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**AQUINAS ON THE APOSTLES
AND
THEIR FITTINGNESS TO THE INCARNATION**

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Abstract

The apostles have a prominent place in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. For example, in the English translations of the Constitutions *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium*, the term “apostles” appears, respectively, thirty-two times and fifteen times. This prominence of the apostles in the Council’s teaching would seem to encourage a proportional prominence in Catholic theology, such as the prominence afforded the apostles in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, Thomas likens the apostles to the Blessed Virgin: “After [Christ] the greatest fullness of grace was conferred on blessed Mary, who was called to be the mother of Christ. Among the rest, however, the apostles were called to a greater dignity than all others, for they received from Christ himself the things that pertain to salvation and the commission to deliver them to others” (c. 8, lect. 5, n. 678). This doctrine on the apostles is related to central features of Thomas’s biography: his membership in the Order of Preachers, his response to Joachimism, and his participation in controversies surrounding the mendicants. But Thomas’s teaching on the apostles has gone understudied.

This dissertation examines Aquinas’s thought on the apostles as it appears throughout the whole of his work. The main texts examined are the scripture commentaries, the commentary on the *Sentences*, the texts pertaining to the mendicant controversies, and the *Summa Theologiae*. My approach to the topic is inspired by Aquinas’s own approach to the mystery of the incarnation. Just as the incarnation is a fitting expression of divine generosity vis-à-vis human nature, so are the apostles a fitting consequence of the incarnation. Aquinas puts forward a unique “apostolic” interpretation of the incarnation according to which the Word became flesh and dwelt especially among the apostles. Another unique feature of Thomas’s approach is his comparison of the apostles’ way of life to that of vowed religious, a comparison that sheds light on the conditions of Christian revelation. For Aquinas, Christian revelation takes place within a context of friendship in which the opposition between the personal and the propositional is minimal. An overview of the apostles material in Aquinas’s works reveals the following recurrent themes: ordered revelation, the impression of teaching on the heart, and the overflow of grace from Christ’s humanity to the apostles. I also cover Aquinas’s views on the apostles’ experience of Christ immediately after the resurrection, the apostles’ confirmation at Pentecost, and their subsequent ministry, including their relation to scripture, unwritten tradition, and the sacraments. In treating these topics, Aquinas discusses the nature of scripture, the Dionysian principle of protective

secrecy, and the special character of individual sacraments. For Thomas, Christ's "greatest miracle" is the spread of the Gospel through the lowly instruments of the apostles. I also discuss Aquinas's explanation of Paul's apostleship and his special fittingness as an apostle. My study of the apostles touches on scholarship related to the "quest for the historical Jesus," ecclesiology, and the theology of revelation. It may also be of interest to Thomists who study Jesus as teacher and Aquinas as a scriptural theologian.

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