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## ENGAGING WITH ISLAMIC THOUGHT THE PARADIGM OF THOMAS AQUINAS

Throughout this article, I will constantly be referring to Mediaeval Christendom. It is therefore appropriate that I clearly state the meaning behind such a term at the outset. Mediaeval Western society was a Christian society; it is often referred to by the term “Christendom”. It is also important to keep in mind that the word “Mediaeval” is used here exclusively in the historical and cultural sense, without any reference to the negative connotation often ascribed to it in non-academic contexts.

### PROSPECTS FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN MEDIAEVAL CHRISTENDOM

Before we begin to address our subject, it would be appropriate to pose a fundamental question: “What type of dialogue existed in Mediaeval times?” One should begin with an *a priori* exclusion of dialogue as it is understood today, given the fact that there existed neither the motive nor the means to implement it.

In fact, Mediaeval society was aware of only three religions: the pagan, which had been surpassed by Christianity; the Jewish, founded upon the precepts of the First Covenant which “Christ fulfilled by his actions and by his teaching”<sup>1</sup> and which was also believed to prefigure the new and everlasting covenant sealed

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<sup>1</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 107, a. 2, resp. All citations of the *Summa* are taken from ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Latin text, English translation, Blackfriars edition (61 vols, Latin and English with notes and introductions), London – New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode – McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964–1980).

by Jesus on the Cross; and finally, the Christian which believed in Jesus as the final revelation of God to humanity.<sup>2</sup> With such a vision in mind it is obvious that any doctrine that is not situated within these parameters, or which proposes some form of belief or conduct which is different, if not contrary, to the Christian vision of God, the cosmos and of society, would be considered a heresy and its promoter an impostor;<sup>3</sup> hence Mediaeval Christendom's hostility toward Islam as a religion. Furthermore, it is necessary to underline the fact that in those times the existence and dissemination of heresy was not understood as an exercise in the freedom of expression, but rather as the cause of social upheaval that could threaten political, social and cultural harmony, which was expected to mirror the harmony of the celestial realm.

Given that there was no unanimity in Mediaeval times in considering Islam as another religion different from Christianity, Muslims were popularly referred to as *Saracens*, a word of uncertain etymology, even though some sources indicate that the term is derived from the Arabic *Šarqī/Šarqiyūn*, meaning *Oriental*.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE TRANSLATION MOVEMENT

That having been said, however, nothing impeded Christian scholars from tapping into the goldmine of wisdom obtained from Islamic manuscripts which were becoming steadily available and translating them from Arabic into Latin. Already in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Benedictines at Salerno and Montecassino possessed translations of medical works, thanks to a monk by the name of Constantine the African (d. 1087). They put these to good use, since monasteries also had hospices attached to them, wherein they would care for pilgrims on their way to Rome or other Christian pilgrimage sites.

Western Mediaeval Christendom, however, remained bereft of any clear understanding of Islam until almost the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when the West received the

<sup>2</sup>The *Letter to the Hebrews* states in fact:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the ages (Heb. 1:1–2; this quotation is taken from *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>R. FLETCHER, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation*, London: Allen Lane, 2003, p. 158.

<sup>4</sup>According to St. John of Damascus (d. 749) it was derived from the Greek *Serraz Kenoi*, which he translates as “abandoned by Sarah.” This derivation is most likely a folk etymology and unreliable, but with a deliberate pejorative thrust. This Father of the Church, who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century under the Muslim domination of the Umayyads, described Islam as “the Heresy of the Ishmaelites.” See St. John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, 101. Here one may also add that pejorative descriptions of Islam were at times conceived as strategies intended to convince Christians of their responsibility to join the crusading movement.

first works of oriental wisdom via Muslim Spain. During this period, the Arabic versions of the works of Greek philosophers, especially those of Aristotle and of Neoplatonic thinkers, together with the original works of Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037), were translated into Latin. This process paved the way, on the academic level, for a phase of intense communication between Muslims and Western Christendom.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century can be described as a veritable renaissance with the process of the translation of works retrieved from the libraries of Toledo that had been taken by the Christian forces in 1085. Here one may detect three stages within this process. The first stage involved the translation of mainly religious works due to collaboration of the monastery of Cluny and its dependencies. The then Archbishop of Toledo, Raymond Sauvetat (d. 1152) desired and successfully achieved his dream of transforming Toledo into the crossroads between two great civilizations. For this reason, he invited the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable (d. 1156), to commission a network of Benedictine scholars with the task of translating works, especially religious ones, from Arabic into Latin. One of the outcomes of this project was the first translation of the Qurʾān undertaken by Robert of Ketton (d.c. 1160). Although somewhat incomplete, it was already an important step forward.<sup>5</sup>

The second stage concerned translations of works with a more philosophical bent. Usually these translations involved the partnership of Jewish and Christian translators, the former translating verbally from Arabic into Castilian, whereas the latter would put down in writing the translation from Castilian into Latin. The most famous partnership was that between a former Jew Ibn Dāwūd (fl. 1135–1153), who later took the name John of Seville and was subsequently appointed Archbishop of the same city, and Dominicus Gundissalinus (or Gundisalvi, fl. c. 1150) who was the Archdeacon of the Cathedral of Cuéllar. Together they translated works of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) such as his *On the Soul* as well as on al-Ġazālī's *Maqāsid al-Falāsifa* (*The Intentions of the Philosophers*). It is common knowledge that the *Maqāsid al-Falāsifa* was the first of a two-part work, the second being entitled the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*). In the first part al-Ġazālī (Algazel, d. 1111) provides a penetrating albeit succinct rendition of the principal doctrines of Islamic peripatetic philosophers, in particular those of al-Fārābī (d. 945) and Ibn Sīnā; in the second, he refutes these very teachings in a systematic manner. In translating the *Maqāsid al-Falāsifa* from Arabic into Latin, Gundisalvi did not translate its prologue setting forth al-Ġazālī's intention of later refuting these views. Consequently,

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed study of Ketton's translation of the Qurʾān and its implications see T.E. BURMAN, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, p. 60–103.

many Mediaeval scholars (including Aquinas) inadvertently operated under the assumption that this part of al-Ġazālī's work expressed his own doctrines.

Gundisalvi was, however, not only a translator but also a philosopher in his own right, since he commented upon the philosophical works that he translated. He believed that his lifelong mission was to serve as a bridge between Islamic and Christian thought. His work *On the Division of Philosophy* was a Latin adaptation of al-Fārābī's *Kitāb Iḥsā' al-'Ulūm* (*The Book of the Divisions of the Sciences*) which he had earlier translated. This adaptation of the Islamic philosopher's work laid the foundations to the syllabi of studies in the principal universities of Mediaeval Europe, beginning with that of Paris.

The third stage of translations was undertaken under the direction of Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187). He himself translated Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Qānūn fī 'l-Ṭibb* (*The Book of the Canon of Medicine*), as well as writings of al-Kindī (d. 873) and possibly of al-Fārābī. Ibn Sīnā's *magnum opus*, the *Kitāb al-Šifā'* was also translated into Latin book by book to be later employed by Scholastics, including Thomas Aquinas.

Following these initiatives, subsequent waves of new works throughout the first part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, especially those of Ibn Rušd (Averröes, d. 1198), underwent translation in Toledo and southern Italy. Here it is necessary to mention the translations of Ibn Rušd's commentaries on the *Nichomachean Ethics* made by Michael Scot (d. 1235) and the translations to the commentaries on the *Categories*, as well as those on the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* undertaken by William of Luna in Sicily, together with the translation of the commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*.<sup>6</sup>

In preserving the works of Islamic thinkers for posterity, these translators laid the groundwork for the veritable resurgence of science, philosophy and theology that took place throughout Mediaeval Christendom between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, it was also natural that these translations would carry with them into Latin Christendom those traces of the controversies that the original works had provoked in the Islamic world a few centuries earlier.

#### RECEPTION OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

It is probable that the teachings of Oriental Islamic philosophers, especially Ibn Sīnā, were initially introduced into Western Christendom by way of the *Maqāsid al-Falāsifa*. Due to the error mentioned above of omitting the prologue, it was quite normal for Latin scholars to consider al-Ġazālī as an enthusiastic

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough analysis of the various stages in the translation process the best work in this field remains G. THÉRY O.P., *Tolède grande ville de la renaissance médiévale: point de jonction entre les cultures musulmane et chrétienne: le circuit de la civilisation méditerranéenne*, Oran: Heintz, 1944.

disciple of Aristotle. In actual fact, the *Maqāsid* was often easier to follow than the writings of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā themselves, given the clarity of exposition on the part of al-Ġazālī. One may therefore understand the intense interest it aroused among Mediaeval translators beginning with Ibn Dāwūd and Gundis-alvi. Also, due to the *Maqāsid*, al-Ġazālī is at times referred to as the *Abbreviator* of Ibn Sīnā.

It was precisely this process of translation that would bring about a full-blown crisis of high culture in Paris two centuries later. As in the case of Muslims in the East, the introduction of Aristotle as interpreted by Islamic scholars opened up for Christians a scientific view of the universe that was in some instances far removed from the religious imagery provided by the Bible. The enthusiastic response and occasionally uncritical acceptance on the part of many Parisian scholars of the Aristotelian corpus by way of Islamic scholarship was viewed by some with a sense of alarm. Pagan thought had infiltrated the very fabric of Christianity. Paris had become the city of the Gentiles.

Engagement with Islamic thought basically underwent two phases: that in which Ibn Sīnā's works were applied to particular issues, such as that of divine illumination, and that in which Aristotle was introduced through the commentaries of Ibn Rušd.

Ibn Sīnā contributed immensely to Mediaeval Western thought, not only through his encyclopedic knowledge of the natural sciences and especially of medicine, but also in the area of philosophy. He was one of the most dynamic and creative thinkers of his era. His innovative ideas found expression in the way that he succeeded in creating a synthesis between Aristotelian metaphysics and Neoplatonic thought. This can be seen particularly in his portrayal of a hierarchical structure of the celestial realm, having God as its summit and the Agent Intellect as the Giver of Forms (*wāhib al-surwar*) at the lower end. As Étienne Gilson has rightly affirmed, early Scholastics saw in this structure a possibility of harmonizing Ibn Sīnā's thoughts with Augustine's doctrine of ideas. In other words, the doctrine of Ibn Sīnā appeared to them an essential tool for the articulation of the Augustinian concept of illumination.<sup>7</sup> This brought about what Étienne Gilson has referred to as *augustinisme avicennisant* (lit. *Avicennizing Augustinism*). This movement was influenced not only by the Latin translations of Ibn Sīnā's works mentioned above, but also by the fact that other works wrongly attributed to him were also translated and eventually proved instrumental to this mediaeval synthesis.

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<sup>7</sup>É. GILSON, "Avicenne en Occident au Moyen Age," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, vol. 36 (1969), p. 99.

Such a mode of interpretation was, however, bound to raise some objections on the part of later Scholastic theologians to the point that some claimed that Avicennian interpretation of Augustine had compromised Augustinian thought, especially his epistemology, his doctrine on causality and, ultimately, his teachings on the relation of God to the world.<sup>8</sup> This synthesis of Ibn Sīnā and Augustine left its mark on the works of Scholastics such as Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), Albert the Great (d. 1280), and, later, John Duns Scotus (d. 1308). Certainly, some of his ideas supplied valuable material for Mediaeval Christian theology, for instance concerning the doctrine on angels and on the soul, yet others offered opportunities for closer scrutiny and animated debate.

Ibn Rušd, on the other hand, received a mixed reception in the Mediaeval West and integrating him into the Christian intellectual heritage proved to be a far more arduous task. The difficulty was twofold since it implied the acceptance of a philosopher who was a pagan as well as of his commentator who was branded an “infidel” for the reasons mentioned earlier.

The Mediaeval thinker, however, was also a person who had a passion for knowledge; he was always prepared to initiate an exchange of ideas in order to arrive at the truth. He was confident of human reason and rational discourse which, enlightened by faith, would lead to divine truth. Saint Thomas Aquinas was one of the major proponents of such discourse, and it is precisely within this context that we discover in him a man of dialogue, not only with the philosophical currents of his time, but also with the religious, including Islam.

One may wonder at the fact that Aquinas sought the assistance and was indeed influenced by philosophers who embraced non-Christian beliefs, all the more so when these happened to be Jewish and Muslim. One must remember that Christendom had already been fighting the Crusades in the East for two centuries and the Spanish *reconquista* was steadily gaining ground in the West. As for the Jews, they were not only subject to frequent degrading treatment and harassment, but they were at times also forced to witness the public burning of the Talmud.<sup>9</sup>

The main concern of Aquinas was that of learning from them in his search for the truth. In this respect he epitomized the medieval respect for learning, with its conviction that “truth was where one found it.” Thus, in the words of David Burrell, “he was more inclined to examine the arguments of thinkers than their

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<sup>8</sup> See É. GILSON, *Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> One need only mention by way of example the confiscations and public burnings of the Talmud that took place in Paris in 1242, 1247 and 1248 on orders from Louis IX, as well as those that occurred in Toulouse in 1319.

faith, trusting in the image of the creator in us all to search out traces of the divine handiwork.”<sup>10</sup>

Burrell also suggests that Aquinas’ own geographic and social origins could well have predisposed him to a closer relationship with thinkers that were representative of the Islamic world than his contemporaries could be presumed to have had, in Paris at least. For his provenance from Aquino in the region of Naples, itself part of the kingdom of Sicily, reflected a face of Europe more inclined toward the Islamic world.<sup>11</sup> This is corroborated by the fact that, following his initial education with the Benedictines in the monastery of Montecassino, he continued his studies at the University of Naples which had just been established by Emperor Frederick II, a distant relative of his; this was prior to his entering the Order of Preachers. Furthermore, in his later years, when his Dominican province asked him to direct a theological *studium*, Aquinas expressly chose Naples for its strategic location.

#### AQUINAS AND HIS ISLAMIC INTERLOCUTORS

Both Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rušd were considered by Aquinas as “authorities” (*auctoritates*) and for this reason he referred to both frequently in his works. They were known to him in Latin translations. He also knew of the *Maqāsid* of al-Ġazālī, but given, as already stated, that the translation did not include the prologue of this work, he assumed that it expressed al-Ġazālī’s own opinions.

References to al-Ġazālī’s *Maqāsid* presented its author as an “Arab philosopher” in the eyes of Thomas Aquinas. One may take by way of example the doctrine of the possibility of an actual infinity of separated souls which Thomas attributed to both Ibn Sīnā and al-Ġazālī.<sup>12</sup> He refutes this opinion in detail from a purely philosophical point of view in the *Summa Theologiae*, wherein he concludes that “even a number of things that happens to be unlimited cannot actually exist. But an unlimited number of things can exist potentially.”<sup>13</sup> Now this possibility of “an unlimited number of things can exist potentially” is actually maintained by Ibn Sīnā but rejected by al-Ġazālī as an opinion held by those who advocate the eternity of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Aquinas had a profound respect for Ibn Sīnā. His first major work, *De ente et essentia* was greatly influenced by the Persian philosopher, whose authority he

<sup>10</sup>D.B. BURRELL, C.S.C., “Thomas Aquinas and Islam,” *Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by J. Fodor, F.Ch. Bauerschmidt, Malden, MN: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup>*Contra Gentiles*, II, c. 81, 3c.; *ST I*, q. 7, a. 4, resp.

<sup>13</sup>*ST I*, q. 7, a. 4, resp.

<sup>14</sup>See *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, q. 20.

invokes right from the first paragraph of this work on metaphysics. During the past sixty years increasing attention has been paid to the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā as a source for Thomas Aquinas. The renowned scholar of Aquinas' thought Clemens Vansteenkiste lists around 450 references to Ibn Sīnā in the works of Thomas.<sup>15</sup> Several general surveys have examined the impact of the Persian philosopher on Western thought in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which have suggested that his influence was more pronounced in Thomas' early works than in his later writings.<sup>16</sup> Research in this field has uncovered an impressive list of Avicennan doctrines which were known and used by Aquinas. As Marcia Colish has so aptly stated:

Thomas received some of these doctrines directly and some indirectly; some he agreed with and others he sought to refute. Aquinas attacked Ibn Sīnā's theory of creation by emanation, his idea of the eternity of matter and the necessity of God's creation, his doctrine of the agent intellect, his notion of the form of corporeity, and his theory of prophecy. Even longer, however, is the list of Avicennan doctrines which Aquinas endorsed, wholly or in part. These include the distinction between essence and existence, the distinction between possible and necessary being and the proof of God's existence based on this principle, the notion that being is the first idea possessed by the mind, the proof of God's existence based on efficient causality, the definition of truth as the congruity between the idea and the thing it represents,<sup>17</sup> the distinction between divine and human ways of knowing, the distinction between dispositive and instrumental causation, the notion of liberality as an attribute of the divine nature, and certain features of Ibn Sīnā's angelology.<sup>18</sup>

Thomas was favorably disposed to the "Platonism", or better still, the Neoplatonism of Ibn Sīnā. In many cases he would refer to "Plato, as well as Avicenna who follows him to a certain extent."<sup>19</sup> This phrase, which is found in the tract of the *Summa Theologiæ* concerning Divine governance, would well illustrate other remarks made by Aquinas in this regard.

<sup>15</sup> See C. VANSTEENKISTE, "Avicenna-Citaten bij S. Thomas," *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, vol. 15 (1953), p. 437-507.

<sup>16</sup> See G.C. ANAWATI, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la Métaphysique d'Avicenne," *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, vol. 1, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974, p. 449-465. The best summary of Ibn Sīnā's doctrinal impact on the West is É. GILSON, "Avicenne en Occident au moyen âge," p. 89-121.

<sup>17</sup> Known in Latin as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. See, for instance, AQUINAS, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>18</sup> M.L. COLISH, "Avicenna's Theory of Efficient Causation and its Influence on Thomas Aquinas," *Tommaso D'Aquino nella Storia del Pensiero*, vol. 1, Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso D'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario (Roma-Napoli — 17/24 aprile 1974), Napoli: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975, p. 296-298.

<sup>19</sup> *ST* I, q. 115, a. 1, resp.



Ibn Sīnā's neoplatonising Aristotelianism was open to new problems that were doubtlessly linked with Islamic monotheism, but along the lines of an intellectualized mysticism originating in Plotinus and without reference to elements of faith as such. It was Thomas the theologian who was concerned with these new problems. Ibn Sīnā's philosophy was not merely the *servant* of Thomistic theology. He occupied the role of a master and a researcher who helped Aquinas discover new perspectives.<sup>20</sup> As Gilson has rightly affirmed, it is indeed remarkable that Aquinas placed his trust in Ibn Rušd in matters concerning finite beings, that is to say physics, but was more inclined to follow Ibn Sīnā in matters concerning being and God, that is to say, the metaphysical order.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the issue of essence, Thomas adopted the three principles posited by Ibn Sīnā:<sup>22</sup>

- (a) being and essence are what is first conceived by the intellect (n. 1);
- (b) the essence of a simple thing, which (essence) is its form, cannot be signified except as a whole, since nothing is there besides the form as receiving the form. Thus, no matter what way the essence of a simple substance is taken, it is predicated of the simple substance. Whence Ibn-Sīnā says that the quiddity of a simple thing is the simple thing itself, because there is nothing other receiving the quiddity (74);
- (c) the essences of composed things, because they are received into designated matter, are multiplied according to its division. And this is why it happens that certain things are the same in species and diverse in number. But since the essence of a simple thing is not received into matter, such a multiplication is impossible here. And this is why, of necessity, many individuals of a same species are not found among these substances; rather, as Ibn-Sīnā expressly says, there are among them as many species as there are individuals (75).

To these Thomas added another principle which goes beyond the other three:

It is therefore necessary that every such thing, the existence of which is other than its nature, have its existence from some other thing. And because every thing which exists by virtue of another is led back, as to its first cause, to that which exists by virtue of itself, it is necessary that there be some thing which is the cause of the existence of all things because it is existence alone (80).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See G.C. ANAWATI, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la Métaphysique d'Avicenne," p. 454.

<sup>21</sup> É. GILSON, "Avicenne en Occident au moyen âge," p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> Y. CHISAKA, "St Thomas D'Aquin et Avicenne: Sur les interprétations de l'être et de l'essence," in *Tommaso D'Aquino nella Storia del Pensiero*, vol. 1, p. 284–295; see especially p. 289.

<sup>23</sup> The above quotations were taken from THOMAS AQUINAS, *On Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* by Joseph Bobik, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965. The enumerations in brackets refer to the divisions of the text adopted by Bobik.

In the First Part of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas addresses the issue of the existence of God by positing five ways through which one may arrive at the affirmation of his existence.<sup>24</sup> In the third way he takes as his point of departure the notion of contingency in order to arrive at the concept of necessity: God who is necessary in himself. This argument is not found in Aristotle, but was advanced by al-Fārābī and particularly Ibn Sīnā who built his entire doctrine of God on the concept of Necessary Being. Aquinas acquired knowledge of this particularly through the mediation of al-Ġazālī's *Maqāsid*. Thomas is also in agreement with Ibn Sīnā and his predecessors, the Mu'tazila, in that he affirms that "God [...] is identical with his own godhead, with his own life and with whatever is similarly said of him."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Aquinas adopts Ibn Sīnā's position not only in that "God is his own essence," but "that he is also his existence,"<sup>26</sup> that "God is not a body,"<sup>27</sup> that "God contains no potentiality, but is sheer actuality [and] cannot therefore be composed of matter and form."<sup>28</sup> All these notions echo the concept of the First Being in al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, as well as in the Mu'tazila.<sup>29</sup>

Concerning the separate intellects that move the celestial spheres according to the Islamic philosophers' doctrine of emanation, these are reinterpreted by Thomas as being "intellects [...] that exist separately, and these we call angels."<sup>30</sup> These angels love God "for the sake of the end which is God himself."<sup>31</sup> Since they behold his very essence, "they are impelled by identically the same love both to love him as he is other than creatures and to love him as creation's general good."<sup>32</sup>

Another influence on the thought of Aquinas from Ibn Sīnā lies in the distinction between metaphysical and physical agent causality.<sup>33</sup> Marcia Colish argues that, according to the Persian philosopher the physical agent is finite and material whereas the metaphysical one is infinite and immaterial; the former is the Aristotelian simple efficient cause, whereas the latter is the Qur'ānic

<sup>24</sup> AQUINAS, *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *ST I*, q. 3, a. 3, resp.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, q. 3, a. 4, resp. See IBN SĪNĀ, *Šifā', Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *ST I*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, q. 3, a. 2, resp.

<sup>29</sup> A.N. NADER, "L'influence de la pensée musulmane sur la philosophie de Saint Thomas D'Aquin," *Tommaso D'Aquino nella Storia del Pensiero*, vol. 1, p. 349-350.

<sup>30</sup> *ST I*, q. 51, a. 1, resp.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, q. 60, a. 5, ad 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, q. 115, a. 5, ad 5.

<sup>33</sup> See IBN SĪNĀ, *Šifā', Ilāhiyyāt*, Book Six, Chapters One and Two. The division of the Ibn Sīnā's work follows that of: AVICENNA, *The Metaphysics of "The Healing"*, A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by M.E. Marmura Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005.

creator God. The physical agent cause is accidental, whereas the metaphysical agent cause is necessary. Consequently, whereas an object depends on its physical agent cause only when it comes into being or undergoes some particular change, it depends always and necessarily on its metaphysical agent cause as the ground and the sustainer of its being.<sup>34</sup> This vital distinction served Aquinas well when he addressed the issues of the cause of evil and of human free will. It also served him when he stated his disagreement with Ibn Sīnā on the issue of emanation. As Colish rightly affirms,

Thomas argues that man's free will is the natural agent cause of sin. God creates the human will out of nothing, with its defects as well as its aptitudes. God remains the ground of being of the human will, but he endows it with freedom of choice. Thus, God is not responsible for the moral evil in the world. Man, through his God-given free will, is responsible for his acts.<sup>35</sup>

Aquinas regarded Ibn Rušd with esteem as “the Commentator” of Aristotle and consulted him on matters pertaining to the interpretation of the texts of Aristotle. For Thomas, Ibn Rušd would be the real Peripatetic. It is here that the different use by Aquinas of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rušd finds its explanation. His thinking was fed by both sources.

This is particularly discernible in his polemical works against the so-called Averroists. Both Aquinas and Ibn Rušd were concerned with reconciling metaphysical and ethical teaching with religious orthodoxy (Islamic and Christian). Both were also profoundly interested in philosophical and theological questions such as human freedom and divine will, the demonstrability of God's essence and attributes, the creation of the world, the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body.

The shift from engagement with Ibn Sīnā to Ibn Rušd took place owing to the later appearance of translations of the works of the Cordoban scholar. It was not until 1170 that Ibn Rušd embarked upon the task of commenting the works of Aristotle. The translation of these commentaries was initiated around the 1220 and began gradually to reach Latin Christendom some five years later. Up until around 1250 Ibn Rušd was being considered as a much more trustworthy commentator of Aristotle than Ibn Sīnā.<sup>36</sup> This is no doubt the most obvious reason as to why Thomas quotes Ibn Sīnā abundantly early on in his career, especially in *De ente et essentia* mentioned above and his *Commentary on the Sentences*. Subsequently, beginning with the *Summa contra Gentiles* (1261–1264),

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<sup>34</sup>IBN SĪNĀ, *Šifā', Ilābiyyāt*, Book Six, Chapter One (6–12). M.L. COLISH, “Avicenna's Theory of Efficient Causation and its Influence on Thomas Aquinas,” p. 298.

<sup>35</sup>Ibidem, p. 303–305.

<sup>36</sup>É. GILSON, “Avicenne en Occident au Moyen Age,” p. 105.

Aquinas would refer more frequently to Ibn Rušd than to Ibn Sīnā. This should by no means be taken as a rejection of the latter. As Gilson has correctly affirmed, by the time Thomas began referencing Ibn Rušd he had already assimilated much of Ibn Sīnā's teachings, to the extent that by then they had become a permanent feature of his intellectual apparatus.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the introduction of Aristotle and later that of the commentaries of Ibn Rušd had obliged Aquinas to reconsider his position. He was very much aware of the dilemma faced by his contemporaries between the extent to which the commentaries of Ibn Rušd faithfully represented the thought of Aristotle and the interpretations of the so-called Averröists prevalent in his time. Gilson continues to indicate that the fundamental objection that Ibn Rušd had raised against Ibn Sīnā was that of having taught a mixture of philosophy and Qur'ānic theology, a statement that might have pleased the theologians but not the masters of arts at the University of Paris, the Averröists who, despite harboring a variety of ideas, had a shared desire to philosophize in the light of pure reason without having recourse to revelation. Consequently, Aquinas' shift from Ibn Sīnā to Ibn Rušd was also strategic. He could not expect to be heard, still less heeded, by the Averröists if he were to present the presumed "dubious Aristotelianism" espoused by Ibn Sīnā rather than that of Ibn Rušd. He was therefore determined to engage the Averröists on their own ground.<sup>38</sup>

His outburst that the Cordoban scholar was "the perverter of Peripatetic philosophy,"<sup>39</sup> was indeed a rare one and also most unfortunate. This brusque statement should however be considered in the light of a controversy that had arisen during the early years of Thomas' academic career and which he had believed to have been put to rest once and for all. In the light of the materialist monism of Amaury of Bène (d. 1206) and of David of Dinant (d. after 1206) a new interpretation of Aristotle had taken shape which, following a whole line of Greek and Islamic commentators including Ibn Sīnā, resulted in an emanationism that was both spiritualist and deterministic. Both Amaury and David were accused of having introduced pantheism into the Faculty of Arts under Aristotelian inspiration and condemned during the provincial synod of Sens convened in 1210. The process that was to lead to a full-blown crisis in the latter part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century originated from the fact that from about 1225 onward,

<sup>37</sup> Concerning the application on the part of Aquinas of Ibn Sīnā's distinction between physical and metaphysical agent causes, Colish affirms that "In his middle and later period, Thomas is not as likely to rest his case entirely on the distinction between physical and metaphysical agent causes; his deeper studies over the years have yielded a broader range of arguments on which he can draw" (M.L. COLISH, "Avicenna's Theory of Efficient Causation and its Influence on Thomas Aquinas," p. 302).

<sup>38</sup> É. GILSON, "Avicenne en Occident au Moyen Age," pp. 105–106.

<sup>39</sup> *De unitate intellectus*, 59, 121.

a number of treatises were written which very clearly reflected the influence of Ibn Rušd.

As Jean-Pierre Torrell has clearly indicated, it was only in 1250, beginning with some vague allusions by Albert the Great and then further articulated in 1252 by Robert Kilwardby, that Ibn Rušd is purported to have stated that there is only a single intellectual soul for all of humanity. This attribution was formulated in a definite way by Bonaventure (d. 1274). In his commentary on Book II of the *Sentences*, Bonaventure described this doctrine in the following way: “There is only one intellectual soul for all men, and that not only *quantum ad intellectum agentem, sed etiam quantum ad intellectum possibilem*.”<sup>40</sup> The doctrine described by the Seraphic Doctor was actually a “re-reading” of Ibn Rušd by the theologians within the University of Paris.<sup>41</sup>

The standard-bearers of the movement in Paris, later to be dubbed as *Latin Averröism* by Renan and Mandonnet, were Siger of Brabant (d.c. 1284) and Boethius of Dacia (d.c. 1285). Around the year 1266, Siger wrote his *Quaestiones in tertium De anima* in which he argued that the possible intellect was incorporeal and separate from the body and that it was one for all of humanity. What Siger did was simply borrow what Albert, Robert and Bonaventure had stated earlier about the Islamic scholar’s work; it was neither a correct reading of Ibn Rušd’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima* still less an analysis of the work.<sup>42</sup> On this issue Boethius appeared to follow his colleague’s line of reasoning. Therefore, whereas this was clearly a doctrine expounded by the so-called Averröists and given the name of *monopsychism*, one cannot blame those who have constantly harboured grave doubts as to whether it was in fact the doctrine of Ibn Rušd whose teaching they claimed to follow.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the so-called “Latin Averröism” was actually an invention of the theologians

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<sup>40</sup> BONAVENTURE, *In II Sent.*, dist. 18, a. 2, q. 1, quoted in J.-P. TORRELL O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: *The Person and His Work* (Revised Edition), translated by R. Royal, Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1996, p. 192.

<sup>41</sup> J.-P. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, p. 194.

<sup>42</sup> THOMAS D’AQUIN, *L’unité de l’intellect contre les Averroïstes*, Texte latin, traduction, introduction, bibliographie, chronologie, notes et index par A. de Libera, Paris: GF – Flammarion, 1997, p. 41.

<sup>43</sup> Salvador Gomez Nogales has definitely exculpated Ibn Rušd when he wrote that “Averroes is not an Averroist. If it is true that there have been Averroists who have admitted the unicity of the human intellect, that is not the case for Averroes himself, who admits the individual immortality of the human soul, even in the material intellect” (S. GOMEZ NOGALES, “Saint Thomas, Averroès et l’averroïsme,” *Aquinas and Problems of his Time*, edited by G. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1976, p. 177, quoted in J.-P. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, p. 192–193, n. 55).

which was subsequently taken up, endorsed, and disseminated by Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia.<sup>44</sup>

On his return to Paris in 1268 in order to take up his position as regent master a second time, Aquinas was rudely awakened to the fact that the controversy concerning the doctrine of there being only one intellect had led to a full-blown crisis within Parisian academia. Siger's and Boethius' reading of Ibn Rušd's psychology now came into conflict with Aquinas. Furthermore, their ambivalence in distinguishing the role of faith from that of reason rendered this controversy even more dangerous. Thomas becomes immediately aware of the situation and resolves to act immediately and decisively. He himself states as much in the introduction of his refutation *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*:

For a long time now there has been spreading among many people an error concerning the intellect arising from the words of Averroës. He tries to assert that the intellect that Aristotle calls the possible intellect, but that he himself calls by the unsuitable name "material," is a substance separate in its being from the body and not united to it in some way as its form, and furthermore that this possible intellect is one for all men.<sup>45</sup> Against these views we have already written many things in the past.<sup>46</sup> But because the boldness of those who err has not ceased to strive against the truth, we will try again to write something against this same error to refute it clearly.<sup>47</sup>

Aquinas argued that "Aristotle, Theophrastus, Themistius, and Plato himself did not hold it as a principle that the possible intellect is one in all [men]." He then went on to state that Ibn Rušd "wrongly reports the opinion of Themistius and Theophrastus concerning the possible and the agent intellect."<sup>48</sup> But, as Torrell judiciously affirms, in spite of the mis-attribution of this particular teaching to Ibn Rušd being already in place among theologians in Paris including Aquinas, one perceives

Thomas' desire not to compromise the faith — under pretext of defending it — by ineffective argument. This occurs sometimes in theological circles, when the faith is surreptitiously invoked to give a force to arguments that they themselves

<sup>44</sup>J.-P. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, p. 192.

<sup>45</sup>It is in this work that Ibn Rušd is reported to have leant toward the interpretation of Proclus rather than that of Alexander of Aphrodisias; that is to say, he believed that there was only one possible intellect (which he calls "the material intellect") for all.

<sup>46</sup>See *Super II Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a.1; *Contra Gentiles*, II, c. 59–61, 68–70, 73, 75, 77–78; *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1 and 2; *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2 and 9.

<sup>47</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *On the unity of the Intellect against the Averroists (De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas)*, translated from the Latin with an Introduction by B.H. Zedler, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1968, Foreword, 1, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *On the unity of the Intellect against the Averroists*, 121, p. 73.

do not always have. Thomas thinks about the image that theology gives of itself to some redoubtable dialecticians in the Faculty of Arts and, at the risk of rendering the task temporarily more difficult, he refuses to depreciate the demands of reason.<sup>49</sup>

Thomas would never cease to refute the claims which were erroneously attributed to Ibn Rušd by some theologians and taught by the philosophers at the University of Paris on the same philosophical plain.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Ibn Rušd remained for him the *Commentator* pure and simple, even if he did not follow him at every point.<sup>51</sup>

Aquinas would, however, continue to criticize and refute certain statements of Ibn Rušd such as when the latter states that “a heavenly body is itself the matter of heaven, a matter that is in potentiality to position and not to existence, and that its form is a separated substance united to it as its mover.” To this assertion Thomas replies that, “it is impossible to posit something to be in act without it either being entirely act and form, or else having act and form.”<sup>52</sup> However, he would never cease to hold him in high esteem on a number of issues, quoting his authority when stating that the separated substances are divided into intellect and will,<sup>53</sup> and that “a steady disposition, *habitus*, is that by which a person acts when he wishes.”<sup>54</sup>

A fundamental difference that needs to be drawn between the two scholars concerns the study of philosophy itself. The *status quaestionis* posed by Ibn Rušd in his work *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (*The Decisive Treatise determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*) was “to investigate, from the perspective of Law-based reflection (*al-naẓar al-šarʿī*), whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is permitted, prohibited, or commanded — and this as a recommendation or as an obligation — by the Law.”<sup>55</sup> For Thomas, however, the issue was different. The very first question that he poses in the *Summa Theologiae* reads: “Is another teaching required apart from philosophical studies?”<sup>56</sup> Whereas the former was fighting for philosophy’s right to exist, for the latter the question was whether philosophy should stand alone.

<sup>49</sup>J.-P. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, p. 195.

<sup>50</sup>See *ST* I, q. 76, a. 2, resp.; q. 117, a. 1, resp. and ad 2.

<sup>51</sup>See C.J. VANSTEENKISTE, “San Tommaso d’Aquinò ed Averroè,” *Rivista di Studi Orientali*, vol. 32 (1957), p. 585–623.

<sup>52</sup>*ST* I, q. 66, a. 2, resp.

<sup>53</sup>Ibidem, q. 54, a. 5, resp.

<sup>54</sup>*ST* II-II, q. 171, a. 2, sed contra.

<sup>55</sup>AVERROËS, *Decisive Treatise & Epistle Dedicatory*, translation with introduction and notes by Ch.E. Butterworth, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup>*ST* I, q. 1, a. 1.

Both Ibn Rušd and Aquinas had a common philosophical legacy whose ultimate source was Aristotelian. In the case of the former, however, only the philosophers are adept in certain interpretation of the Qur'ân:

(44) For people are of three sorts with respect to the Law.

One sort is in no way adept at interpretation. These are the rhetorical people, who are the overwhelming multitude. That is because no person of unimpaired intellect is exempted from this kind of assent.

Another sort is those adept in dialectical interpretation. These are those who are dialectical by nature alone, or by nature and by habit.

Another sort is those adept in certain interpretation. These are those who are demonstrative by nature and art — I mean, the art of wisdom. This interpretation ought not to be declared to those adept in dialectic, not to mention the multitude.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, Aquinas emphasized that God “destines us for an end beyond the grasp of reason.” Hence there is “the need of being instructed in divine revelation even in religious matters the human reason is able to investigate.”<sup>58</sup> It is for this reason that he embraced the scholastic maxim *philosophia ancilla theologiae* (“philosophy is the handmaiden of theology”).<sup>59</sup> This should not be understood in the sense of philosophy being *subordinate* to theology but rather its being a necessary *tool* for the effective articulation of theological thought. As Jacques Maritain states, within the framework of Scholastic thought

philosophy is placed in the service of theology when, and only when, in its own workings theology employs philosophy as an *instrument* of truth in order to establish conclusions which are not philosophic but theological. *Ancilla*, then, it may be, but not *serva*, for theology handles philosophy in accordance with its own proper laws; a Minister of state yes, but a slave it can never be. But in itself, or when engaged in its own pursuits, philosophy is not a handmaid; it is free, it enjoys the freedom to which as a form of wisdom it is entitled.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> AVERROËS, *Decisive Treatise & Epistle Dedicatory*, p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> *ST* I, q. 1, a. 1, resp.

<sup>59</sup> This concept has its origins in Philo of Alexandria's allegorical reading in *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia* of Gn. 16:1–6 which recounts Abraham's temporary relationship with Hagar. In Christian circles, however, the first to refer to such an allegorical interpretation of this Biblical text was Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* (beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century).

<sup>60</sup> J. MARITAIN, “An Essay on Christian Philosophy,” <https://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/acop15.htm>.



## THOMAS AQUINAS AND INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS

Thomas' capacity for addressing the interreligious challenge of his time was due principally to his research of sources that went beyond those of the Christian tradition in order to broaden his philosophical and theological horizons.

As David Burrell has so judiciously affirmed, one need only glance at the careful choices that he made when quoting such authorities as Mūsā b. Maymūn (Moses Maimonides, d. 1204), Ibn Sīnā and the "Commentator" Ibn Rušd in order to see that his classical synthesis of Christian thought could already be considered a triumph in the area of interreligious dialogue. His intellectual investigations allowed him to bridge the divide that arose in encounters with alien religions. In this manner he succeeded in discovering analogous methods intended toward developing common perspectives concerning creation and divine providence as well as parallel approaches to the subject of attaining human perfection. The work of Thomas is a living testimony to the encounter between Christian thought and Hellenistically-inspired Islamic thought, with some added investigations, albeit indirectly, into the field of Islamic theology.<sup>61</sup>

It is common knowledge that Thomas was deeply indebted to these great sages. In the first place they succeeded in preserving the works of Aristotle in Arabic, a language in which they remained for the most part unknown in Western Europe until they were translated into Latin. Having reached the universities of Europe, particularly Paris, and subsequently having been commented upon by no less a Master than Aquinas, they altered the course of academic studies throughout the following centuries.

Whereas the passion of Thomas for the truth could in no way have been quenched or compromised, the methodology that he adopted was one of dialogue. As Colish has rightly observed, "he has no difficulty accepting doctrines he agrees with from authorities whom he deems in error on other points."<sup>62</sup> His abiding principle was that one must consider not *who said what* but *what was being said*.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See D.B. BURRELL C.S.C., "Thomas Aquinas and Islam," p. 69. In this connection the author of the article also refers to the pioneering work undertaken by Louis Gardet in this area, especially his article "La connaissance que Thomas d'Aquin put avoir du monde islamique," *Aquinas and the Problems of His Time*, edited by G. Verbeke and D. Verhelst, Leuven – The Hague: Leuven University Press – Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 139–149.

<sup>62</sup> M.L. COLISH, "Avicenna's Theory of Efficient Causation and its Influence on Thomas Aquinas," p. 305.

<sup>63</sup> It is truly instructive to compare this principle with what the renowned Mediaeval Muslim theologian Abū Hāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) wrote in his autobiographical work *Al-Munqid min al-Dalāl*. In a section of this book he criticizes those who reject the ethical conceptions of the

Such a maxim spurred him on to confront and refute all opposition against the use of pagan and non-Christian authors. He was open to the truth from wherever it originated, precisely because, following the *glossa* of Ambrosiaster,<sup>64</sup> he was convinced that “every truth, by whomever it may be said, is from the Holy Spirit in the sense that he imparts the natural light and that he moves the mind to understand and utter the truth.”<sup>65</sup> Such an innovative and courageous attitude was highlighted by his biographer and secretary, William of Tocco, when he wrote:

For he was making new divisions in his text, finding a new and clear manner of drawing conclusions, and adducing new reasons for his conclusions, such that no one who heard him teach new things, or define doubtful things by new arguments, could doubt that God had illuminated him.<sup>66</sup>

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prophets and mystics incorporated in the works of the philosophers simply because they are mentioned by the latter. He rejects this attitude with the following statement:

This is like a man who hears a Christian assert, “There is no god but God, and Jesus is the Messenger of God.” The man rejects this, saying, “This is a Christian conception,” and does not pause to ask himself whether the Christian is an infidel in respect of this assertion or in respect of his denial of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). If he is an infidel only in respect of his denial of Muhammad, then he need not be contradicted in other assertions, true in themselves and not connected with his unbelief, even though these are also true in his eyes.

It is customary with weaker intellects thus to take the men as criterion of the truth and not the truth as criterion of the men (*AL-ĠAZĀLĪ, Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, translated by W. Montgomery Watt as *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*, <http://www.ghazali.org/works/watt3.htm>).

<sup>64</sup>See PL 17, 245.

<sup>65</sup>*ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 1. Aquinas reiterates this same concept when he stated that no spirit can be “so darkened as not to participate in some way in the divine light. In fact, every known truth from any source is totally due to this ‘light which shines in the darkness,’ since every truth, no matter who utters it, comes from the Holy Spirit” (*Super Ioannem*, 1, 5 lect. 3, n. 103).

<sup>66</sup>This text refers to Chapter XIV of the *Vita Sancti Thomae Aquinatis* written by William of Tocco. The Latin original reads:

Erat enim novos in sua lectione movens articulos, novum modum et clarum determinandi inveniens, et novas adducens in determinationibus rationes: ut nemo, qui ipsum audisset nova docere, et novis rationibus dubia diffinire, dubitaret, quod eum Deus novi luminis radiis illustrasset (*Vita S. Thomae Aquinatis*, auctore Guillelmo de Tocco, in: *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis*, notis historicis et criticis illustrati, curis et labore D. Prümmer O.Pr., Fasciculus II, Tolosa s.d., p. 81).

The context of this quotation refers to the preparatory studies undertaken by Thomas in order to accede to the Baccalaureate. At one time he was hesitating whether to continue, considering himself unworthy of such an academic position. He was then persuaded to continue thanks to the intervention of St. Albert the Great.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has emphasized the approach of Thomas to this crucial question and how his conclusions have set an example for inter-cultural dialogue in today's world:

With his charism as a philosopher and theologian, he offered an effective model of harmony between reason and faith, dimensions of the human spirit that are completely fulfilled in the encounter and dialogue with one another.

According to St Thomas' thought, human reason, as it were, "breathes": it moves within a vast open horizon in which it can express the best of itself. When, instead, man reduces himself to thinking only of material objects or those that can be proven, he closes himself to the great questions about life, himself and God and is impoverished.

St Thomas Aquinas, with farsighted wisdom, succeeded in establishing a fruitful confrontation with the Arab and Hebrew thought of his time, to the point that he was considered an ever up-to-date teacher of dialogue with other cultures and religions. He knew how to present that wonderful Christian synthesis of reason and faith which today too, for the Western civilization, is a precious patrimony to draw from for an effective dialogue with the great cultural and religious traditions of the East and South of the world.<sup>67</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is true that the language used by Thomas in describing the religion of Islam and the conduct of Muḥammad is harsh and would be unacceptable by today's standards. Having said that, one must also admit that such an attitude did not limit his intellectual curiosity or preclude him from seeing Muslim (and Jewish) scholars as fellow companions on a voyage along the way toward divine truths. His was a dialogue which was at a distance in both the geographical and the temporal sense. It was a debate in which all the interlocutors were called to expound their thoughts with that lively mental rigor demanded by the rules of scholarly discourse, an element which, alas, is nowadays becoming something of a rarity.

Thomas has always had much to teach us, and also will do, of the way one should undertake dialogue, one which is based not on mutual prejudice, but rather on mutual understanding perceiving in the other the image which the Creator Himself has cast as a sign of his providence.

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<sup>67</sup>Benedict XVI, Papal Audience, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2007, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/angelus/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_ang\\_20070128\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/angelus/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20070128_en.html).

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## ENGAGING WITH ISLAMIC THOUGHT. THE PARADIGM OF THOMAS AQUINAS

### S U M M A R Y

Despite Mediaeval Christendom's hostility toward Islam as a religion, Islamic culture as communicated through the sciences and philosophy was an essential element, perhaps even a fundamental one, underlying the development of the Scholastic movement throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The origins of this engagement with Islamic thought in Mediaeval Christendom began with the translation of the major works of Islamic thinkers from Arabic into Latin. It was through this process that the works of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rušd found their way into the principal universities of Europe. Thomas Aquinas's contribution to the study, understanding, and dialogue with these two philosophers across the geographical and temporal divides is one of the greatest feats of the Scholastic period.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas; Ibn Sīnā; Ibn Rušd; Mediaeval Christendom; Translation Movement