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Article

The Sacramental Approach to the Sacred in Thomistic Perspective

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Abstract: The main challenge of theology is the adequate manner of the transmission of what is sacred and belongs to the transcendent order by means of appropriate categories of immanent religious language. In history, there was a debate between the univocal and equivocal approach, but the main Christian rules of telling about the sacred were shaped by Thomas Aquinas, who proposed analogy as a fundamental tool: in the middle of similarity there is still great dissimilarity. From this perspective, the world is seen as sacramental, so all material reality refers to something more and further. In this way, the sacred has a transitory character. Nowadays, however, the naturalistic narrative dominates among many theories of the sacred. This paper will begin by dealing with several types of theological narrations about the sacred in Christian theology (metaphysical and historical, mediating and representative, etc.). Then it will go into characterizing the Thomistic storytelling and its hermeneutical rules. Finally, it will consider the role of imagination in transmitting the sacred (Chesterton, Lewis, McGrath) and how the new perception of the sacred—so visible in pilgrimages such as Camino de Santiago—can be integrated in a new thinking about the city of the future.

Keywords: Biblical Thomism; religious narratives; virtue epistemology; sacred space; pilgrimage; hermeneutics; sacraments; interpretation; sacred storytelling; sacred narrative

1. Between "Place," "Time," or "Relation"—New Language of the Sacred

Contemporary culture is an arena of rivalry among numerous narratives that fulfill a hermeneutic, etiological and persuasive function, exerting a great influence on the conduct of individuals and societies. Others are convinced by those who tell a better story—a story that will coherently describe the reality experienced by the human being, provide him or her with the keys of interpretation or create an adequate hermeneutic situation, by which the full dimensions of reality will be read. This susceptibility to stories results from anthropological conditions, namely, from the identity of the narrative (Ricoeur 1991), but also from the search for comprehensive explanations, and not only partial ones (Pawłowski 2018, p. 159).

In the reflections on humanity and the world, especially in those based on realistic metaphysics, God and His presence in the world played an essential role in the narrative, thanks to which the world was also sensible and not only rational. St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) was the theologian and thinker who combined these two aspects. His reflections on understanding the sacred, the language in which the reality of the sacred should be described and the ways of its transmission, allow for a better understanding of the medieval approach to the sacred—which has been reflected in pilgrimages to holy places (Seryczyńska 2019)—in experiencing holy times or celebrating holiness in the liturgy.

These classic stories about holiness are today undermined by a strictly naturalistic discourse, which is part of the tradition of "disenchanting the world." It does not see the need of including a mention of what is holy and about God in the description of the world. For other narratives, God is regarded as one of the objects of this world—He is not treated as a transcendent but as an immanent absolute principle—along the lines of the Greek gods in mythology that lived "in the world." The God of Christian Revelation,

who is the Logos, changes this perspective and—without losing closeness—remains in a transcendent relationship to the world. It seems that many contemporary approaches try to naturalize the experience of the sacred, making God one of many objects in the world again (panentheistic approaches, in their extreme form, referring to the world as the body of God).

As Ted Peters emphasized, in such narratives about the world, God becomes merely an additional "supplement" (Peters 2017). Simultaneously, the Thomistic approach of God indicates His non-contrastive presence, which as the First Cause gives power to all created causes and does not obscure creation or force a place for itself (Roszak 2017). His presence is revealed in the power of creatures and as a final cause. The story about such a sacred, which one discovers but not collides with as with an object, is a typically Christian narrative in which the concepts of mystery and sacrament play an important role. From the very beginning, they were in opposition to the Roman way of perceiving the *sacred* and the *profane*, the spatial and legal, although the sense of the sacred was fundamental for Christians, the emphasis is shifted to the interiority and the connection with the cult in which God becomes present.

Contemporary remarks about the cultural weakening of the sense of the sacred or even the desacralization of life do not prove its absence but rather point to a change in its understanding consisting in greater emphasis on relationality (Roberts 2001). By linking the sacred with religiosity, this discussion extends to the issues of identifying what can be defined as religious: whether it will only be the opposite of the profane—on the basis of zones or areas separated from everyday life—or if Christianity and Christ will bring a new concept of what is sacred, which slowly transforms the natural sense of it—developed in the course of evolution—by responding with the fullness of Revelation to this search in the dark.

2. The Thomistic Significance of *Sacrum* and the Manner of Attaining It

According to Aquinas, the grammar of the discourse on God is not extremely apophatic but requires a clear definition of how to adjudicate about God—and this is where he begins the *Summa Theologiae* (Hochschild 2019, p. 157; D'Ettore 2019, p. 43; Herrero Hernández 2019, p. 364). We need to know what our language, in which we try to make statements about God, really signifies. We speak of God, who is one and straight, through a series of terms that infer about Him just as the effects speak of their cause. Despite the awareness that the speaking about God will never be fully expressible, Thomas is convinced of the value of such discourse about God, which, although difficult, is of great importance: it is better to know little about essential topics than much of what is cliché.

For Aquinas, the way of perceiving the presence of God is not something accomplished "directly" but needs to be discovered, for God is not one of the many causes present in the world but the First Cause. Being the First Cause does not imply a chronological order but a different ontological order. This leads to a non-contrasting accountability of the Creator–Creation relationship testifying to His power, not weakness, for the good in discovering Him is inscribed in His nature, which, after all, is the pouring of goodness on others. God belongs to a different order, and therefore He cannot be told like any other hero, but He is in creation through being, power, and presence (Roszak and Huzarek 2019). The existence of God—though obvious in itself—is not something apparent from the prospect of creation: the discovery becomes possible by the effort of reason, which discerns the cause from its effects. This however, is possible in two ways: metaphysical and historical narratives. Both are present in Aquinas. Nevertheless, before we present these two ways of transmitting the sacred and the main ways of speaking about God, it is worth commencing with Aquinas' understanding of the very idea of the sacred. From it one can understand the significance of "sacred" places, times, or people, and why such a way of storytelling is the most appropriate here.

2.1. Sacredness in the Relational Key

The proper sense of the sacred in Aquinas can only be grasped in remembering the holiness of God, which should be recognized through the prism of two terms: *sacrum* and *sanctum* (Horvat and Roszak 2020). It is they that build a sense of sacredness or a network of derivatives, like the sacraments, holy places, or sacred things (such as sacred oils). Thomas is aware that defining them as sacred is neither substantial nor reistic, as if certain things were holy by themselves, but they become so through certain relationships to what is holy in itself. The basic sacramental scheme makes itself known here. That is why Thomas distinguishes between two types of sacred, in the proper sense when it comes to a holy man, that is a holy subject, and in a secondary sense with regard to things, places, times, events that are sacred through relationships—by reference to holiness, by possessing the power of sanctification. (Super Sent., lib. 4 d. 8 q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 co.) Obviously, there is also a gradation here, depending on the degree of intensity of this relationship: whether it merely indicates something sacred (*aliquid sacrum*)—as everything that exists evokes goodness and the wisdom of the Creator—or if it rather brings what is holy (a difference between the signs in the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT)). This is explained in the "Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews":

> But the Greek text does not take it that way, because it says, *mundane holy*. Hence, a difference between the New Testament and the Old was that, although both are bodily, the former contains grace and is holy, and in it the divine power works salvation under cover of visible things. This was not so in the Old Testament because it contained no grace in itself. (In Heb. [rep. vulgata], cap. 9 l. 1.)

In this way, Thomas not only distinguishes and shows the mediation structure from what it brings, but demonstrates how to receive what is sacred. The key example are the sacraments, which bring grace through material signs: By defining them as "sacred signs," Thomas is referring to holiness deriving from the fact that they relate to something sacred, not only as a sign but also as a cause ("*inquantum ordinantur ad aliquid sacrum non solum per modum signi, sed etiam per modum causae*"—ST, III, q. 62 a. 1 ad 1). The very name sacrament refers to containing something sacred (*continet aliquid sacrum*), whereby something may be sacred in an absolute way (e.g., the Eucharist in which Christ is present) or because of something else (e.g., baptismal/holy water in the sacrament of baptism—ST, III, q. 73 a. 1 ad 3). St. Thomas, in the prologue to the "Commentary on the First Letter to the Corinthians," draws attention to this duality in the perception of holiness, and thus the consequences on the part of the sacraments. He suggests reading the sacraments as *secretum*, and in this way relating them to sacred things as well as signs of sacred things that not only are resembling these things but causing them, as it can be seen in the seven sacraments of the Church: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, the anointing of the sick, priesthood, and marriage (*Baptismus, confirmatio, Eucharistia, poenitentia, extrema unctio, ordo et matrimonium*). These are not, however, separate understandings but converging within themselves. In following St. Augustine, Aquinas recalls that their essence is *a divine power that is secretly accomplishing our salvation* (In 1 Cor, prol.).

The scholastic distinction between matter and form would be an essential way of recognizing holiness: in the case of holiness, all human actions would be its matter, which would gain their identity through form, and thus orientation toward God (hylomorphism). Therefore, in the net of references that determine the sacred, grace and love are the correlates of holiness understood in this way, its distinctive signs, as somehow constituting its form. For both grace and love express a relationship to God.

At the same time, it is worth noting that worship is the key to understanding the Thomistic idea of the sacred, because it is from the relationship to worship that every activity or thing derives its sacred character. This is mentioned in the *Summa Theologiae*, based on the idea of *ordinatio*:

> A thing is called "sacred" through being deputed to the divine worship. Now, just as a thing acquires an aspect of good through being deputed to a good end,

so does a thing assume a divine character through being deputed to the divine worship, and thus a certain reverence is due to it, which reverence is referred to God. (ST II-II, q. 99 a. 1co)

This designates a functional and relational significance of the sacred, which Thomas most willingly speaks about in terms of a certain *ordo* (Menessier 1930, p. 70) that concurrently makes the thinking about ordination easier, which is such because of its specific relationship to the sacred (Super Sent., lib. 4 d. 24 q. 2 a. 1 qc. 3c). Thus, it is not defined in opposition to *profanum*, but understands this reality through the sacred, which manifests itself and gains significance through external signs of religion or internal worship (Marshall 2016). As a result, the sacred is not autonomous but has a servant form because it expresses and crystallizes faith "without confusion and without separation," to evoke the famous Chalcedonian formula. Thus, it would be unimaginable for Thomas to look at the sacred without reference to God Himself, as evidenced by short definitions of holiness such as *sacrum dicitur quod est Deo dicatum* (ST I-II, q. 101 a. 4 arg. 3). In the latter context, when considering the sanctity of the holy day—Sunday, the seventh day of creation on which God rested—he observes that "the sanctification of anything consists primarily in that it rests in God. For that reason, things offered to God are called 'holy'" (ST I, q.73, a.3c).

Its separation from other things and its allocation for worship is performed by virtue of an act of blessing (Margelidon and Floucat 2011, p. 462), making it the seat of sanctity—although still elusive—thus it can be seen that sacredness has an ecclesial or institutional dimension, introducing a hierarchical order. Due to the primacy of the sanctification of man, this place is assigned to the sanctity of man, and therefore the sin of sacrilege does not only have extents but is more grievous (*gravius*) when it is accomplished against a saintly person (ST II-II, q. 99 a. 3c).

Thomas is aware of the ancient definition of holiness in the culture of Western Christianity, which was associated with purity, both as *puritas* and *munditia*, hence uncontamination, which brought to mind the old rites of purifying things in order to devote them to the service of God. Therefore, Thomas, following Isidore of Sevilla, explains that "his word *sanctus* may be connected with purity if it be resolved into *sanguine tinctus*, since, in olden times, those who wished to be purified were sprinkled with the blood of the victim" (ST, II-II, q. 81, a. 8c).

2.2. Static vs. Dynamic Sacred. Two Stories: Historical and Metaphysical

The description of holiness defined in this way in classical theology, which is revealed by reference to its source, namely God, was based on the language of metaphysics that was intended to comprehend the relationship between what is here and what is beyond (meta-), but in close relation to the biblical language that tells the story of God's involvement in history (Vijgen 2018, pp. 374–76). The balance between the Bible and metaphysics achieved in the scholasticism of the 13th century was violated in subsequent epochs, and the postulates of de-Hellenization of theology and the influence of German historicism deepened the differences. At the same time, there were postulates inspired by evolutionism to regard the truths presented by religion as *Aufhebung*—a Hegelian term that points to overcoming religion. This is related to the emergence of secular alternative narratives, but they seem to regard God as one of the elements of the world while the reasonability of the world itself testifies to God–Logos. It is not the "inexplicability" that proves the existence of God, the necessity of recognizing Him in the narrative as a hero, but seeing him as the First Cause (Oleksowicz 2015, p. 142). This narrative is also inspiring today. Reviewing the previous attempts, it can be seen that the attempts of great narratives (Big History) are shown only in purely naturalistic and immanentist terms: What is the place for God in such a context? But are we not treating Him as one of many—His presence in what categories? Nevertheless, if the divine dimension is ignored this cosmic–scientific great narrative is incomplete and very contingent (Turbon 2020). As Peters argued, the Big History is not big enough if it ignores the moment in which the emergence of human self-awareness was associated with a special perception of the divine and its transforming grace.

This brief historical overview reveals two competing ways of narrating the sacred that have emerged in the history of theology. They are not contradictory to each other, but complementary. The first is a narration of the sacred through history, traditionally associated with the biblical mentality, strengthened by the historicism of the 19th century, and by contemporary cognitive narratology (Horvat and Pavlić 2020). Such a dynamic approach seems to stand at the antipode of the second, metaphysical approach, which seeks to capture not the course of events, but the essential, which lasts despite the passage of time. It is worth taking a brief look at both narratives about the sacred.

The metaphysical narrative is essentially based on the attempt at reading God as a final cause, which is the essence of the fifth way of Aquinas. The divine principle does not replace creatures in their natural action: its role consists in ordering. Even Aristotle considered the nature and actions of humans—who organizes the means and justifies them—in these categories. The metaphysical narrative reveals such dynamism to humans from the perspective of *finis ultimus*. The metaphysical description is a transcendence of what is only given in experience, just as the cosmology of quantum notes that the spatiotemporal description is not the most profound description of reality (Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz 2019, p. 103). This does not signify a rivalry with scientific descriptions about the world, but a transgression of them and a provision of answers to what is beyond nature.

The historical narrative, on the other hand, is not a simple metaphysical opposite but a development from the perspective of means rather than goals. Moreover, Thomas emphasizes the difference between a theoretical and a practical, active, and contemplative life, putting the reflection on the goal as the basis. The goal, however, is not achieved for the historical narrative, which is set on the way in anticipation of achieving the goal of metaphysics. The historical narrative about the sacred shows that it is about the way in reaching the goal, the freedom of created beings, which better reflects the goodness of God. In the "Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews," when the words that God has manifested Himself in history "many times and in different ways" are uttered, St. Thomas notes that due to the greatness of the mystery different ways of reaching people are necessary (*In Hbr.*, cap. I, lect. 1).

Thus, this kind of historical narrative primarily shows the *ordo* and, because of that, provides an answer to why and how things are happening in the world. This is not a ready answer, but as in the case of Job, to whose questions about the meaning of evil in the world God answers by a series of questions about the context of the whole and with a zoological overview of creation (McLeish 2020, p. 59; Iwański 2013). Its purpose is to discover the existence of a broader order, intellectual humility rather than what humans do not know beyond their perspectives. The historicity of the Revelation and the narrative of faith makes us realize the real personal contact with God reveals the dynamics of eschatological fulfillment. The temporality emphasized in this narrative is not an imperfection, but a good that enables freedom. In such a narrative about the sacred relevance is the key (*convenientia*), by which Thomas explains "why" God chooses such or other methods. The essence of theology is discovering fittingness, which offers no evidence but indicates a specific "style" of God. In this light, it becomes clear that the testimonies and narratives that leave room for interpretation will be the evidence in this kind of theological argument based on history. This is the difference between experiential and experimental evidence (Nieminen et al. 2020, p. 454).

In the context of these two narratives—the metaphysical and historical—is religion necessary for the interpretation of the sacred? This often applies to the Church, which mediates in the sacred but is not the owner of it. It is necessary to bear in mind the philosophical assumption of modern times that there is no pure subject, but it is always shaped. This is how virtue ethics and art perceive it today. It is not about rigid rules but access to Tradition, which is the hermeneutic principle: it cares for the whole, in spite of Gnostic simplifications (Marcos and Marcos 2019, p. 27). It can therefore be said that the access to the sacred in Christianity is mediated but not representative. The narrative is related to reality, yet it requires imagination in order to apply it to all spheres of life.

The sacred is not invented but discovered with the help of narration. This is perfectly demonstrated by the biblical approach, which shows that the creation of the world and the mission of humanity consist in ordering the sacred—understood as the work of God—for there are no fractions of the "profane" without relation to the Creator. Nonetheless, not all of them have the same weight; moreover, the metaphor of gravity and attraction is one of the insightful ones introduced by St. Thomas (*pondus*). In this sense, a theologian is someone aware of the burden and challenge of communicating the sacred as something ordered, which was the subject of efforts in the first generation of Christians.

The Thomistic recognition of the sacred speaks about the way to it, and not that it is given directly—just as spiritual values are transmitted through what is material (In Hebr., cap. I, lect. 5). Thus, the access to the sacred is associated with the ability of organizing, just like poetry that appears from the proper arrangement of the letters: the proofs for the existence of poetry do not correspond to the existence of letters but to the purpose they possess. Thus, discovering the purpose is the domain of the narrative that shows the whole. By that very fact, the world acquires a sacramental dimension, and in this way it does not focus on or retain itself but refers to what is next. It is a narrative of wisdom that prompts the discovery of a broader perspective of the highest causes, from which the connections between the lower ones become clear. The concept of order has the key role in such a narrative, which depicts the action of God as wise and therefore based on certain reasons that are not arbitrary decisions but considerate of the nature of things (Huzarek 2017).

These two types of narratives—the metaphysical and historical—raise, however, other questions about the sacred: Is it possible to speak about a sacred place or only about sacred time? This is especially evident in the case of modern pilgrimages to shrines (Rucquoi 2019; Mróz 2016). In this case, the feeling of sacredness is related to the relationship or being ordered toward God, and thus specific times (pilgrimage) and places (the purpose of the journey) become sacred, which is in line with the classic perception of the virtue of religiosity (Roszak and Seryczyńska 2020). It is a virtue that regulates the conduct of other virtues, and therefore what relates humans to the principle that is the source of their lives (hence *pietas*—piety—refers to the homeland, parents, and God) becomes religious.

2.3. Access to the Sacred

The classical Thomistic tradition emphasizes the double path of reaching what goes beyond what is directly given. In other words, for Aquinas the natural way of perceiving the sacred is not through the directness of the approach—proper for the saved in heaven—but what is divine comes second and thus is mediated. It is not given by intuition (it is a quality of the celestials) but leads on a path of discovery where it takes some effort in order to "see" it.

The theological tradition indicates several stages of the path leading to God, which is also relevant to contemporary pilgrimage and the human relationship to the sacred (Duda 2014; Mróz 2017, p. 60), and moreover related to the tradition of Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite and the way of purification, enlightenment, and unification. The first stage, the purification, deserves particular attention as it confirms that access to the sacred requires a certain threshold of sensitivity since it is not given in direct view.

This makes it clear that Christian storytelling does not only perceive two ways, but also indicates—following Aquinas—access to the *sacred* expressed in Latin terms: per *modum cognitionis* and *per inclinationem* or *connaturalitem* (Huzarek 2018). They appear already in the first question of his *Summa Theologiae*, when St. Thomas ponders how the sacred should be adjudicated and notices two ways that give rise to a twofold wisdom. The first stems from closeness or participation in the cognized reality, itself due to the sharing of nature, and thus wisdom is gained through participation in wisdom (e.g., in spending time with wise people). This is a way of *patiens divina*—that is, experiencing the sacred—which belongs to the tradition of Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite, rather than acquiring information intellectually. For this way of accessing the sacred one needs preparation and virtue, because it is only then that a person makes perfect statements about what possesses

virtue (Mróz 2018). St. Thomas binds this way of reaching the sacred with the gifts of the Holy Spirit that give participation in the supernatural life. Because the second way is a cognition in line with the proper instruction of moral teachings, therefore it is not necessary to possess the virtue in order to truly tell about something (ST I, q.1, a.6, ad 3).

2.4. Christological Rule: The Communication of Idiom

In Christian storytelling about Christ as the Incarnated Lord, theology developed during the first centuries a series of principles that allowed for a proper understanding of the challenges of Christ as true God and man (Strzelczyk 2010, p. 298). One of the main tools is the *communicatio idiomatum*, which, by the union of the divine and human nature in Christ (the hypostatic union), derives consequences for the adjudication about Christ. The human properties of His nature can be referred to the divine by reason of this unification of natures. This is the basis for paradoxical statements such as "crucified Lord of Glory" or "God is dead," which characterize the theological language and have been the axis of the doctrinal dispute for centuries. The distinction between the ontological (one subject) and the logical-linguistic aspect is based on the unity of nature and the duality of property in the person of Christ.

This grammar of the Christological discourse reveals a broader approach to the theological description of the sacred, which becomes concrete in Christ. Christ is a concrete embodiment of the perceived sacred, in other words, "Jesus Christ is a concrete content, shape, substance and meaning of the sacred" (Stech 2018, p. 215). Christianity therefore proposes a specific narrative about the sacred that is not perceived in isolation, autonomously, but in relation to Christ, in the conviction that He is the source of what appears to be sacred. Attempts to present this relationship do not require a tight seal in linguistic areas but exchange by maintaining unity.

3. Thomistic Storytelling about the Sacred

The Thomistic way of telling about God (and about sanctity in general) rests on several foundations, pillars that are worth presenting.

This is an expression of the classical approach in theology, which takes into account what Revelation is in itself (*in se*) and how it makes itself known to humans (*quoad nos*). Christianity is based on "storytelling," proclaiming, but also mentioning, reminding—anamnesis so evident in the liturgy. It is not a simple account of events on the basis of a reportage, but a testimony of witnesses aimed at conveying the revelation of the mystery of God in Christ with the aim of leading to faith, and therefore open to mystagogy. The reader of Scripture enacts in his/her life what is read in the history of salvation and ultimately serves the transformation of Christians (Wright 2015, p. 21). As MacIntyre observed, "the reader thus discovers him or herself inside the Scripture" (MacIntyre 1990, p. 83).

3.1. Between Univocal and Equivocal: Analogical Language on God

The language of telling about God is one of the primary issues to be resolved in the theological discourse. Thus, we ascribe univocal meaning to words, and therefore the same meaning applies to God and creation, so that the discourse about God can be understandable to us. As known, it was John Duns Scotus, who, driven by the desire to bring the science of God closer to the human language, postulated the univocal concept of being because he feared that otherwise our words about God would be exposed to the effects of an equivocal approach and, therefore, of complete diversity. However, there is a radical asymmetry between the Creator and the Creation, which makes our words spoken from the perspective of creation—arising from the experience of reality, emerging from materiality, and reaching the mental—unable to grasp the mystery of God (Soars 2020, p. 13). This asymmetry gives rise to a negative theology, which recognizes that we can only say about God who He is not. Its purpose is not to remain silent about God but to reject the idolatrical discourse that sacralizes verbal formulas and to see the source in Him. As Aquinas observes: "Every effect which is not an adequate result of the power of the

efficient cause does not receive the similitude of the agent in its full degree, but effects reside in the agent simply, and in the same manner [. . .] as said in the preceding article, all perfections existing in creatures divided and multiplied pre-exist in God unitedly" (ST I, q.13, a.5).

That is why Thomas Aquinas, with the acceptance of negative theology, proposes a special way for the theological adjudication—the use of analogies. It breaks the dichotomy between the divine and the human: we can make meaningful sentences about God because of a certain "similar dissimilarity" that exists between the Creator and the Creation. They are not competitors with each other, but the First Cause remains in relation to the created, secondary causes: creation participates in the Creator from Whom it draws the power to exist. All human actions (*poiesis*) are drawn from God's creating power (Milbank 1994, pp. 304–5). In this sense, we attribute joy or mercy to God, but not in an unequivocal sense that we know from the human experience, but in an analogous sense, that is, as a result of what we know as joy or mercy, not bodily emotions. In fact, it is an attempt to adapt the language to the simplicity of God (Hochschild 2019). The principles of the language of analogy, rejected in the 20th century by some representatives of dialectical theology (such as Karl Barth) are, however, the basis of the discourse of classical theology and allow to grasp the meaning of Revelation: God speaks to the creatures through the creature. God's self-expression releases a continuous concatenation of spoken words, and this leads the theological discourse to a constant search for new images, and thus the language is free in an endless pursuit of the divine.

3.2. Diversity of Manner of Speaking (Modus Dicendi)

From a theological point of view, Revelation is distinguished from the way it is transmitted. In this sense, the Bible is not simply a Revelation but a historical testimony of that Revelation. This signifies that testimony is one of the privileged ways of conveying what is sacred. It is the personal commitment of the speaker, of his freedom, and not a simple reporting of events on a chronicle basis. In this biblical narrative about God, who intervenes in history and makes it the history of salvation, a special place is occupied by metaphysics, which is not meant to obscure the transmission of the revealed truth—as the authors of the postulates of the so-called dehellenization considered—but to make it universally available. In the biblical narrative of events that occurred in history, the dimension of testimony is crucial.

The diversity of the language that approaches the mystery of God plays an important role in Thomistic storytelling about the action of God in history. Aquinas emphasizes that it is necessary to distinguish between the ways of adjudicating on God before forming metaphysical conclusions. Thomas explains this in the "Prologue to the Commentary on the *Psalms*" by distinguishing the *modi dicendi* present in the Scriptures in order not to take, for example, statements of a poetic nature literally. Therefore, he distinguishes *modus narrativus* (in historical books), *admonitorius*, *exhortatorius* and *praeceptivus* (prophetic books), *disputativus* (seen in the *Book of Job*), *deprecativus vel laudativus* (in the *Psalms*). This is not a contradiction of the literal sense of Scripture but a way of discovering it. Aquinas continues the path of the school of St. Victor in this way, which, by emphasizing the significance of history and the literal sense, showed that it is about a deeper reading of history, because it contains "something more."

3.3. Sub Tegumento

The Thomistic storytelling about holiness is multi-leveled: the mainstream is not rolling above the surface but somewhat below. This kind of resembles Bach's key (Spaemann 2006), that is, perceiving another piece of information in the ordinary course of

events, not stopping at one level.[1] The history of salvation can also be compared to the way in which information is stored in DNA: it is as if different stories—by using the same records—were written in different sentences on the same text page (Bancewicz 2015, p. 62). This denotes that it is not about extracting a specific sequence of events and labeling them as "divine," but reading them on a deeper level, covert (*tegumentum*) from direct cognition.

Thus, it is about discovering the secret salvific action of God under the veil of visible things. Thomas points to this principle of discourse in his "Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews," when he states that "in the divine power salvation works under the cover of visible things" ("*sacrum est in quo sub tegumento rerum visibilium divina virtus salutem secretius operator*"—*In Hbr.* cap. IX, lect.1, no. 415). Thomas does this against the background of the differences between the OT and the NT, that this "containing grace" in signs is a distinguishing feature of both testaments. This dimension is worth the notice, especially in Aquinas' "Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews": to tell something new is to delve deeper, not to abandon the old story. For this reason, an analysis of the "heroes of faith" from the Old Testament appears in this Letter.

The theological narrative—although it concerns history—is not an event-driven history but rather a view of the whole (*ordo*). This corresponds to the sense of Tradition that combines the past with the present. It is about understanding the pedigree of thoughts, not fragmentary answers. Such was the ideal of "catena" in the Middle Ages, a chain of patristic quotations important to the scholastic theologian, who shows the connection between protology and eschatology in order to bring out the meaning. Nonetheless, the vision of "genesis" discussed here merely exceeds the description of the causes. It is a constant reference to the whole, needed as an orientation in the field.

3.4. Outside Sacramentality There Is No Christianity

Another element of Thomistic storytelling is the conviction about the sacramental nature of the created reality, which refers to something more. Since the visible world is a path leading to an encounter with God, this indicates that its meaning is not exhausted in itself, but remains open to transcendence, which is a way of understanding sacredness (Joas 2012). The difficulties or even the "sacramental crisis" of today entails the loss of a symbolic understanding of the world in favor of the functionalist one. This sacramental dimension of creation is often referred to as the sense of the sacred, and in the face of transhumanism attention is drawn to the danger of losing it, and the desacralization of the world regarded without its transcendent reference—and thus as a philosophy of terrorism (Rossetti 2020, p. 631). The sacramental approach is therefore the inclusion into a wider history—the transition—which shows further horizons than here and now, and the unification of people with God, showing the continuity of the Christian's path.

On the canvas of this broad understanding of sacramentality—which tries to grasp the relationship between the spiritual and the material—a narrative about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church is born. They are effective signs of grace and signify the involvement through faith in the history that begins with Christ. The sanctification of humanity through material signs is one of the basic principles, which, if Christianity were to abandon it, would no longer be a saving offer for the world. Christian soteriology is about giving something—though imperfectly—mediated (sacramental) here on earth that will be completed after death (in this sense, a sacrament is a *signum prognosticum*—ST, III, q. 60, a. 3.). In this light, the sacrament is a deposit and a tool leading to the union of people with God, and thus sanctification—participation in holiness ("*sanctificatio hominis est effectus sacramenti*"—Super Sent., lib. 4 d. 8 q. 1 a. 1

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[1] As Spaemann observed: "A few years ago, in a violin script written by Bach, a double code was discovered: if each interval (semitone) is assigned with a letter of the Latin alphabet and combine the first notes of each bar, then the following sentence will be gained: *Ex Deo nascimur, in Christo morimur, per Spiritum Sanctum reviviscimus* [We are born from God, we die in Christ, we will be made alive through the Holy Spirit—PR]. The script contains a beautiful melody. The musicality of this structure is enough to understand why Bach did not reveal a second, hidden meaning. But who, following an ancient rumor, imagines that there is something more and begins to search for a hidden message, mastering Latin, stands to his surprise in the face of an unexpected dimension. Fortunately, Bach's researchers did not allow themselves to be intimidated by 'Occam's razor.'"

qc. 1c). Within the framework of the sacramental hylomorphism (the division of each of the sacramental signs into matter and form), Thomas Aquinas showed in detail how this sacramental conferring of holiness occurs through the material reality (which cannot be confused with physicality). Thus, Christian theology stands on the antipode of magic, which in the very sanctifying matter sees its causative power but does not perceive God who works through matter (Roszak and Tykarski 2020).

4. Christian Narratives and Imaginative Apologetics in the Thomistic Lens

In the presence of such a framework of transmission of the sacred, especially the essence of analogical adjudicating and the sacramental approach, one can understand the importance of imagination in constructing a narrative about the sacred. It is needed, because for St. Thomas, God—by reason of his simplicity—is not the first but the last object of cognition (In De Trinit., q. 1, a. 3c.). Thus, as the metaphysical narrative shows, there is a certain path that leads to the discovery of Him. Reductionism in the functionalistic view of the world causes us to look at reality as only two-dimensional, omitting something important. Therefore, Christian narratives in the 20th century, appealing to the imagination and alternative worlds in which the Gospel message is expressed, are intended to help in perceiving another dimension that led to the emergence of imaginative apologetics (Davison 2011).

For that reason, the transmission of the sacred is not based on a logical syllogism but on showing the big picture. The idea is to tell the whole meaning of the world history, not the details, and thus reveal the ultimate goal (Ramage 2020, p. 316). It is about creating an intellectual and cultural framework that explains a number of particular issues and provides meaning by making everything work. This is not an opposition to the Thomistic schema but a consequence of what was concealed under *ordo rationis* (Panero 2020), that the ultimate goal must be linked to the means leading to it, the subordinated good to which the affect must be committed. Because of the postmodern limitation of the perspective—the looping in one—the requirement of the moment is to change the "formatting" and not the correction of one of the elements. Tensions from the secularizing discourse reveal the differences in both narratives, whereas the semantic alterations and the omission are contentious issues: presenting the whole picture.

In the Christian narrative about the sacred attention is drawn to the proposal of three authors: G. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, and A. McGrath. They share a common theological background and the attempt to use imagination in order to convey the sacred in a renewed way, in the cultural realities of modern culture.

Gilbert Chesterton was convinced that natural theology was an intellectual framework for understanding what is being experienced (Pickering 2020). Therefore, it is not about a prelude of faith but about building that kind of worldview within which faith as intelligible is possible (Ward 1990, p. 1). The value of natural theology depends on the fact that it builds a narrative based on the categories common to culture and not on Revelation. Chesterton actually talks about the art of wonder, which leads him to "sacramental mysticism": if God is God, then everything tells about Him (hence detective stories, literature, imagination), recognizing morality as a dance—a dynamic activity in which attitudes must be synchronized. He wanted to translate the theological truth into non-religious terms in order to build a common ground. It is not about pointing out doctrines that ought to be believed in, but in showing—as in the case of original sin—that they explain reality in the best way. In this manner, theology becomes a great experiment of manifesting how the contents of faith work in life. His proposal is to replace the slow, cumulative gathering of arguments in favor of a rapid experimental and imaginative method.

In turn, C. S. Lewis pointed to the differences between the theories of myth. He noted that Jung and Tolkien were convinced that story gives humanity real meaning, but they differed as to the source: whether it was conscious or not. Christ embodied the hero archetype. Stories show why humanity is where it is today. For Lewis, the idea of general revelation is reason, morality, myth, consciousness, and longing (Trudeau 2020, p. 644).

The proposal of Alister McGrath should be placed on the same line, as he emphasizes that the Christian narrative about the sacred is a domain of imagination, and we usually have problems with it, not with real issues in the science–religion relationship. A classic example is the very concept of nature, which caused many challenges in theological reflection, especially when asked about God's relationship to nature, which was regarded as static and unchangeable. Perceived in such a key, it was a passive element of the created world—not a self-organizing dynamism—which led to many concepts of God intervening in nature in order to force it to act appropriately.

From this perspective, McGrath believes that the Christian vision tells the story further than science but in accord with it, in becoming a full story (McGrath 2011, p. 44). It provides a better conceptual grid and a hermeneutic horizon for the research and investigations currently under way, by which it is possible to understand everything better and establish patterns of meaning in human life. But McGrath's approach can only be understood on the basis of the conviction about the narrative nature of the Christian faith (McGrath 2019a), and not just on the utilitarian use of stories (McGrath 2019b, p. 76). The Christian narrative is a better story because of its imaginative and rational transgression of secular narratives. At the same time, this broadening of horizons is the key to answering questions, giving rise to the belief that it works. It is not about eliminating metaphysics, but about not making it the only language of communication of the sacred. This transmission should be based on cultural empathy, that is, a good knowledge of sensitivities, concerns, and anxieties of culture, but aim at being able to open the mind to alternative possibilities to the current cultural approach, and transform the human existence through appropriate perception of the sacred (Platovnjak 2017). Christian narratives help to make sense of what is expected and offer foundations for appropriating what is really good, true, and beautiful.

5. The Sacred in New Post-Liberal Cities: Insertiveness and Relationality

Despite the fact that the Gnostic cultural paradigm seems to dominate in the era of transhumanism—focusing on the mental while ignoring and depriving us of the material aspect of its significance—the Thomistic storytelling about God emphasizes that God is transcendent to creatures in a non-contrastive sense, and thus intimately present in the world. God remains as the universal cause of being to His creation. The creation of *ex nihilo* positively conveys that it is about the presence of God in creation, which cannot be located to here or there (Soars 2020, p. 14). Therefore, the Chalcedonian *communicatio idiomatum* allows for a new language of sacredness, not based on the contrastive asymmetry between God and creation, but perceiving God as present in creation and revealing Himself through what is created. Beauty and harmony (*ordo*) seem to be a promising way for recognizing this presence (Cessario 2006). In this sense, the sacred architecture of cities does not have to be built on the basis of an exclusive model, but on a difference that does not separate but reveal a greater order and beauty. This sacredness is a reminder of the relationality proper to the concept of God, whose personality Aquinas expressed in the key of the subsisting relationship.

However, this perception of the sacred translates into a vision of sacred architecture in new cities of the future. It is an insertive sacredness that is a consequence of its relational approach, pushing forward and looking for a place for itself to mark its distinctiveness. This new presence has more to do with the evangelical leaven that makes everything around it grow than a closed fortress fearful of being tainted by outside influence. Storytelling about the sacred is thus related to theandricity—a complicity of what is human and divine. This in turn indicates that not every matter has the same value, but is in need of purification. This is one of the dimensions of the presence of architecture—which is intended to purify and show the real value, a place where faith will become culture, for it is the only criterion that confirms the acceptance of the Gospel. The sacred will be built openly and not across borders that create a discrepancy with what is profane. It is noteworthy that sacredness is associated with immutability and constancy, yet open to temporality. Hence, it is not about building "enclaves" of the sacred in the world, but showing from the level of everyday life

and work that it is possible to experience the sacred there—reading the message hidden by materiality. Not giving up work in order to experience the sacred, but discovering deeper dimensions through this work. It concerns the way of building cities and sacred spaces that will purify and simultaneously care for relationships, to transcend one-dimensionality. The insertiveness of the sacred understood in this way flows from the relationship that humans discover in relation to the source of their existence. The architecture, which is intended to express this sacred, will invite people in the midst of their daily duties to enter into a series of relationships (López Arias 2018).

The following contemporary changes in the perception of the sacred, such as the transition from spatial to temporal in experiencing the sacred, carry a number of consequences that include the presence of religious symbols in public places. What architecture will be the most suitable for this sacred sensitivity? It regards building places that discover temporality and the search for new forms of existence, which is possible through unity and not isolation (Szulakiewicz 2017, p. 69). This implies that a human as a metaphysical being is inhabiting a symbolic space open to infinity, which he or she should not turn into "little salvations" or propositions of the gods of evil infinity (Kuźniarz 2020, pp. 11, 331). These are places that reveal the hermeneutic horizon and not so much indicate where a person currently is at, but perceive him or her on a larger scale from the perspective of the whole. These are places where the policy of time is implemented where the immediate return does not count, yet they strengthen the belief in the long-term project which life is, because only in this way can freedom be saved. Contact with this sacredness results in the ability to read the hieroglyphs of God in the world, and thus the way of organizing the means for the ultimate goal. It is a way from reading connections and the relational sacred, to what is the absolute source of the sacred.

In Christian culture, cathedrals were the symbol of this openness and the transmission of the sacred. Programmatically, they were a synthesis of finiteness and infinity, a harmony of order—that revealed the transcendent dimension. These were not simple buildings with a specific functionality. There is a need for the mentality of the ancient cathedral builders who wanted architecture to express the beauty and order of the world pointing to God. This is the code to understanding the world on a deeper level.

Such an understanding of sacredness finds its expression in the liturgical rite of the dedication of the temple—which existed in the history of Christianity—designating the devotion or allocation of a certain space for the worship of God. In various liturgical traditions, this rite had its own unique features, gestures, exposing the role of the altar, gathering the faithful (the Spanish–Mozarabic rite), but they were united by a common theological background. The synthesis may consist of the views of Hugh of St. Victor, who saw the connection between architecture and the actualization of the soul, which during the liturgy, due to the contemplation of love, experiences the presence of God and becomes sacred in itself. This search for Christ is being accomplished through worship in a specific place and time. Hence, "[. . .] a church building is a new visible cosmos symbolizing both Christ's body and the Christian soul; within this building, the yearly liturgical repetition of salvation history is a new saving history interpreted by the particularity of his Incarnation" (Wales 2010). Mozarabic temples were meant to be a reflection of the Temple of Jerusalem, the meeting tent, and the heavenly Jerusalem, according to the images given from the Apocalypse. It can be noted that there are two principles: the incarnational and eschatological, which Ratzinger called the spiritualization of architecture: "To spiritualize means to incarnate in a Christian way, but to incarnate means to spiritualize, to bring the things of the world to the coming Christ, to prepare them for their future form and thus to prepare God's future in the world" (Ratzinger 1997, p. 88). Apart from incarnating the invisible Eschaton, architecture is meant to express what it was for the early Christians: *domus ecclesiae*, a place of daily growth in receiving the Gospel and worship—contributing to the foreshadowed life with Christ.

This perception of the sacred draws attention to the lack of homogeneity, the reality appears to be related to the sacred but not to the same degree or intensity. Rather, it points to a common center around which things gravitate, like circles moving at different speeds around the center. For temples, it is a call not to focus possessively on themselves and eliminate the manifestations of profane life, but to make them revolve around them, discovering dependencies and connections in the spirit of Thomistic religion. Due to this virtue, not only do humans become connected with God, but also do their lives become attuned and coherent.

6. Conclusions

On the one hand, the Thomistic interpretation of the *sacred* is relational and shows that it depends on the reference of material reality to the ultimate goal, which God is. Thus, it opens an essential question for scholastic theology concerning the sacramentality of the world, whose meaning is not confined to itself but refers to something more. In this respect, the Christian's sense of the sacred is not a magical, hypostatic place or thing, incarnations of the sacred, but a forming of *ordo*, an order of references by which a detail gains significance. The loss of purpose in modern culture, the conviction that there is no horizon, the wandering of humans in immanence—lead to the loss of the sacred. From this sacramental characteristic of Christianity, it appears that the sacred is never given directly or straightforwardly, but requires discovering, deepening, and sensitivity for a multilayered reading. It is a perception of materiality as a certain path to the sacred and not in opposition to what is spiritual: just like in Christ, whose divinity was revealed to Christians in His humanity. Not despite this humanity, but through it (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2019, pp. 675–80).

On the other hand, the Thomistic language about the sacred knows its limitations, which result from adopting an analogous rather than an unambiguous predicate. This means that the description of the sacred will never be exhaustive or closed but open to new perspectives. The analogy that reveals similarities without forgetting the differences, indicates that a proper imagination plays an important role in the relationship of the contemporary human to the sacred (Platovnjak 2018). This is an extremely effective resource for contemporary storytelling about the sacred: it reveals the universality of the transmission of faith by placing its most important elements in an alternative cultural arrangement. From this, the answer to what is important in Christianity can be obtained.

Such an approach to the sacred by the Thomistic tradition, derived from Platonic themes (the sacramentality of the world, which refers to eternal ideas) and the Aristotelian (the value of materiality as such), forms the basis for Christian sacred architecture. The tendencies of recent years seem to confirm these intuitions of Aquinas, and the temples are not lonely islands of the sacred on the profane sea, but places and sometimes the building of relationships, and not by dragging all life in reference to God. This ordering in the liturgy does not mean abandoning the profane or entering another dimension, but sanctifying everyday life—which is the great spiritual program of Christianity. Not an escape from the world, but a transformation of it.

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Abbreviations

ST	Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 4–12: Pars prima Summae theologiae* (Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1888–1906)
Super Sent.	S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, t. 1. Ed. P. Mandonet (P. Lethielleux, Parisiis, 1929)
In Hbr.	S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura, t. 2: Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos lectura*. Ed. R. CAI (8ª ed.: Marietti, Taurini-Romae, 1953) pp. 335–506
In Ps.	S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia, t. 14: In psalmos Davidis expositio* (Typis Petri Fiaccadori, Parmae, 1863) pp. 148–312

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