, p. 393: “eum ad probationem theologiae adhibere logicam, metaphysicam atque omnem philosophiam [. . .]. Lubricus hic mihi et anceps locus [. . .].”

²⁹ *Encomium*, p. 394: “Ista autem quae vocant metaphysica et modos significandi et alia id genus, quae recentes theologi tamquam novam sphaeram nuper inventam aut planetarum epicyclos admirantur [. . .].”

³⁰ Di Napoli (*cit.*) p. 118ff, mentions that “modi significandi” is not Thomist, but rather Occamist terminology, and underscores that Aquinas is eventually being presented as the “minor male” in comparison with Scotus and the later scholastics (p. 122).

³¹ L. Valla, ‘Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie’, ed. G. Zippel, Antenore, Padua, 1982, 2 volumes.

Scotus and Albert the Great. All these seem to be inferior to Aquinas. The serious competition, then, is with the great Church Fathers. Valla's Solomonic solution is to create a set of five Greek and five Latin Church Fathers that are paralleled as twins (p. 395):

Basil – Ambrose
 Gregory of Nazianzus – Jerome
 John Chrysostom – Augustine
 Dionysius the Areopagite³² – Gregory the Great
 John Damascene – Thomas Aquinas

In order to bring his unusual panegyric to a harmonious conclusion, Valla attributes to each of the twin theologians a musical instrument: *lyra*, *cithara*, *psalterium*, *tibia* and — to John Damascene and Aquinas — the *cymbalum*. The speaker does not dwell too much on the symbolism of such instruments, and justly so, since the cymbals have a bad resonance in St. Paul, who in a passage not far from another, already cited, called a man without love “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal”³³ What he emphasizes is, again, the motive of twins, because the cymbal is made of two parts that, brought together, bring about “a merry, blithe, and plausible sound” (p. 395), in harmony with all the other teachers of the Church.

The humanist thus reaches his aim in praising Aquinas without dispensing with his philosophical and theological convictions, and he does so in the dialectical way that marks all his philosophy: provoking the audience and reshaping common assumptions of scholarship into a new harmony.

What do we learn from this about Aquinas? *Ex negativo* these two examples of the Renaissance treatment of Thomas show how not to use his teaching: As soon as Aquinas, as any other teacher, for all his virtues and excellence, is extolled as the one and only teacher we lose sight of what he himself was aiming at, namely research into the truth of Christian belief with all means humanly available. Making him divine, above his merits as a Saint, threatens to overshadow the original

³² This pairing is, interestingly justified with the remark that it was Gregory who among the Latins first makes mention of him, a statement that entails some doubt about his authenticity.

³³ 1 Cor. 13, 1 (King James Version); on symbolism of musical instruments see H. Giesel, *Studien zur Symbolik der Musikinstrumente im Schritum der Alten und Mittelalterlichen Kirche*, Bosse, Regensburg, 1978. (Thanks to Aušra Grigaravičiute for this reference.)

source of Christian truth and to overload Aquinas with a burden he should not have to carry. Thus far as regards the person of the Angelic Doctor. The consequences of this go much further, given that “a small error in the beginning grows into a larger one.” For the counter reaction, which we can observe in Mantovano, involves and endangers the whole approach to science and knowledge. Once the later humanist is compelled to emphasize that Aquinas was just another human thinker, he opens the door to the notion that no one will ever have access to truth, and that in the best case, the whole of humanity is the store of wisdom. Christianity, then, becomes an option, but nothing more than that.