



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
*INITIATION AND MYSTAGOGY IN THOMAS AQUINAS:
THEOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, LITURGICAL, AND PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES*

TILBURG UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGY
THOMAS INSTITUTE
DATE: DECEMBER 13-15, 2018

Conference Topic

Recent research by Torrell (2011), Murray (2013), Klimczak (2014), Blankenhorn (2015), and Mongeau (2015),¹ among others, rightly underlines the spiritual, mystical, liturgical, and pedagogical dimensions in Aquinas's corpus. After all, Aquinas was first a teacher and preacher (or a pedagogue and mystagogue, if you will), who, being himself a man of prayer and mystic of sorts, composed (especially communal-liturgical) texts. But how do (a) spiritual, mystical, and liturgical inspiration, (b) intellectual study and reflection, (b) and (c) the process of passing down faith and knowledge relate to one another?

The conference aims to further explore different issues and aspects related to 'initiation and mystagogy in Thomas Aquinas'. Obviously, these notions can be understood and defined in various ways. Historically, the Greek verb 'mystagogein' (usually translated into Latin as 'initiare') originates in the mystery cults of Greek and Roman Antiquity, where it denoted ritual initiation into the cultic mysteries relating to the worship of goddesses and gods, such as Demeter and Dionysus. Later, Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophers, Gnostics, and Church Fathers, seem to have employed the terms 'mystagogy' and 'initiation' in a broader sense, namely as metaphors for the (primarily inner) journey towards attaining philosophical knowledge, or 'gnosis', or sharing in the divine mystery. In this sense, 'mystagogy' and 'initiation' are no longer viewed as strictly ritual (primarily communal-institutional) processes that are concluded as soon as the initiate has become a member of the religious group. Rather, they are regarded as ongoing processes of learning and as models for continuing spiritual (trans)formation, which can accommodate the personal journeys of individual believers. And it seems to be this broader (more individualistic) understanding that has become popular among practical theologians and researchers in the field of religion education during the past few decades. But how do the notions of 'initiation' and 'mystagogy' (as well as related terms, such as 'manuductio') apply to, and function within, Aquinas's multifarious oeuvre,

¹ B. Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas*, Washington D.C. 2015; G. Mongeau, *Embracing Wisdom: The Summa theologiae as Spiritual Pedagogy*, Toronto 2015; P. Klimczak, *Le Christ Maître dans les commentaires évangéliques de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Fribourg, 2014; P. Murray, *Aquinas at Prayer. The Bible, Mysticism and Poetry*, London 2013; and J.-P. Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality*, Washington D.C. 2011.

especially given the deeply Aristotelian structure of his thought, that is, given the crucial role of a (ecclesial) community in the intellectual and affective development of man as a social, political (and religious) being?

At least four research questions seem to call for a renewed investigation. First (a), with regard to fundamental theology, how do speculative and argumentative reasoning interrelate with affective knowledge (involving well-known concepts such as *pacti divina*, *cognitio experimentalis seu affectiva*, *compassio*, *connaturalitas*, etc.) and what is the effect of this interrelatedness on Aquinas's methodology? Secondly (b), how does moral theology, understood as the ongoing process of developing and deepening the (theological) virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit affect the processes of initiation and mystagogy, both at the individual and at the communal level? Thirdly (c), in terms of Christology and Trinitarian theology, how do the exterior teachings (by words and deeds) and the interior teachings (by illumination, attraction of the will, and the sending of the Holy Spirit) of Christ affect the processes of initiation and mystagogy? Finally (d), concerning liturgy or liturgical theology, how does the liturgy, being itself instructional (see ST III, q. 83), affect our understanding of the nature of liturgical theology?

Confirmed Invited Speakers (in alphabetical order)

- Bernhard Blankenhorn OP (Angelicum, Rome)
- Matthew Levering (Mundelein Seminary)
- Daria Spezzano (Providence College)

Submitting a Paper

Those interested in presenting a paper (of about 20 minutes) should submit an abstract (including a title, a summary of their proposed paper, and their institutional affiliation) to J.I.M.Vijgen@uvt.nl by March 1st, 2018. Notification of acceptance will be given by April 15, 2018.

If your abstract is accepted for presentation, you will be asked to submit your full paper by November 1, 2018 (that is, prior to the conference itself).

A selection of papers will be published at Peeters Publishers afterwards.

There is a participation/registration fee of €150,- (affiliated/tenured scholars) or €50,- (PhD or MA students).

Conference Location

The conference will take place in the heart of the city of Utrecht, the Netherlands. Participants will convene both in the buildings of the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology (Nieuwegracht 65, 3512 LG Utrecht) and at the Ariënsinstituut of the Archdiocese of Utrecht (Keistraat 9, 3512 HV Utrecht).

More information

For more information, please visit the website of the Thomas Institute (www.thomasinstituut.org) or contact one of the members of the organizing committee:
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