Wisdom in Love:
Philosophy in Action
in St. Thomas of Villanova

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Abstract: The present article delves into St. Thomas of Villanova's understanding of wisdom and its relationship with love, on the one hand, and how he translates such understanding into concrete actions, on the other. This is quite evident particularly in his pastoral work inspired by both wisdom and love in its two-fold dimension. The article is expository in nature, although the possible influence of Saint Augustine is highlighted for a better understanding of Saint Thomas' thought. His homilies constitute the exclusive source of the study, which moves around certain key ideas (like wisdom, knowledge, and love). The intent is to demonstrate that Saint Thomas' philosophical speculations are not purely theoretical in nature. They are rather applied to concrete actions – thus constituting an example of a "philosophy in action".

What motivated St. Thomas of Villanova on a deeper level is explained. His acts of generosity were but concrete expressions of his love for God and neighbor and of the wisdom that he succeeded in possessing under the guidance of faith. Faith and reason are presented to be complimentary, philosophy and theology work together, and both can guide man in his search and possession of wisdom.

Keywords: Thomas of Villanova, Wisdom, Knowledge, Love, Philosophy.

Sabiduría en el amor: filosofía en acción
En Santo Tomás de Villanova

Resumen: El presente artículo profundiza en la comprensión que Santo Tomás de Villanueva tiene de la sabiduría y su relación con el amor, por una parte, y en cómo traduce dicha comprensión en acciones concretas, por otra. Esto se hace patente, sobre todo, en su labor pastoral, inspirada tanto en la sabiduría como en el amor en su doble dimensión. El artículo es de carácter expositivo, aunque se destaca la posible influencia de San Agustín para una mejor comprensión del pensamiento de Santo Tomás. Sus homilías constituyen la fuente exclusiva del estudio, que se mueve en torno a ciertas ideas clave (como sabiduría, conocimiento y amor). La intención es demostrar que las especulaciones filosóficas de Santo Tomás no son de naturaleza puramente teórica. Más bien se aplican a acciones concretas, constituyendo así un ejemplo de «filosofía en acción».

Introduction

St. Thomas of Villanova is one of the prominent saints of the Augustinian Order. He was declared as the Patron Saint of Augustinian studies on account of his contribution to the academic world and culture of his time, particularly in the fields of Philosophy and Theology. As a student, he already distinguished himself for his intellectual gift, keenness of mind and critical thinking. At the young age of twenty-six (year 1512) he was already lecturing publicly in Philosophy.[1] He held a chair in Philosophy for four years (1512-1516).[2] In 1516 he was offered a chair at the College

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[1] Scholars have varying opinions as to the year of birth of Thomas of Villanova. Some date it to 1488, like Miguel Bartolomé Salón, 1880: 2; Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 3; Santos Santamarta, 1952: 9; Luis Morales Oliver, 1981: 3; et al. Others, on the other hand, propose a slightly different and earlier date. For example, Siegfried Back, 1987 opts for 1486 and proposes a different chronology in his account of the Saint's life. Mons. Pierre Jobit, 1965: 19 does the same, and John E. Rotelle, 2000: 58 as well. The present article takes 1486 as the year of the Saint's birth, taking into consideration the fact that the Augustinian Order (OSA) and the Archdiocese of Valencia (which was the Saint's episcopal seat) celebrated the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Saint last 1986.

[2] José Manuel Bengoa: 79. At that time, every assignment to teach covered a complete cycle of four years (according to the Complutense Constitutions of 1510). During this period of four years, Thomas of Villanova taught Logic, Natural Philosophy, Metaphysics, Mathematics, Astronomy, etc. Mons. Pierre Jobit, 1965: 56-57 explains that the first

of Saint Ildephonsus (Colegio Mayor de San Ildefonso) in Alcala with the intention of keeping him, but the University of Salamanca invited him to teach there instead.[3] However, to everyone's surprise, he entered the Augustinian monastery, thus abandoning the prestigious academic career he was enjoying up to that time.

He was at the height of his career when he entered the Augustinian monastery in Salamanca at about the age of thirty and he did his religious profession in the following year (1517).[4] He was ordained priest in 1518 at the age of thirty-two[5] and became known not only for his keenness of mind, fast and critical thinking, but also for being prayerful, ascetic and virtuous. Several times he became the local prior of the monasteries in Salamanca, Burgos, and Valladolid as well as visitor general (1525, 1536).[6] He also became the Prior Provincial of the then existing Augustinian Province of Andalusia (Provincia Betica, 1527-1529)[7] and later of the Province of Castile (1534-1537). The first time Emperor Charles V (former King Charles I of Spain) asked him to become a bishop (in fact, archbishop of Granada), Thomas refused. However, the second time bishopric was offered to him (1544) – this time that of Valencia, he accepted it in virtue of obedience to the Augustinian Prior Provincial at that time (who was Fray Francisco de Nieva).[8] As bishop, he distinguished himself as an outstanding preacher,

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year was dedicated to an introductory study of Logic using a manual composed by the 13th century Portuguese philosopher Pedro Hispano, the second year was dedicated to the study of Logic on a deeper level, the third year was dedicated to the study of Natural Philosophy (Physics), and the fourth year was dedicated to the study of Metaphysics.

[3] Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 12-13.

[4] It was on the occasion of his religious profession that Thomas García changed his name to "Thomas of Villanova" (Tomás de Villanueva). This practice of changing name during one's initial religious profession is still being observed today among some mendicant Orders in the Church.

[5] Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 20 slightly differs from the majority of scholars saying that Thomas of Villanova was ordained priest at the age of thirty-three.

[6] Dates provided by José Seguí Cantos, 2020: 180-181 and José Manuel Bengoa: 11-12.

[7] Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 53-54 explains that we are dealing with one and the same Augustinian Province, in this case. It was simply divided into two by an apostolic brief of Pope Clement VII – thus creating the Province of Andalusia and the Province of Castile.

[8] A copy of the letter of obedience that the Prior Provincial sent to Thomas of Villanova (dated August 02, 1544) is translated in Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 71. Among other

as being very generous to the poor and living a very modest lifestyle. He also promoted studies and spirituality in the Order and contributed to the reformation of the Province of Castile.[9] He was also a mystic, oftentimes experiencing ecstasy while contemplating or celebrating the Holy Mass.[10]

For Saint Thomas, becoming an ordained minister of the Church did not immediately entail abandoning the academic world. In fact, after his priestly ordination, the Superior of the Augustinian monastery of Salamanca ordered him to return to teaching (this time, no longer instructing Philosophy, but Theology),[11] which he apparently carried out until 1524 – that is, until he was ordered to cease teaching in order to dedicate himself fulltime to preaching.[12]

Now, while he was intellectually gifted and highly respected by people of the Church and the academicians of his days, Saint Thomas is more venerated and remembered nowadays as a pastor of the Church, a bishop

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things it contains we read: "I hereby command you within twenty-four hours (*sic.*) after the receipt of this letter, to accept the archbishopric of Valentia …. I command it in virtue of holy obedience and under the pain of excommunication, *trina canonica monitione praemissa*". An original Latin version of it can be found in Miguel Bartolomé Salón, 1880: 137. It reads: "Praecipio Paternitati vestrae, ut visa hac praesente nostra epistola intra spatium viginti horarum, acceptet collationem archiepiscopatus Valentini ea forma ac modo quo illam fecit Imperator, in virtute sanctae obedientiae et sub poena excommunicationis, trina canonica monitione praemissa".

[9] As to the reforms introduced by Thomas of Villanova both within the Church and the Augustinian Order, scholars pay attention to how his desire for a more austere and rigid lifestyle, a life of intense silence and prayer, a life of real poverty and more rigorous observance of the Augustinian Rule, eventually – that is, a few years after his demise – led to the foundation of the Recollect Order – cf. Emmanuel Luis A. Romanillos, 2001: 21-22. "The Mexican Recollection certainly considered Thomas of Villanova as its founder. Although he was not physically among them in the New World, Saint Thomas had given birth to the Recollection in Mexico, training them in the spirit and charism of what would be called 55 years afterward the *Augustinian Recollection*" – Emmanuel Luis A. Romanillos, 2001: 22-23.

[10] For some episodes of his mystic rupture, cf. Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 21, 43-46 and 92. During such ecstatic moments he would remain silent for a long period of time and remain immobile while shedding floods of tears. The ecstasy the saint experienced on one Holy Thursday supposedly took place in the presence of the emperor himself, Charles V, and became well-known in the entire Province of Castile at that time.

[11] Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 24.

[12] Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 33. The affirmation of John E. Rotelle, 2000: 59 that Thomas of Villanova was "lecturing for over a decade on philosophy and theology" depends on

particularly keen to the plight of the needy and actively engaged in charitable acts, gaining for himself the title of "Bishop of the Poor" or "Father of the Poor" or "Holy Almsgiver". His being a man of culture and an intellectual is often overlooked or put aside. John Rotelle rightly observes: "Thomas is still remembered, still honored not so much for his acute intellect … [but] primarily for his simple sharing".[13] Most of the articles written on him focus on his theology, spirituality and pastoral life. The present article intends to focus on the often-neglected aspect of his life – that is, his being a critical thinker and wise intellectual. Thus, his contribution to the field of knowledge and culture is highlighted, especially the way he was strongly influenced by the teachings of Augustine of Hippo.[14]

Thomas died in Valencia on 08 September 1555 (Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and was buried in the same city.[15] He was beatified by Pope Paul V in 1618 and canonized by Pope Alexander VII in 1658.

2. Guide Questions and Sources

Even after he abandoned his worldly career as a lecturer, Saint Thomas continued to carry with himself all the cultural formation he had received in the liberal arts, classical literature, Philosophy and Theology. His sermons, for example, were filled with classical and philosophical insights imbued with Christian teachings. Both traces of classical learning and faith-inspired speculations can be discerned in the homilies he addressed

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the chronology that one adopts. But even if the Spanish Saint taught for four years in Alcalá (1512-1516) and for about six years in Salamanca (1518-1524), Rotelle's estimation of the number of years the Saint spent teaching still falls short of "over a decade".

[13] John E. Rotelle, 2000: 61.

[14] Argimiro Turrado, 1994: 16 rightly points out that "the foundation that gives unity to the theological and spiritual teaching of Saint Thomas of Villanova is basic Augustinianism". This holds true also for the Saint's philosophical insights.

[15] At deathbed, Thomas of Villanova, feeling that his demise was drawing near, requested to be buried in the Augustinian monastery of Our Lady of Succor contrary to the plan of the canons of his diocese to have him interred in the cathedral instead. Cf. Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 197.

to the faithful of his diocese. In him, the two became a unified whole and were used to deliver a single message of salvation.

In Saint Thomas of Villanova we encounter a type of philosophical thinking that is not only speculative or theoretical, but something that translates itself into concrete action. We may describe it as a "philosophy in action". His actions, particularly his pastoral works, were inspired by his understanding of what true wisdom consists in. He proposes a particular idea of wisdom and demonstrates how it can motivate Christian love expressed concretely through gestures of charity. And this, in turn, is deemed necessary for salvation. It is for this reason that the present article is entitled "Wisdom in Love", whose purport will be explained later. As a guide to the present study, the following questions are herein proposed:

1. What does St. Thomas of Villanova mean by "wisdom"?
2. What is involved in man's acquisition of wisdom?
3. What is the relationship between wisdom and love, according to him?
4. How can wisdom be translated into concrete actions inspired by love?

Answers to these questions are based on a study of his surviving homilies. The present article is purely expository in character, focusing on key-ideas that can elucidate the Saint's understanding of wisdom and its relationship with love. A thematic approach is also used. Unfortunately, the surviving writings of Saint Thomas are not dated. Neither do they indicate the specific circumstances surrounding their delivery, making it very difficult to determine the exact historical context that produced them. Even if his writings were "shrouded in the political, cultural, and religious composition of his era",[16] it is still difficult to date them with precision.[17] At any rate, the present article intends to supplement previous attempts to study systematically the thought of Saint Thomas. The articles written

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[16] John E. Rotelle, Foreword, 1994: 9.

[17] We shall not delve into putting the homilies of St. Thomas of Villanova in the overall theological and cultural context of his days. Other studies have been done on this. Cf. Macario M. Ofilada, *Philippiniana Sacra* 41,123 (2006): 609-632, and Argimiro T. Turrado in John E. Rotelle (ed.), *The Works of Saint Thomas of Villanova* 20,1 (1994).

by the late Fr. Argimiro T. Turrado, OSA, for example, constitute a significant contribution, in this regard.[18]

Many of Saint Thomas' writings (particularly his sermons or homilies)[19] have come down to us. As to his sermons, he originally delivered them in Spanish, but he later translated most of them into Latin because in those days things were published in Latin.[20] Prior to their publication, copies or drafts of his sermons already circulated among the crowd, given the popularity that he enjoyed as a preacher and the high esteem that people of all walks of life had for him. Stenographers jotted down notes, which were later collected and circulated in the diocese of Valencia.

A Latin edition of his sermons was first published in Alcala in 1572 (just a few years after his demise).[21] They were also published in six volumes in Manila from 1881 to 1897. A volume of the Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC, vol. 96) also contains some of his sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) and other writings.[22] These publications consist mainly of his sermons on the liturgical year. However, we also have some

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[18] One may read the following publications by Argimiro T. Turrado: "La teología de la caridad en Santo Tomás de Villanueva, maestro de espiritualidad agustiniana" en *CD* 171 (1958): 564-598; "El ideal monástico agustiniano en Santo Tomás de Villanueva" en *RAE* 1 (1960); 107-146, 345-359; 2 (1961): 253-269; 3 (1962): 5-21, 265-285; 6 (1965): 39-78, 193-214, 340-371; *Espiritualidad agustiniana y vida de perfección. El ideal monástico agustiniano en Santo Tomás de Villanueva*, Madrid, Ed. Religión y Cultura 1966; and *Santo Tomás de Villanueva. Maestro de teología y espiritualidad agustinianas*, Madrid, Ed. Revista Agustiniana 1995.

[19] The Spanish term "*conciones*" is often used in this case. It comes from the Latin word "*concio, concionis*" or "*contio*, *contionis*" which indicates a discourse or oration before a public assembly – hence, the connotation of a "sermon" or a "homily". Most of the works of Thomas of Villanova have been preserved in the form of sermons. They constitute the main material of his writings in terms of volume and content. In fact, of the six-volume collection of his works published in Manila from 1881 to 1897 (edited by Fr. Benito Ubierna and Fr. Ignacio Monasterio), five volumes are sermons (on the liturgical seasons, the feasts of the Lord, the BVM and the Saints).

[20] Cf. John E. Rotelle, Foreword, 1994, Part 1: 9.

[21] The initiative to have the sermons and other writings of Thomas of Villanova published was taken by the bishop of Segovia immediately after the saint's demise. Thomas was already considered by the people of Spain as a saint during that time. In fact, he was often called "the Seraphic Doctor": cf. Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 201.

[22] Santos Santamarta, *ibid*.

of his commentaries on particular biblical books (for example, those on the Song of Songs), as well as some letters[23] and his annotations while working on the revision of the *Constitutions* of the Augustinian Order in 1543.[24] Other posthumous editions of his sermons saw the light in Alcala, Salamanca, Cologne, Atwerp, Brussels, Ausburg, Rome, Milan and Brescia. A nine-volume English translation of his works was published by the Augustinian Heritage Institute in Villanova, PA in USA from 1994 to 2001.[25] The references to the Saint's writings are based on this English translation (except for some quotations based on the BAC edition).

As to the present article's title, let it be said beforehand that the type of wisdom discussed by St. Thomas of Villanova is not a purely worldly and temporal type – wisdom according to the wise men of this world and applied to the existing situations of the present life. It is not wisdom that fills a thinker with intellectual pride and seeks people's admiration. It is rather wisdom in a religious sense. It means being wise according to God's mind or divine standard. Wisdom is ultimately identified with God himself, or as Saint Paul would put it: "If any one of you thinks of himself as wise in the ordinary sense of the word, then he must learn to be a fool before he really can be wise. Why? Because the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God" (1Cor 3:18). He uses the term σοφία (Latin *sapientia*) in this case as against the term μωρία which means "foolishness" (Latin *stultitia*).

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[23] For example, we have his letter to Fr. Jerome Seripand (Prior General of the Augustinian Order at that time) dated August 12, 1544, his undated letter to Pope Paul III on the occasion of his appointment as archbishop of Valencia, etc.

[24] Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 72-73 mentions that Thomas of Villanova requested to be relieved of the task to revise the Augustinian *Constitutions* after his appointment as archbishop of Valencia. See his letter (dated August 12, 1544) addressed to Fr. Jerome Seripand.

[25] The writings of Thomas of Villanova cited in the present article are based mostly on this translation and on the way it is divided. Thus, for documentation, the sermons and writings of the Saint are quoted as published in vol. 20 of *The Augustinian Series* (published in nine volumes from 1994 to 2001), indicating what "Part" (volume) they come from and the corresponding page. Part 1 of the said publication is on Advent, Part 2 is on Christmas, Part 3 is on Lent, Part 4 is on Easter, Part 5 is on Sundays, Part 6A and Part 6B are on the Saints, Part 7 is on the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), and Part 8 is on various sermons and other writings. Hence, for example, "Sermon 1, 1: 90" means that such sermon comes from Sermon 1, part 1 – that is, on Advent, page 90 of the said publication.

Commenting on Saint Paul's words, Saint Thomas in one of his sermons on Advent identifies divine wisdom with God's plan and explains: "[it] transcends every human mind. If you try to assess it by your wisdom it will look like folly because it stretches beyond the bounds of reason, yet in reality it is the highest wisdom".[26] However, this does not mean that divine wisdom is totally beyond human grasp. This will be explained later. For now, let it suffice to say that the possession of wisdom presupposes humility. Thus, he says: "Humble your intellect and bring it into captivity in the obedience of faith …. Listen that you may see; believe that you may understand, for unless you believe, you will not understand".[27] This corresponds with Augustine's teaching: "*crede ut intelligas*" – "believe so that you may understand", based on his interpretation of Is 7:9 (LXX and Vulgate versions).[28]

3. Man and Knowledge

To better understand Saint Thomas' notion of wisdom, one must take into account his vision of man. Indeed, every philosophy presupposes Anthropology. What is man has always been a fundamental question raised by philosophers since time immemorial. Saint Thomas initially seems to espouse Aristotelian Hylemorphism. Man is composed of body and soul. However, he later elaborates on it and resorts to a more Platonic tripartite Anthropology that sees man as composed not of two but three "parts" – body, inferior soul, and higher soul.[29] Of more interest to the Saint was man's soul or incorporeal "part" and its faculties or powers.

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[26] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.3, 1: 128; *Sermon* 5.19-20, 5: 117-118.

[27] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.3, 1: 128

[28] Augustine, *Sermon* 43.7.9 and *In Ioh. ev. tract*. 29: "Ergo noli quaerere intelligere ut credas, sed crede ut intelligas"; cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.16, 4: 298. On this, see Gareth B. Matthews, 2005: 86-95, and Robert E. Cushman, 1955: 287-314.

[29] The inferior soul is sometimes identified with the "*anima*" or the "*psyche*", while the higher soul is identified with the "*animus*" or the "*pneuma*". This distinction between the soul (ψυχή) and the spirit (πνεῦμα), inspired by Pauline anthropology (as expressed in 1Thess 5:23; cf. Ws 15:11), was already elaborated on by the Fathers of the Church in the second and the third centuries, especially on the part of the so-called

He starts by comparing the abilities or powers of living creatures, of men and beasts in particular. He says that both have the power to perceive things, to observe things through the use of the external senses. But understanding what one observes or perceives is proper only to rational beings (including man). Thus he writes: "Observing is free for all, but an understanding of what is observed is only in the human being … Brutes are able to perceive all these things, but only people can discern and judge them. To hear a voice is common to people and brutes, but only a human can recognize melody, harmony, and consonance. To see colors is common to both, but only a human can perceive beauty …. Only a human enters into the inside of things by the sharpness of reason and understanding".[30]

From the level of perception, one moves higher to the level of understanding using the intellect. Saint Thomas explains that "the name 'intellect' is taken from that which is interior, as if an internal reading of interior things".[31] He clearly had in mind the Latin etymology of the term, from "*intus*" (within, inside) and "*legere*" (to read). Then from the level of understanding with the intellect, man goes to the higher level of wisdom, which enables him to penetrate the mysteries revealed by God himself – "the hidden truth … the secret remedy and road of salvation".[32] The possession of wisdom presupposes faith. Hence Saint Thomas says: "the mystery is not known without faith …. This knowledge is possessed not from a sharp intellect, but from a pure one; not from a subtle mind, but from a clean heart. Faith is what cleanses the heart …. The secrets of salvation are revealed by faith, and where

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"Alexandrians". See, for example, *De principiis* 3.4.1-5 by Origen of Alexandria (185-254). The soul was then understood as somewhat located between the body and the spirit and seen as the seat of freewill – hence, changeable in nature. Cf. Eugene TeSelle, 2006: 35. In the case of Augustine, however, sometimes he uses the term "*anima*" as referring to the soul in general and the term "*animus*" as referring to the rational soul in particular. As to the soul's mid-rank position, unlike the Alexandrians, he thinks of the soul as being half-way between God and the body and not so much as something located between the body and the higher soul – cf. Roland Teske, 2001: 116, and Mary T. Clark, 2001: 97.

[30] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.12-13, 5: 113-114.

[31] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.13, 5: 114.

[32] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.16, 5: 116.

the intellect falters, faith attains".[33] Faith is "infused into the mind; it enlightens the intellect so that it understands supernatural truths and, in an extraordinary way, faith inclines the intellect to believe them".[34]

What Saint Thomas says about human acquisition of knowledge reveals the strong influence of Augustine on him. In the African bishop's work "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis" (written in 401/415), he speaks of three types of "vision" or "ways of seeing" – namely, the corporeal, the spiritual, and the intellectual.[35] Corporeal vision relies on sense perception and on the actual presence of objects to the bodily senses. Next comes spiritual vision which relies on the corresponding images formed in human memory. Last comes intellectual vision where true understanding takes place. This is the level of abstract thinking and pure ideas.

Saint Augustine certainly offers us a more elaborate Epistemology compared to what Saint Thomas proposes, which is understandable. It must be kept in mind that we are focusing on what the latter delivered in homilies and how he communicated his ideas to simple members of his diocese. He was not addressing an élite group of philosophers. However, Saint Thomas goes beyond what Saint Augustine termed as intellectual "vision" and transitions from the level of understanding to the level of wisdom, where things are revealed to the human mind by faith. On this level, knowledge and understanding no longer result from rationalization and reasoning, but from divine revelation. Here one enters into the domain of faith.

For St. Thomas of Villanova, believing should guide understanding. We read: "Not through understanding to faith will you travel, but through faith to understanding".[36] This is the classical description of Theology provided by Saint Anselm of Canterbuy: faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*)[37] which has all the imprint of Augustine.[38] Faith,

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[33] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.16, 5: 116; cf. *Sermon* on the 20th Sunday after the Pentecost 5, 5: 313.

[34] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on St. Ildephonsus 1.1, 6A: 119.

[35] Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt*. 12.6.15-11.22 and 30.58-31.59.

[36] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.3, 1: 128.

[37] Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 1: "Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam".

[38] Cf. Augustine, *De Trin*. 15.2.2; George Howie, 1969: 49-61 and 283.

therefore, is a necessary prerequisite for understanding.[39] It should guide us in our search for truth, while our search for truth should help us understand what God has revealed to us through faith. It is "understanding through faith".[40] Note, however, that man must recognize how far his understanding can take him in his faith-guided search. Indeed, the human intellect can help us understand certain things about God, but only up to a certain extent.[41] Otherwise, we would be like that small boy, according to a medieval legend, that tried to put all the waters of the ocean into the small hole that he dug in the sand.[42]

The relationship between faith and the human intellect is compared to the relationship between a master and his servant travelling together towards a palace. St. Thomas of Villanova explains: they "travel together, they ascend the stairs together, but the servant remains at the door while the master enters and passes through all the rooms".[43] The "master", in this case, symbolizes faith while the "servant" represents the intellect. Furthermore, comparing faith and the knowledge grasped by the human intellect, he says: "faith is more resolute than knowledge … Knowledge relies on the eye, but faith on an oracle, and the eye may be mistaken or deceived, but an oracle cannot … just as God cannot lie, neither can faith deceive".[44] He is referring here not so much to the possible effects of faith, but to its divine origin.

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[39] John M. Rist, 2001: 131.

[40] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.16, 4: 298.

[41] Through intellectual reasoning, for example, one may arrive at the existence of God, understand the divine attributes, and so forth, but knowledge of the mysteries of faith goes well beyond the scope of natural human reasoning.

[42] This story is often associated with Augustine's attempt to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity while he was writing his work *De Trinitate*. It is depicted several times in late medieval and early modern art, but its origins are sketchy. A written account of it is found in an English translation of the so-called *Legenda Aurea* or "Golden Legend". This was a collection of the lives of the Saints put together by an Italian Dominican friar named Jacobus De Voragine (ca. 1230-1298) around the middle of the thirteenth century. Cf. https://www.google. com/search?q=jaconus+de+voragine&oq=jaconus+de+voragine&aqs=chrome..69i57j 46i13i512l2j0i13i512l3j0i22i30l3.4753j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 [accessed 9-Oct-2024].

[43] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on St. Ildephonsus 1.9, 6A: 126.

[44] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on St. Ildephonsus 1.2, 6A: 120.

Recognizing the limitation of the human mind should not lead one to give up any intellectual search altogether. Faith presupposes a certain level of understanding. It is not something totally blind and irrational. In fact, it is a particular form of thinking.[45] Human reason can help us, to a certain degree, understand many things about our faith, God and ourselves. In this regard, Saint Thomas says that knowledge has two facets. On the one hand it entails knowledge of God; on the other hand, it entails self-knowledge.[46] From this, one arrives at true wisdom. Thus, "our highest wisdom is to savor the truth of what we are and to ponder it".[47]

4. Two Facets of Knowledge

Self-knowledge means, first and foremost, recognizing that you are composed of body and soul, the former being mortal and the latter being immortal.[48] The rational soul is seen as "a type of spiritual substance, incorporeal, incorruptible, immortal, intelligent, free, open to God, having reason and will".[49] On the other hand, in a very Platonic way, Saint Thomas sees the body (sometimes identified with the flesh) as "a prison for the soul".[50] The soul is the animating principle of the body.[51] Sometimes a distinction is further drawn between the "soul" and the "spirit". He says: "The spirit is the superior part and the soul the inferior. The soul as such remains here below, while the spirit ascends to where the heart is …. Our spirit is divided and separated from things below in order that it may be

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[45] Augustine describes faith as "thinking with assent": *De praed. sanct*. 2.5. Cf. John M. Rist, 2001: 37 states: "the goal of religious thought must be to see by reason (properly understood) what we now hold by faith".

[46] Cf. Augustine, *Sol*. 2.1: "Let me know myself, let me know you"; Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.9, 4: 253. Also see George Howie, 1969: 310.

[47] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.2, 1: 151.

[48] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.2-3, 1: 150-151.

[49] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.4, 6B: 30.

[50] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.10, 6A: 114.

[51] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on 22nd Sunday after the Pentecost 3, 5: 326.

lifted to the heights. The spirit is divided from the soul in order that it may be joined and united to the Lord".[52]

Second, self-knowledge means recognizing the fact that it is the soul that enables you to enter into a relationship with God by using your natural gift of understanding and ability to love. These are powers which Saint Thomas attributes to what he considers as the "higher part" of the soul in contrast to the "lower part" or the "sensitive part".[53] Again influenced by Plato, he talks of three parts of the human soul – namely, the rational, the appetitive, and the choleric.[54] It is in the higher soul – the rational (whose seat is in the "spirit") – where man cultivates virtues. Thus he says: "Recognize who you are …; acknowledge your high dignity and live as befits your nature. You are a human being: live humanly, then! ... By nature you are rational, for reason was given to you …. Live a rational life, then! … What, you may ask, is a rational life? Surely, a life dedicated to virtue, for virtue is simply the habit of acting according to the rule of reason".[55]

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[52] Thomas of Villanova, *Treatise* 11, Chapter 4, 8: 183-184. However, there are instances where Saint Thomas does not make any distinction at all between "soul" and "spirit": cf. *Sermon* 1 on the Presentation of the BVM in Santos Santamarta, 1952: 221 ("alma llamamos al espíritu que anima a todo hombre, alma también al que anima a cada cuerpo"). Soul or spirit is taken, in this case, as the animating principle of the body. Cf. Augustine, *Sermon* 267.4.

[53] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on St. Barnabas 3, 6A: 188. In his exposition on contemplation (chapter 4) in Santos Santamarta, 1952: 524 we read: "son una misma cosa el ánima y el espíritu, porque en un mismo hombre no es otra cosa su esencia que su ánima, bien que no talmente es una sola substancia, empero por las distinguir se llama espíritu y ánima: el espíritu es la superior porción y el ánima la inferior".

[54] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.4, 6B: 171; cf. *Sermon* 1.7, 6B: 166-167; Plato, *Republic* 4.440-441 in John M. Cooper, 1997: 1071-1072. In *Phaedrus* 246a-b, Plato compares the three "parts" of the soul to two types of a horse and to a charioteer that tries to control them. He writes: "To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline. This means that chariot-driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business". Plato picks up the same analogy in *Phaedrus* 253d. On this, cf. Giovanni R. F. Ferrari, 1992: 263-265.

[55] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.3, 1: 152. We can already see this type of exhortation among the ancient Stoics. For them, living a rational life meant "living according to nature" (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει) – that is, not allowing oneself to be ruled by irrational passions and living in a state of *apátheia*. Cf. Czar Emmanuel V. Alvarez, 2012: 45-48 and 50-51.

Lastly, self-knowledge means recognizing your calling as a Christian. Saint Thomas writes: "You are a Christian. What does it mean to be a Christian? It is to be a disciple of Christ and enrolled in his school … a follower of him".[56] Self-knowledge, therefore, entails growing in awareness of one's intimate relationship with God. The more one becomes aware of the desires of the spirit, the more he feels the need to commune with God. On this level of self-knowledge, man allows his intellect to be enlightened by divine illumination.[57] Certain truths are revealed to him by faith.

In other words, the human mind (among other things) helps man understand his true nature – that is, his being composed of body and soul. One likewise understands their true nature – the body being mortal and the soul being immortal. The human mind also makes one aware of the powers or abilities of the soul, in particular his ability to cultivate virtues. Lastly, it makes one aware of his calling as a Christian. This is as far as self-knowledge is concerned.

Knowledge of God, on the other hand, means discerning God's will and plan for us. Specifically, it means recognizing how God works in the person of Jesus Christ. He who arrives at this comes to understand that all wisdom and all Christian philosophy means knowing nothing else but Jesus Christ.[58] It is true that God also reveals himself through creation, as Saint Paul acknowledges in Rom 1:20.[59] However, St. Thomas of Villanova explains that "God makes himself known through his redeeming work

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[56] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.4, 1: 153.

[57] The topic of divine illumination or how the divine mind enlightens the human intellect, thus making it capable of understanding, is one of the debated questions in Augustinian epistemology, as Eugene TeSelle, 2006: 18 points out. Roland J. Teske, 2009: 81 agrees, saying: "Contemporary scholars are more in agreement about what this divine illumination cannot mean than they are about what [it] does mean". The analogy of the sun is often used to explain it, in this case: "Divine illumination acts like the sun conferring intelligibility even when it is not directly seen": Eugene TeSelle, 2006: 18. "Just as the light of the sun makes other things visible by its light and is itself visible, so the intelligible light makes other things intelligible and is itself intelligible": Roland Teske, 2009: 81; cf. Gareth B. Matthews, 2001: 180-181; Augustine, *Sol*. 1.8.15; *De Gen. ad litt*. 12.31.59. Hence, man is made capable of knowing but not necessarily of arriving at an immediate vision of God.

[58] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.5, 1: 142.

[59] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on Trinity Sunday 1.5, 4: 282.

even more clearly than in creating the world".[60] He expresses the same idea in one of his sermons delivered during the Christmas season: "O God, you have revealed yourself more fully in your Son than in the world".[61]

Knowledge of God is something that goes beyond purely human understanding.[62] It is possible only because God makes himself known through the person of Christ. Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, talks about this when he writes: "Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!" (Rom 11:33) And yet, things have been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. Thus, "no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).[63] One needs to transcend human knowledge, in this case, to understand certain things that God reveals. St. Thomas of Villanova, talking about the limitation of the human mind, exclaims: "What is the human intellect, what is the perspicuity of reason and the sharpness of mind compared to such a mystery to be investigated?"[64] Not all philosophers attain such level of understanding. In fact, only a few among ancient philosophers succeeded in doing so "by divine intuition … more than by study, [they] attained something of this most sacred mystery from afar".[65] Like Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas includes the Platonists among such fortunate pagan philosophers.[66] He says: "Do you suppose that they reached this by natural light alone and not rather that they perceived it by certain divine inspiration …?"[67] It is something that surpas-

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[60] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.5, 1: 142.

[61] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.7, 2: 41.

[62] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.7, 2: 41.

[63] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.7, 4: 284-285.

[64] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.5, 4: 282. Examples of such mysteries would be those concerning the Most Holy Trinity, the Word's Incarnation, the perpetual virginity of the BVM, etc.: cf. *Sermon* 1.4 on the Nativity of the BVM in Santos Santamarta, 1952: 179; *Sermon* 4.1 on the Annunciation in Santamarta, 1952: 270; and *Sermon* 5.4 on the Annunciation in Santamarta, 1952: 286. These were the same truths of faith that Augustine wrestled with and which resulted inexplicable from the purely human, rational point of view.

[65] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.5, 4: 283.

[66] Augustine had a high esteem for the Platonists (although he corrected and even rejected some of their teachings). For him, they "approached the truth more nearly than other philosophers" (*De civ. Dei* 14.20.19).

[67] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.5, 4: 283.

ses "all the wisdom of the world, all philosophy, astrology, and every other knowledge, whether natural or a product of civilization".[68] It cannot be known by human powers alone unless God assists a person "on the inside".[69]

5. Stages in the Acquisition of Wisdom

Only by possessing knowledge in its two aspects of self-knowledge and knowledge of God can one arrive at divine wisdom, which goes beyond what the philosophers of this world can ever attain.[70] At this point we may ask: Can man become wise or possess wisdom effortlessly? Is it something that simply falls down from heaven upon man and transforms him? Is it God alone who acts, in this case, and does man need not do anything but wait for God to bestow it upon him? How would St. Thomas of Villanova answer these questions?

In his *Sermon* 4 delivered during the Advent season,[71] Saint Thomas compares the coming and growth of wisdom in us to a bride waiting for her groom.[72] It comes in gradual stages. First, she hears his voice; then she sees him; next she feels him approaching and becomes aware of his presence; and finally she hears him calling her name. Thus, there are four stages involved in the growth, development and acquisition of wisdom in us: (1) hearing, (2) seeing, (3) feeling, and (4) being called.

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[68] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.7, 4: 285.

[69] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.3, 4: 289.

[70] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.11, 2: 58.

[71] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4, 1: 197-198.

[72] The use of analogy and allegory is quite common in the sermons of St. Thomas of Villanova. We can already find examples of both in the Bible itself (e.g. Rom 7:1-6 and Gal 4:21-31). Saint Thomas was definitely familiar with the Sacred Scripture's use of analogies and allegories. The Bible was his primary source of inspiration and constant point of reference – cf. Argimiro Turrado, 1994: 15, and Luis Morales Oliver, 1981: 24-26. He also followed the example of Augustine and other Fathers of the Church, in this case. In their biblical exegesis, they distinguished among the different levels of interpretation – from the literal (material, historical, corporeal) to the spiritual (moral, anagogical, mystical, etc.). cf. Manlio Simonetti, 1985: 67-69, 79, 85, 87, and 92.

"Hearing" the voice of wisdom entails being aware of one's sinful state and allowing oneself to be awakened from one's spiritual slumber. It is not possible to possess wisdom unless one overcomes the obstacle of sin that prevents him from welcoming wisdom into his life. Wisdom presupposes the ability to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong and eventually pursuing the former. If a person decides to continue wallowing in a state of sin, then we would not consider him as wise because he has been given a chance to be wise by changing his wrong ways and yet he refused to do so.

After one has shaken off the shackles of sin and arisen from it comes the "seeing" stage. For St. Thomas of Villanova, "seeing" means moving towards wisdom itself. This time, one does not simply "hear" the voice of wisdom calling him to change his ways, but actually "sees" where the voice is coming from and hastens towards it. At this point one already "sees" wisdom, but he does not possess it yet. However, a person already catches a glimpse of it and feels the desire to possess it. Hence, one starts moving towards it. Saint Thomas writes: "Such hastening is manifested by desire born in the heart: a desire to serve God, to give one's attention to him, to make up for the wasted time".[73]

The third stage is that of "feeling". At this point, the desire for wisdom grows even stronger within us. We now actually start taking concrete actions or translating our desire into concrete attitudes and behavior.[74] Saint Thomas explains: "This is a holy, heavenly fire, which consumes and drives away all worldly attitudes, earthly ambitions and carnal lusts".[75] Indeed, having the desire to possess wisdom is one thing, translating that desire into something concrete is another. Engaging in concrete acts and cultivating the right attitudes within us prepares us for full possession of wisdom. We do not possess wisdom yet at this point, but we are already creating the proper dispositions within us to welcome it.

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[73] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.4, 1: 198.

[74] This may appear identical with the stage of "hearing" that leads one to a moral conversion. However, Saint Thomas seems to be referring here to something more complete and holistic. It goes beyond moral reform or turning away from sin, but entails more positive engagement on man's part. One thing is avoiding sin, another thing is doing positive actions to grow in goodness and holiness.

[75] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.4, 1: 198.

Finally comes the fourth stage: "hearing" the voice of wisdom "calling our name" and responding to it.[76] In this way an intimate rapport is created between our soul and wisdom itself. It is at this point that one experiences happiness. Thus, St. Thomas of Villanova says: "Happy is that soul which has God present and abiding so intimately within it".[77] It is foretaste of that eternal happiness that awaits us in the afterlife, when we will be in full communion with God and be completely filled with His presence.

Saint Thomas' description of the stages involved in the acquisition of wisdom on man's part by way of analogy somewhat reflects also the four steps involved in man's spiritual growth or the stages of Christian perfection. He compares them to four rungs of a spiritual ladder, while he compares the soul to a spiritual castle. The first step consists in defending one's castle and walling it on every side to protect it from enemies or the assaults of evil – hence, a process of purification. The second step consists of advancing in virtue. The third step consists of performing good acts to please God. And the final step consists in the union of action and contemplation (symbolized by Martha and Mary, in the Gospel accounts)[78] where one would have expected the union of the soul with God.

Saint Thomas' description of happiness as having God present and abiding in one's soul resonates with Saint Augustine's ultimate notion of happiness. This was the result of the African bishop's deeper reflection on the nature of happiness. He started off with a rather generic idea of hap-

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[76] In the Bible, being called by name indicates something intimate and presupposes a profound knowledge of the one being called. Take the case, for example, of Mary Magdalene who recognized the Risen Christ only after he called her by name (Jn 20:16). God alone possesses full knowledge of everything that He created (including man). Ps 147:4 says that "God numbers all the stars and calls each of them by name". God called the prophets by name (cf. Is 43:1). It also indicates belonging to God (cf. Is 49:1; Jn 10:3) or being given a special mission (especially when one's name is modified, as in the case of Abram in Gen 17:5, Sarai in Gen 17:15 and Jacob in Gen 32:28). For some of the uses of names in the Old and the New Testaments and their implications, cf. John L. McKenzie, 1965: 603-605.

[77] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.4, 1: 198.

[78] Argimiro Turrado, 1994: 27. For Augustine's symbolic interpretation of the biblical personages Mary and Martha (sisters of Lazarus of Bethany – cf. Lk 10:38-42), see his *Sermones* 103, 104, 179 and 255.

piness: "Happy is he who has what he wants".[79] Later on he realized the insufficiency of such definition and came up with a slightly more delimited one: "No one is happy unless he has all that he wants and wants nothing that is evil".[80] Thus, he understood that in order to be happy, it was not enough that one obtained whatever he wanted, independently of whether what he desired was good or evil. One must rather pursue only what is good. Saint Augustine then reflected on the various possible objects of desire that were good in themselves and realized that only the pursuit of the "highest good" could make man happy. He later identified it with God himself. Hence, "happy is he who enjoys the highest good".[81] In this way he came up with a more precise notion of happiness: "Happiness consists in the enjoyment of a good other than which there is nothing better, which we call the chief good".[82] Note that the refinement and development of Saint Augustine's understanding of happiness was not chronological in order or the result of maturity in thinking along the course of time, but more of a conceptual one. From a more generic understanding of it he arrived at a more precise notion of happiness as possession of God as the "*summum bonum*".

By identifying the various stages involved in the growth and eventual possession of wisdom on our part, St. Thomas of Villanova reminds us that it takes time to be wise; it takes a lot of patience; it presupposes willingness on our part to change our way of thinking and feeling; it entails purification; and so forth. It is not something that one can possess with no preparation and without the proper internal disposition. One must open himself to it, take some necessary steps to attain it, and welcome it.

6. Learning and Possession of Wisdom

Saint Thomas speaks of the gradual possession of wisdom as being "schooled by the Word" itself. The Word trains and educates the human soul in wisdom, slowly preparing the soul to possess it in its fullness. Such

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[79] Augustine, *De beata vita* 10.

[80] Augustine, *De Trin.* 13.5.8.

[81] Augustine, *De lib. arb.* 2.13.36.

[82] Augustine, *De mor. eccl. cath.* 3.

act of schooling is a manifestation of God's love for man. He writes: "It is the Father's nature to love, and so an infusion of love is the proof of the Father's coming". And then he asks: "Of what use would learning be without love? It would only puff us up. But what would love do without learning? It would lead us astray".[83] So he first points out that the soul's being schooled in wisdom is an expression of God's love. He loves us and so wants us to possess wisdom. If God did not love us, He would not even bother to train us. Second, Saint Thomas speaks of the necessary balance between the act of learning and the act of loving. Learning means allowing oneself to be schooled by God or allowing him to train our soul to possess wisdom. However, the learning process must be accompanied by love. Learning is not an end in itself. It is rather geared towards loving God. In other words, as we learn and deepen our understanding of wisdom, our love for God should become deeper. Pure learning not accompanied by love leads to pride, and this brings us farther away from God.[84]

Again, it is not hard to hear echoes of Saint Augustine's thought in all this. The African bishop considers the act of knowing God as the ultimate goal of learning. His idea of education has a clear eudemonistic background: education is not an end in itself, but should rather be seen as a means to the attainment of happiness which, in turn, is possible only if one succeeds in possessing God, the "*summum bonum*". To possess God is the same thing as enjoying him.[85] George Howie synthesizes, "the aim is to know God, and the process is intellectual enquiry".[86]

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[83] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.2, 1: 196. Along the same vein but without citing his source, Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 26 attributes these words to Thomas of Villanova: "Science and doctrine without piety are like a sword placed in the hand of a child, who can make no good use of it and may injure many".

[84] Augustine considers pride as the very cause of sin right from the very beginning. It is the archetypal sin, the first of all vices, the origin and cause of all sins, the fountainhead of all diseases (cf. *In Ioh. ev. tr.* 25.16). Cf. John C. Cavadini, 1999: 679-684. For Thomas of Villanova, one way of avoiding this is by accompanying one's acquisition of knowledge with love. In fact, it is the very goal of learning: we study in order to know God more and love Him more (cf. *Sermon* on Mary Magdalene 10, 6A: 251).

[85] Augustine, *De beata vita* 33. In his *De div. quaest. octoginta tribus* 35.1 we read: "Quid est beate vivere nisi aeternum aliquid cognoscendo habere?"

[86] George Howie, 1969: 42.

Loving, on the other hand, is not enough to possess God. It should rather be accompanied by knowledge or growth in understanding. Taking cue from St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) – the second author most cited by St. Thomas of Villanova next to Saint Augustine,[87] he says that increase in learning can come about in many ways, for example, through study of the Scriptures, through meditation, etc.[88] Possession of wisdom, therefore, presupposes a certain degree of understanding or knowledge. In this case, our study contributes to knowing God more and more, and the more we grow in our understanding of God, the more we should love him. We read: "God has made you capable of possessing him by intellect and will, in order that by understanding him you might love him and by loving him you might enjoy him".[89] Possession of wisdom, then, has two fundamental aspects: the cognitive or intellectual and the affective or volitional. Philosophical studies should eventually lead to Theology, which provides us with a deeper understanding of God. It is not surprising that Philosophy is traditionally described as "*ancilla theologiae*" – "the handmaiden of theology".[90]

7. Love and Acquisition of Wisdom

The acquisition of knowledge and of wisdom presupposes the existence of two fundamental faculties in the human soul – namely, the intellect and the will.[91] They are considered as the two "feet of the soul"

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[87] John E. Rotelle, Foreword, 1994: 15.

[88] John E. Rotelle, Foreword, 1994: 196.

[89] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on Mary Magdalene 10, 6A: 251.

[90] This dictum is often attributed to Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215), but some scholars would trace its origin to the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (ca. 30 BC to 45 AD), in his treatise *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia* (translated as "On Mating with the Preliminary Studies"). In this work, Philo explains in what way the study of the so-called "liberal arts" leads to the possession of wisdom. He writes: "The encyclical branches of education contribute to the proper comprehension of philosophy, so also does philosophy aid in the acquisition of wisdom, for philosophy is the attentive study of wisdom and wisdom is the knowledge of all divine and human things … Therefore, just as encyclical accomplishments are the handmaidens of philosophy, so also is philosophy the handmaiden of wisdom" (*De congr. quaer. erud. gr.* 14.79 as translated by Charles D. Yonge, 1993: 311.

[91] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.18, 3: 135.

since "we go to God with these when we contemplate and when we love".[92] The two work together. For example, through the intellect one sees God's goodness, while through the will one loves God for his goodness. It is through the will that man loves what the intellect perceives as good, desirable, true, and so forth. Hence, Saint Thomas describes love as the "breath of the soul … which broadens the soul to receive Christ. The heart without love is narrow and cannot receive Christ, and therefore love is breadth of heart".[93] Sometimes, like Saint Augustine, he says that the human soul has three faculties – intellect, memory and will.[94]

The human heart plays a special role in Augustinian spirituality. In fact, the burning heart is a common representation of Augustinian spirituality. Saint Augustine speaks of the heart as the seat of love, which in turn is described as the force of the soul and of life itself.[95] Love is the strongest and most powerful of human inclinations. St. Thomas of Villanova replicates the same thought when he says: "Such is the power of love: it so inebriates the soul that it leaves no room in the heart for other feelings".[96] It moves the human will, making us one with the object of our love.[97] Saint Augustine even says that a person "is" what he or she loves.[98]

Saint Thomas speaks of man's natural desire for God, a natural inclination to love God. Everything, not only man, tends towards him in its own way.[99] Following the teachings of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas speaks of love as a weight (*pondus*). It is "a weight of the soul".[100] It is also "the driving force in our life". However, he perceives a certain balance

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[92] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 7.5, 7: 247.

[93] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.20, 3: 137.

[94] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.4, 6B: 30; cf. Augustine, *De Trin*. 10.18. Also see Argimiro T. Turrado, 1994: 33 citing a text from Thomas of Villanova where these three powers of the soul are compared to three plants.

[95] Cf. Tarsicius van Bavel, 1999: 509.

[96] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.11, 4: 61.

[97] Cf. Augustine, *De ord*. 2.18.48.

[98] Cf. Augustine, *In ep. Ioh*. 5.7-8; 2.14.

[99] Argimiro Turrado, 1994: 18-21.

[100] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.3, 5: 253; and *Sermón del Amor de Dios* 2.3 in Santos Santamarta, 1952: 603. Cf. Augustine, *Conf*. 13.9: "My love, my weight. I am carried by it wherever I am carried".

between love and understanding. It is God himself who "lights a spark of love" in us so that we would return to Him.[101] God sets our heart on fire through His word: "You have transfixed us with the arrows of your charity".[102]

Man cannot acquire knowledge and wisdom unless he is moved towards what the mind perceives as true and good. Love is at work in both instances. The human will moves the intellect towards its proper object and, at the same time, it moves the human will towards what the intellect perceives as good and desirable. Man cannot love what he does not know. "Love indeed supposes knowledge, because the unknown is not loved".[103] Likewise, the will must be "directed and regulated by reason".[104] Some scholars speak of a certain "symbiosis of intellect and will", in this regard.[105] St. Thomas of Villanova compares volition to an oil and the intellect to the mind.[106] He says: "If you want to shed light, first be anointed (*sc*. with the oil of charity), for the oil of the will feeds and ministers to the lamp of the intellect … a lamp without oil is useless".[107] Love is an essential part of the learning process, just as learning is necessary for loving. Saint Thomas (as we have quoted earlier) asks: "Of what use would learning be without love? It would only puff us up. But what would love do without learning? It would lead us astray".[108] Understanding should ultimately lead man to love God.

Love of God is the highest form of love that man can ever cultivate within himself. Before reaching this point, one would have already gone through the various levels of love. Saint Thomas identifies four of them.[109]

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[101] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.5, 1: 183. Also see *De civ. Dei* 11.28.

[102] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.10, 1: 117; cf. Augustine, *Conf*. 10.6.8.

[103] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 9.4, 7: 263.

[104] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on St. Barnabas 3, 6A: 188.

[105] Argimiro T. Turrado 1994: 20.

[106] See footnote 71 on the use of analogy and allegory in the sermons of Thomas of Villanova.

[107] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.5, 6A: 149.

[108] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.2, 1: 196.

[109] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.2, 5: 261-262. Moreover, based on Thomas of Villanova's *Sermon* 2 on the love of God, Macario M. Ofilada 2006: 623 identifies three

We begin with self-love. Thus, we love ourselves above all else and all things because of ourselves. Next comes love of God for our own sake. This comes from the realization that we cannot love ourselves unless we love God who gives us everything that we need. God is the one who satisfies our needs. Third comes love of God that comes from the pleasure that we experience because of his benevolence, generosity, kindness and goodness toward us. Loving God, in this case, pleases us. The focus is now shifting from self-love to love of God. Finally we have love of God for his own sake. Hence, we end up loving God because he is God and we love him with undivided heart.[110] "Every thought, every affection, every desire, and every power of the soul is completely absorbed into God, and that we love God with the whole effort of the mind".[111] It means loving God without measure.[112]

St. Thomas of Villanova also speaks of three levels of love, depending on what one is willing to pay and sacrifice for it. "First, when wealth and resources are spent for love; second, when honor is spent …; third, when life and soul is spent …. This last level is the highest"[113] and it is the example given to us by Christ himself when he laid down his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13). What level of love is involved in the acquisition of wisdom? It has to be the third one, since the quest for wisdom is a life-long endeavor. Whoever desires to possess it must be willing to spend his whole life and use all the powers of his soul for it.

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coordinates of love – namely, (1) the "ethico-moral coordinate" (por qué se ha de amar a Dios = the reason why God must be loved), (2) the "spiritual coordinate" (cómo se ha de amar = how God must be loved), and (3) the "mystical coordinate" (cómo podrás alcanzar su amor = how one achieves the goal, which is love).

[110] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.9, 5: 268.

[111] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 3.9, 5: 269.

[112] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.7, 5: 276. Augustine ultimately reduces love to two fundamental types: *amor sui* (self-love) and *amor Dei* (love of God). In his monumental work *De civitate Dei*, he considers them as the primary motors of history or that which keeps history moving towards its end: cf. Czar Emmanuel V. Alvarez, 2020: 1-11. They are also the foundations of two types of city – namely, the city of man and the city of God (symbolized respectively by Rome and Babylon, on the one hand, and by Jerusalem, on the other). Cf. *De civ. Dei* 14.28.

[113] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.8, 4: 15.

8. Wisdom in Love

Love moves man's intellect and will. However, its power goes well beyond what man is capable of grasping using his natural reason. Love leads him to go even higher, up to the mystery of God himself, to the realm of faith. St. Thomas of Villanova is well aware of this. Thus, he says: "Withdraw the eyes of your natural understanding and apply the eyes of faith; close your natural eyes and open the eyes I have given you. You must go beyond the understanding of reason and turn aside the senses of the body if you desire to know something excellent and magnificent about God".[114] God opens the "eyes of the mind" of man in order to enable him to contemplate the hidden and concealed riches of heaven.[115]

It is God who draws man to himself and He does this in many ways. Some equate this with "grace" itself – "grace" as the power that draws us to God.[116] Saint Thomas, for example, explains how even Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross attract man to God. They are expressions of God's love for humanity, and "nothing more than love inspires love".[117] Thus, God demonstrates his love, power and wisdom by sending us his Son and allowing him to die for us. "His power and wisdom shine forth, but here is love".[118]

Another way by which God draws man to himself is through the Holy Spirit, which penetrates the human soul, rendering it good, holy, virtuous, wise, and so forth. "By participation in it we are made wise or wiser, good or better".[119] It is in this context that we can better understand the relationship between wisdom and love.

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[114] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.1, 4: 23. This corresponds with the following description of a "mystic" as proposed by Macario M. Ofilada, 2006: 611 – a mystic must "close his eyes and mouth upon being initiated into the Mysteries …. The mystic closes his eyes because the experience of the Mystery demands that he shut off the light of natural reasoning and enter into a higher, superior form of reasoning".

[115] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.9, 4: 200.

[116] Argimiro Turrado 1994: 21, 25 and 28. Grace is also described as a dialogue between God and his children where God always takes the initiative and man responds accordingly, if he wills to. Man cannot respond unless he is first called by God.

[117] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.1, 4: 32.

[118] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.1, 4: 32.

[119] Tomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.3, 4: 236.

Wisdom consists in knowing the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation. Without knowing such mysteries, man cannot be saved. Thus, wisdom is necessary for salvation. A truly wise man would dedicate his entire life and use all his capacities to understand such mysteries. It would be foolish on his part to waste his time, life and powers on things that cannot save him. In order to be saved, man must know God and love him. Therefore, there is wisdom in loving God.

To speak of "wisdom in love" can mean, at least, two things. It can mean that wisdom can be found in God, who is love (1Jn 4:8), or it can also mean that there is wisdom in loving God (cf. Ps 107:43). Both ideas can be found in the writings of St. Thomas of Villanova.[120] The focus of our reflection is on the latter sense: "wisdom in love" means that a man can be considered as wise if he dedicates himself to knowing and understanding God or the mysteries revealed by Him and eventually loving Him. However, we go beyond this purely ontological and cognitive level – that is, of understanding that wisdom can be found in God and is one of his attributes, on the one hand, and understanding that there is wisdom in loving God, on the other. It is necessary to apply such understanding to concrete action and to see to it that what we do is inspired by such wisdom in love. Only then can wisdom contribute to man's salvation.

There may be different kinds of knowledge and understanding (such as knowledge of the world, knowledge of the motions of the heavens, knowledge of plants, animals and other creatures, etc.), but Saint Thomas

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[120] Macario M. Ofilada, 2006: 632 distinguishes between philosophy as "love of wisdom" and philosophy as "wisdom of love", which seems to include both nuances of "wisdom in love" as wisdom existing in God himself and "wisdom in love" as consisting in the act of loving God. Ofilada suggests that there is true wisdom in loving God in whom wisdom (among other things) exists. In fact, wisdom is just one of the so-called "divine attributes" (aside from goodness, truth, beauty, justice, etc.). Such attributes are not only properties possessed by God but are identical with the divine substance itself (in virtue of his ontological *simplicitas*). Thus, God is not only wise, but IS wisdom itself and the very source of all wisdom. The idea of divine simplicity was already present in ancient Greek philosophers (like Plotinus) and was later adopted by Christian thinkers (like Augustine, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas). In the case of Augustine, we read this explanation in *De civ. dei* 11.10: "What is meant by 'simple' is that its being is identical with its attributes .... The reason why a nature is called 'simple' is that it cannot lose any attribute it possesses, that there is no difference between what it *is* and what it *has* ...."

states: "A person can be saved without other knowledge, but without this (*sc*. knowledge of God and of the mysteries he has revealed) he is not saved. To attain salvation, this wisdom is necessary …. This truth is the only base and foundation of all faith".[121] Note how he equates wisdom with knowledge that comes from faith without limiting himself to a purely cognitive understanding of wisdom and faith. Saint Thomas avoided the mistake of the early century Gnostics, in this case, who asserted that knowledge (*gnosis*) alone could save man.

Lastly, wisdom as consisting in loving God is not something purely cognitive, theoretical, abstract and affective. In the case of St. Thomas of Villanova, his love for God was expressed through concrete acts of loving the people around him (cf. 1Jn 4:20). For good reason he became famous for his acts of charity, not only towards the poor but towards every person that he encountered independently of one's socio-political rank and status. The act of almsgiving was just one of the concrete expressions of his love for God and he demonstrated what authentic wisdom meant by reaching out to people in need. His being a bishop offered him countless occasions to do so and biographies written about him highlight this particular aspect of his life.[122] However, care must be taken in assessing outward demonstrations of acts of charity for these may not be properly motivated – that is, people who engage in acts of charity (like almsgiving) may do so for

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[121] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.7, 4: 285.

[122] Throughout his life as bishop of Valencia, Thomas of Villanova upheld the idea that whatever he gave to or shared with people in need rightfully belonged to them. Cf. Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 111-113, 117, 161, 166, 170, 177-178 and 191. He would often say: "What I have is not mine, but belongs to the poor of my diocese" or "Whatever I possess does not belong to me, but to the poor of the province". Almsgiving, therefore, as Argimiro T. Turrado, 1994: 36 rightly observes, "is not simply an exercise of charity but a work of justice". The Fathers of the Church of the early centuries already elaborated on this principle. Cf. John Chrysostom, *De Lazaro Concio* 2.6; Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis* 3.21; etc. It was grounded on the conviction that God created the world and all its resources for everyone or the principle of universal destination of created goods. Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (on fraternity and social friendship, dated 03 October 2020) has a very insightful reflection on this: cf. *Fratelli Tutti* nos. 118-123.

His fame of generosity to the poor was well known during those days such that hundreds of them would come to him for help on a daily basis: cf. Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 157. He expressed his love for the poor until the very end of his life. Thus, shortly before he died, he had all the remaining money in his sacristy distributed to the poor in his diocese and to the house servants, including all his furniture and the bed he was lying on: Claude Maimbourg, 1947: 194 and 196.

other motivations aside from the love for God. In this case, St. Thomas of Villanova reminds us that every act that we accomplish must be motivated only by the love for God. Otherwise, they are not expressions of wisdom as he understood it. Indeed, there is wisdom in loving one's neighbor as a concrete expression of one's love for God.

Conclusion

At this point, to summarize what we have discussed, we will now answer our guide questions. What does St. Thomas of Villanova mean by "wisdom"? What is involved in man's acquisition of wisdom? What is the relationship between wisdom and love, according to him?

1. *Wisdom is knowledge of divine mysteries or truths of faith*.

St. Thomas of Villanova identifies wisdom with understanding of the mysteries of faith or of the divine truths revealed by God to the human intellect. It is "the hidden truth … the secret remedy and road of salvation".[123] Now, while recognizing the limitation of the human mind, he believes that man, to a certain extent, is capable of understanding something about God and divine realities using the natural capacities that God has given him, particularly his intellect and will. Possession of wisdom, while going beyond what the human intellect is capable of grasping and the human will can ever desire, can be attained if the human mind is aided by faith. Hence, he does not see any contradiction between human knowledge and faith. The latter presupposes the former.

2. *Man is capable of acquiring wisdom gradually*.

Knowledge, on the other hand, is acquired by degrees, beginning with the level of sense perception and going higher to the level of understanding the nature of things. In this regard, St. Thomas of Villanova speaks

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[123] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.16, 5: 116.

of the importance of "hearing", "seeing", "feeling" and "being called".[124] Along the way, love plays a crucial role. Love is the strongest of all human inclinations and it is what moves both the intellect and the will. They are both moved towards their proper objects. Man is drawn towards what the intellect perceives as good and desirable, while the will moves the intellect towards what is true. Saint Thomas succinctly states that one cannot love what he does not know,[125] and one cannot know unless love moves the human intellect towards an object of knowledge. Once one reaches the limit of the human intellect, faith sets in.[126]

3. *Faith aids purely human knowledge in the attainment of wisdom.*

Faith enables man to know the mystery of God. Natural knowledge in itself is not enough to make a man wise. It is by God's grace that a higher level of understanding is infused in the human soul, making it good, holy, virtuous, wise, and so forth.[127] Hence, faith is "infused into the mind; it enlightens the intellect so that it understands supernatural truths and, in an extraordinary way, faith inclines the intellect to believe them".[128] God draws man toward himself in various ways, but it is through love itself that He attracts man more effectively, or as St. Thomas of Villanova would say: "Nothing more than love inspires love".[129]

4. *There is wisdom in loving God and this is necessary for salvation.*

The concrete indicator of being wise is how man spends his entire life and uses all of his powers to penetrate the mystery of God or understand the truths of faith since doing so is necessary for him to be saved. God wants man to be saved (1Tim 2:4) and for this reason he reveals certain

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[124] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4, 1: 197-198.

[125] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 9.4, 7: 263.

[126] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 5.16, 5: 116; *Sermon* on the 20th Sunday after the Pentecost 5, 5: 313.

[127] Cf. Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 1.3, 4: 236.

[128] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* on St. Ildephonsus 1.1, 6A: 119.

[129] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 2.1, 4: 32.

truths to him, enabling him to understand them not only with the use of the human intellect but with the help of the "eyes of faith", or as we have read: "Withdraw the eyes of your natural understanding and apply the eyes of faith; close your natural eyes and open the eyes I have given you. You must go beyond the understanding of reason and turn aside the senses of the body if you desire to know something excellent and magnificent about God".[130] Nothing would be more foolish than wasting all the possibilities that God is giving us to possess wisdom and be saved. Indeed, wisdom ultimately consists in knowing and loving God, remaining in Him who is both Love and Wisdom or the source of both for us. However, an intellectual grasp of the truth alone is not enough to save man. One must rather find ways of translating his understanding of the truths of faith into concrete actions. St. Thomas of Villanova did so by making wisdom and love inspire and motivate his actions.

In St. Thomas of Villanova, we do not see his actions as pure activism, but rather as concrete expressions of his faith enlightened not only by the teachings of the Scripture and the Church, but also by his own philosophical speculation and pastoral experience. They are demonstrations of his own understanding of wisdom translated into acts of love for God and humanity. Thus, it was an example of how philosophy – "love of wisdom" – turns into action. Like other philosophies, it had its own vision of man and its own epistemology and explains how man can acquire wisdom and eventually allow it to inspire his actions. For Saint Thomas, understanding alone or possession of wisdom cannot save man, but how man translates his understanding of the divine mysteries into concrete expressions of faith and love.

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[130] Thomas of Villanova, *Sermon* 4.1, 4: 23.

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