

Thomism, moral claim and *Amoris laetitia*

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SUMMMARY: It is common for theologians to quote authorities in order to bolster their arguments. Recently Cardinal Schönborn has publicly stated that Pope Francis's encyclical is "Thomistic". This raises the question as to what constitutes Thomism and how a Thomistic position may or may not help one's theological positions. This article examines Thomas's positions in light of his commitments to Catholic Tradition. It concludes that Thomas would never undermine Tradition as explicitly consistently taught by the Magisterium. Furthermore, Thomas argues that a person can never perform an intrinsically evil action. Therefore, any claim that would contradict these two positions would ultimately not count as Thomistic. In sum, one should read Thomas systematically in light of his entire thought and fundamental positions and not merely through individual statements isolated from their proper context, which is the perennial Tradition of the Church as seen in definitive Magisterial teachings.

On account of his great wisdom and authority, Saint Thomas Aquinas is not infrequently invoked to bolster the claims of theologians, including as a defense of *Amoris laetitia* in general and chapter eight in particular. Throughout the text and footnotes of AL, there are more than citations of St. Thomas, which are meant to show that what is being asserted by Pope Francis is also in continuity with the thought of Aquinas's teaching.

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If you have the Angelic Doctor on your side, you are doing very well. This raises questions about what sorts of claims and documents warrant being called “Thomistic”, and how one might reasonably justify the appellative. The following observations might prove helpful for answering such questions.

1. WHAT MAKES A DOCUMENT THOMISTIC?

First, something might be called Thomistic because it takes a cue from the methodology perfected by Aquinas. Marie-Dominique Chenu had lamented that voluntarist and manualist approaches to theology, even those that claimed a genetic link to Thomas, tended to obscure the creativity and ingenuity that characterized the Angelic Doctor’s thought¹. Without entering into discussions of whether Aquinas was more of a propositional or intuitive thinker, there can be no doubt that, like many authors, he uses many different “voices” for different purposes. He provides commentaries on Scripture, commentaries on philosophical and theological works, lectures on the Creed, and so on. His two greatest works are a thorough defense and explanation of Catholic theology in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and his *Summa Theologiae*. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asks literally hundreds of questions, and he always answers them in light of Catholic Tradition – especially Sacred Scripture and the Fathers – with the help of sound philosophy. Sometimes his *respondeo* results in a “yes”, sometimes in a “no”, but he always provides elucidating distinctions and he characteristically says, “‘yes’ in one way, but ‘no’ in another”. He liked clarity not ambiguity such that it would not take years for someone to understand his teachings. As he said, it is the work of the wise man “to arrange and to judge”, that is, to meditate on the truth, teach it to others in an orderly fashion, and to refute opposing falsehoods².

Invoking the Mercy of God, inseparable from the truth and the Word of God, Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* states the ends of

1 See M.-D. CHENU, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A. M. Landry and Dominic Hughes, Regnery, Chicago (ILL) 1964.

2 *Summa Theologiae (S.Th.)* I, q. 1, a. 6, c. and ad 2. See *Summa Contra Gentiles (SCG)*, I.1.4.

his method, saying, “In the name of the divine Mercy, I have the confidence to embark on the work of a wise person”, namely, “the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside errors that are opposed to it”³. The phrase “Catholic Faith” was not limited in his mind to solemn definitions of faith or creeds, but included moral teaching, which, when concretely lived out, becomes with human choices “faith action”. He specifically mentions the method of “ancient Doctors of the Church” who refuted the errors of the “Gentiles” or unbelievers of their times one by one⁴. Different errors require different approaches, he says. A Catholic theologian should operate with the same functional premises and context of his respective dialogue partners. With pagans and Muslims, natural reason is the starting point, since they do not accept the Catholic Scriptures as an authority. With Jews, in contrast, one shares the Old Testament as common ground; with Christian heretics, the Old and New Testaments. The result is a theology that is unafraid of standing upon Catholic Tradition as a source of truth, and of naming as “errors” those teachings that contradict Catholic Tradition, errors that call for a refutation so that hearts and minds might be raised to the full revelation of God as a preparation for the eternal beatific vision⁵.

Second, a teaching might be called Thomistic because it follows Aquinas’s actual teachings. However, this can have varying results.

Sometimes, but only very rarely, following Aquinas merely on the basis of his authority can lead a person into error. In discussing the relative weights of different theological arguments, he writes, “a proof from authority is most weak [*infirmissimus*], according to Boethius”⁶. He explains that arguments from Sacred Scripture are the strongest and provide “necessary” proofs, because the canonical Scriptures contain the revelation of God⁷. However, since the truth of the faith “is contained diffusely, in various modes, and in somewhat obscurely”⁸, it was useful for the Universal Church, “who cannot err” to publish a summary of

3 SCG I.2.3.

4 *Ibid.*

5 See SCG I.2.4; *S.Th.*, I, q. 1, a. 4, c.

6 *S.Th.*, I, q. 1, a. 8, obj 2.

7 *S.Th.*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

8 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 1, a. 9, ad 1.

the faith in the form of a symbol or Creed⁹, and to express the same faith more explicitly against the errors that arose in the course of time¹⁰. As for the recognized “doctors of the Church”, Aquinas argues that by themselves, their authority only provides a probable proof for a particular doctrine¹¹. In other words, just because Aquinas or Augustine taught something in particular does not mean that their teaching is *true*. Indeed, Aquinas quotes Augustine to prove that point:

Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem everything in their works to be true, merely on account of their having so thought and written, whatever may have been their holiness and learning.¹²

2. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS IS THE COMMON DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, BUT HIS TEACHING IS NOT EQUIVALENT TO CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

In light of what we have seen above, one can clearly see that Aquinas would never place his own authority above that of the Universal Church, or of the Magisterium of the Church teaching definitively a doctrine in continuity with the perennial Tradition. To follow a theological position attributable to Aquinas in contradiction to those teachings would be to place a lesser authority above a greater authority, to place human wisdom above divine wisdom. Certainly this would be the case now if one denied the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the grounds that Aquinas denied it. Similarly, a person would be wrong to support direct abortion at an early stage for health reasons because Aquinas believed in the delayed hominization of the human embryo¹³. Both issues have been abundantly clarified by the Church since the time Aquinas wrote¹⁴. In these cases, the theologian must follow the Church and not proposed interpretations of Aquinas.

9 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 1, a. 9, re.

10 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 1, a. 10, ad 1.

11 *S.Th.*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

12 *Ibid.*

13 See *S.Th.*, I, q. 118, a. 2, ad 2.

14 See PIUS IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* and JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium vitae*, n. 57.

Magisterial teaching does not intrinsically depend on St. Thomas Aquinas, but on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, interpreted in continuity with previous teachings and in light of the most sound thinking. Furthermore, one can persuasively argue that Aquinas would have followed the best science of our day, and therefore, in keeping with the principle that innocent life should never be taken, he would have supported Church teaching that abortion is everywhere and always to be rejected and can never be justified¹⁵. In the end, following Tradition is the most authentically Thomistic position, for, as we have seen, he firmly opposed any doctrinal position that was not faithful to divine revelation and the Church's perennial teachings. Developing an understanding of any sacred doctrine would never mean contradicting previous teaching but deepening in continuity with it. *Humanae vitae*, for example, affirms the Tradition's rejection of contraception, develops Catholic teaching regarding Natural Family Planning, and prophetically warns of governments imposing contraception as a form of population control¹⁶.

3. ST. THOMAS AND MORAL ABSOLUTES

St. Thomas was nothing if not a holistic thinker. To pick and choose his statements without considering their context and relation to his other relevant insights would be about as disastrous as proof-texting Sacred Scripture. One might suppose that a situationist ethic is supported by Aquinas when he states, "In matters of action, truth or practical rectitude is not the same for all, as to matters of detail, but only as to the general principles; and where there is the same rectitude in matters of detail, it is not equally known to all. [...] The principle will be found to fail, according as we descend further into detail"¹⁷. Isolated from Aquinas's other statements, it could seem as if the doctor of the Church is saying that no moral rule or divine law is absolute, but that discernment is needed in each and every situation to know whether or not a general

15 See C. PAYNE, "Would Aquinas Change His Mind on Hominization Today?" In *Life and Learning XVIII: Proceedings of the Eighteenth University Faculty for Life Conference at Marquette University 2008*, ed. J. W. Koterski, University Faculty for Life, Bronx (NY) 2011, 229-48.

16 See *Humanae vitae*, 16, 17.

17 *S.Th.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 4; quoted in *Amoris laetitia*, n. 304.

moral applies in a particular situation. However, this is not authentic Thomism.

Situation ethics contradicts Aquinas's firm affirmation that there are moral norms that always hold for everyone: these are the precepts of the Decalogue¹⁸, and similar universal negative precepts, for they condemn acts that are "evil in themselves and cannot become good"¹⁹. He specifically says that "one may not commit adultery for any good"²⁰. In the same vein, Aquinas holds that some acts "have deformity inseparably attached to them, such as fornication, adultery, and others of this sort, which can in no way be done in a morally good way"²¹, which is in continuity with *Veritatis splendor* 81, which states, "circumstances or intentions can never transform an act, intrinsically evil by virtue of its object, into an act 'subjectively' good or defensible as a choice"²². Exceptionless norms exist and remain perennial because human nature does not change, nor does the Gospel and the Church's mandate to transmit it unsullied through the centuries. Hence, Pope Pius XII criticized situationist morality saying:

The distinctive mark of this morality is that it is not based in effect on universal moral laws, such as, for example, the Ten Commandments, but on the real and concrete conditions or circumstances in which men must act, and according to which the conscience of the individual must judge and choose. Such a state of things is unique, and is applicable only once for every human action. That is why the decision of conscience, as the advocates of this ethic assert, cannot be commanded by ideas, principles and universal laws. [...] [A]dultery and fornication, the abuse of marriage, the solitary sin, stealing and robbery, taking away the necessities of life, depriving workers of their just wage [...] – all this is gravely forbidden by the divine Lawmaker. No examination is necessary. No matter what the situation of the individual may be, there is no other course open to him but to obey²³.

18 See *S. Th.*, I-II, q. 100, a. 8.

19 See *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 33, a.2.

20 *De Malo*, q. 15, a.1, ad 5.

21 *Quodlibet* 9, q. 7, a. 2.

22 See also *VS* 49, 52, 53, 67, 82, 75, 76.

23 *Soyez les bienvenues*, Discourse to the Participants in the Congress of the World Federation of Catholic Young Women, 18 April 1952.

The sum problem of situationist morality is that, “perhaps without being aware of it, [it] acts according to the principle that the end justifies the means”²⁴. Hence, it can justify any behaviour and destroys all morality.

4. POSITIVE PRECEPTS ON THE NATURAL AND DIVINE LAW HAVE EXCEPTIONS IN THE PRACTICAL ORDER

Undoubtedly, certain positive moral norms found in the social encyclicals of the papal magisterium are adapted to the times and circumstances of the world order, such as one’s relation to the environment, work, business that generate moral decisions²⁵. While human nature does not change per se, culture and the common good does change in its particulars. Thus, Magisterial teaching adapts to changing conditions in a general way – but always without contradicting reason and the truths already articulated by the Church. Here the social teaching of the Church has authentically developed from *Rerum novarum* to *Veritas in caritate*.

5. THOMAS’ MORAL THEOLOGY UNDERLIES HIS PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Finally, with a Thomistic moral theology, one can embrace an authentic position of Thomas and benefit from the insights he offers to illuminate the truths of faith and morals held perennially by the Church. For example, he explains the relation between the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance. Aquinas builds on St. Paul’s teaching, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord”²⁶. Aquinas says, “Holy Communion ought not to be given to open sinners when they ask for it. [...] A priest who has knowledge of the crime can privately warn the secret sinner, or warn all openly in public, from approaching the Lord’s table, until they have repented of their sins and

24 *Ibid.*

25 See *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 33, a. 2c; q.79 a.3 ad 3; *De Malo* q. 7, a. 1

26 *1 Cor* 11:27.

have been reconciled to the Church”²⁷. Such public sin includes being sexually active with another person who is not his sacramental spouse and well known to others, which, in addition to being homosexual acts, fornication or adultery, is also the sin of scandal whereby one leads others into sin²⁸.

Without reference to the Traditional doctrine that Catholics who have committed grave sin should not be given holy communion, Pope Francis says: “I would also point out that the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak”²⁹. The Pope does not explain what he means by “perfect”. If he means that people with imperfections and even venial sins may receive Holy Communion, this is in accord with Catholic Tradition. In this context, Aquinas discusses the various levels of charity. He is very clear that there are three stages: beginners, advanced, and the perfect:

[T]he divers degrees of charity are distinguished according to the different pursuits to which man is brought by the increase of charity. For at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity: this concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed or fostered lest it be destroyed:
in the second place man’s chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose chief aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it:
while man’s third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who “desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ”³⁰.

Much later in the *Summa*, he will add the idea a little further:

[...] Now the perfection of Divine love is a matter of precept for all without exception, so that even the perfection of heaven is not excepted from this precept... The lowest degree of Divine love is to love nothing more than God, or contrary to God, or equally with God... [thus] one does not

27 *S.Th.*, III, q. 80, a. 6.

28 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 43, a. 1.

29 *Amoris laetitia*, n. 351.

30 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 24, a. 9.

transgress the precept, if one does not attain to the intermediate degrees of perfection, provided one attain to the lowest³¹.

Aquinas is indicating that so long as a person has charity in his soul, he has the habit which makes him reject sin and conform to the image of God – and therefore, no matter how low or high one’s state of perfection, one can and should go to Holy Communion for growth in grace and healing of the wounds of sin. The Holy Eucharist is not a “prize” for those in any state of perfection as the Pope rightly points out, but it does demand a reception in the state of grace even if someone feels unworthy. Most humans are not worthy of the Holy Eucharist because of a lack of generosity to do more difficult works of charity, that is, acts of supererogation such as praying the rosary, and fasting, going to confession, and going to Mass more often. However, at least being in the state of grace human beings are relatively perfect even though almost all are not yet heroic saints in this life.

6. SEXUAL ACTS: VOLUNTARY OR SLAVERY TO THE SENSES?

Aquinas states that, whatever reasons a person may have for engaging in sex outside of marriage, “actions done for the sake of pleasure are simply voluntary”, so one cannot rightly claim that exterior pressures cause him to sin³². Such a person is not capable of fruitfully receiving the sacraments until he repents of all his sin: “it belongs to penance to detest one’s past sins, and to purpose, at the same time, to change one’s life for the better”³³. Aquinas’s teaching is clear: a Christian who does not intend to change his life and forsake his public sin should not receive absolution from sin. It follows that a public sinner in the objective order should not be given Holy Communion until he repents and receives absolution. Here is where Pope St John Paul II evolved this teaching concerning absolute continence (living as brother and sister) if in a second irregular union and for one reason or another cannot leave

31 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 184, a. 3 ad 2.

32 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 142, a. 3.

33 *S.Th.*, III, q. 90, a. 4.

it without major deleterious consequences³⁴. Further Thomas teaches that if someone is in the state of his, “[...] there is in him a habitual inclination to avoid sin. As soon as anything is presented to him under the aspect of mortal sin, therefore, because of his habitual inclination he refuses it consent, unless he makes an effort to the contrary, following his concupiscence. But there is no necessity of following it, even though he cannot avoid having some movement of concupiscence arise entirely preceding the act of free choice”³⁵. He also agrees with St. Gregory’s wise admonition: “a sin that is not quickly blotted out by repentance is both a sin and a cause of sin”³⁶.

7. THE LOST OR FORGOTTEN VIRTUE OF PENANCE

Al mentions repentance twice (91 & 300) without explaining what it means. St. Thomas on the other hand looks upon penance as a moral virtue and develops this with a biblical understanding and great insight in the third part of the *Summa Theologiae*. Penance signifies grief for a sin committed “as it is an office against God” and the truly penitent “has the purpose of amendment”³⁷. Aquinas clarifies, “amendment for an offence committed against someone is not made simply by ceasing to offend, for something is further is required in the way of recompense [...] when he makes satisfaction”³⁸. He further explains that a penitent should possess a continuous repentance that is not excessive: “one must be continually penitent, both by never doing anything opposed to repentance, by which the habitual disposition of the penitent would be lost; as well as by maintaining a resolve that his past sins should always displease him”³⁹. The virtue of penance does not mean one decides to sin less often, but that one determines himself to never sin again.

Significantly, Aquinas’s teachings on the effects of sin indicate that he would definitively reject a notion that a person could rightly discern that he ought to continue in an objectively disordered act such as

34 *Familiaris consortio*, 84.

35 *De Veritate* q. 24, a. 13.

36 *S.Th.*, I-II, q. 75, a. 4.

37 *S.Th.*, III, q. 85, a. 3.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *S.Th.*, III, q. 84, a. 9.

fornication or adultery. This is not repentance. A person who regularly sins against marriage by fornicating or adulterating regularly thereby develops the vice of intemperance. As a consequence, his reason is darkened and he becomes enslaved by his passions⁴⁰. The result is that such a person becomes incapable of authentic discernment, “Because whoever lacks the [virtues] falls into the danger of false doctrine”⁴¹. Hence, “those who abandon purity of heart, having a heart corrupted by passions, judge according to their affections and not according to God”⁴². In other words, a deformed conscience will lead a person further down the wide road to vice, and not along the narrow path that leads to life. Here Thomas is reflecting the Scriptural wisdom which in many places speaks of the “fool” who is righteous in the discernment of the corrupt but is not righteous in eyes of God: “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death”; “There are those who are pure in their own eyes but are not cleansed of their filth”; “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart”⁴³.

8. THE PROBLEM OF MITIGATING FACTORS IN DISCERNMENT

In paragraphs 301–303, *Amoris laetitia* discusses the factors which mitigate the responsibility and imputability of the sexual sinner who has entered a second union while still having a first one, valid or not. One may note that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* likewise mentions at least six reasons from ignorance to duress that can mitigate sin⁴⁴. What is missing from AL is the importance of knowing what lust is and what chastity does as a counter-measure against the consequences of living by lust.

Following Pope St. Gregory the Great, Aquinas recognizes that lust’s daughters include blindness of mind, thoughtlessness, inconstancy, and rashness – all of which undermine solid prudence and produce the vice of folly⁴⁵. Failure to think before acting, thinking too much and

40 *S.Th.*, II-II, q. 142, a. 4.

41 *In 1 Tim*, c. 1, lect. 3.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Proverbs* 14:12; 30:12; 21:2.

44 See CCC, n. 1735.

45 *S.Th.*, II-II q. 46, aa. 1-3

never acting, rarely seeking advice from persons of virtue all go to stymie one on the road to a reasonable life under grace. Lust consequently makes it extremely difficult for the lustful to make decisions of right and wrong, to know when, how and where to do any good act. In this case, following one's deformed conscience is to follow a fool.

Furthermore, the other daughter of self-love is selfishness or an unwillingness to think of others and fulfill their needs when it is the right act to do. Worse still are the other daughters, namely, hatred of God, love of this world, and abhorrence or despair of a future world which is an effect of folly. These enervate the desire for wanting to know God and his will which have a necessary relationship with him as one's ultimate end of life on earth. The common good of societies which a person may belong to beginning with home becomes subordinated to one's inordinate desire for the goods of this world. The material goods of this world become one's purpose for existence and therefore avarice settles into one's soul. The notion that all things have a universal or common destination for others when in need is lost. Sharing one's bounty with others in need, the virtue of liberality according to Aquinas, becomes meaningless⁴⁶.

Also closely related to pride are lust's other daughters, namely, hatred of God and her sister, abhorrence of the next world of heaven, eternal life. These daughters within the soul battle in varying degrees against God the creator, God the redeemer, and God the consummator of human life. Damnation or eternal death comes easy as the daughters entrench themselves either because one forgets or denies its existence or falsely assumes heaven will be granted anyway, the sin of presumption against divine hope. When the heart is captivated by lust, the individual has no final prize to strive and his striving for heaven is weakened. Put simply, anger, blasphemy, vainglory and envy are not easily eliminated unless the foundation of chastity solidly informs the will.

To grow into the virtue of chastity from the virtue of continence whether pre-marital, marital, or post-marital, prayer, sacramental life of communion and confession, together with sustained effort to control sexual impulses that come from within and avoiding near occasions of sin, is absolutely necessary. Additionally, a conviction about the dignity of the human person, marriage and family life helps put to death these upstart

46 *S.Th.*, II-II q. 117, a. 4

impulses to vice that can undermine character. While knowledge as such does not produce virtue, it can aid it by offering insightful ideas about the moral good of the human person and so motivate personal and interpersonal dignity. Often ignorance of the law of chastity is the result of not taking the trouble to learn the truths he is obliged to know⁴⁷.

If Catholics today do not know very well their catechism, even more so they do not practice chastity either. If only 0.2% of the US population practice Natural Family Planning, and up to 90% practice contraceptive “love” in all its various forms to limit or exclude children, how can these parents convincingly teach pre-marital chastity? And if 80% or more of teens and young adults watch pornography from time to time, how can there be long lasting marriages, even if they are going to Holy Communion without confession of their sins? If God desires the salvation of everyone, then it follows he gives graces to everyone. However, these graces can meet obstacles which in turn cause second and third unions that simulate marriage.

9. THE IMPORTANCE OF *AD TUENDAM FIDEM* FOR THOMISTS

In sum, a burden of proof lies on anyone who wants to fly the banner of Thomism over his moral edifice. But even a Thomistic flag is not sufficient for a nod of approval from God. Whether one is Thomistic in methodology or in content, what is most important is to be faithful to the teachings of Christ as expressed in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as handed on through the perennial teaching of the Church, for “The apostles and their successors are God’s vicars in governing the Church which is built on faith and the sacraments of faith. Wherefore, just as they may not institute another Church, so neither may they deliver another faith, nor institute other sacraments⁴⁸. This is very clearly taught in the Apostolic Constitution of St. John Paul II in June of 1998, *Ad Tuendam Fidem* when he added an important addition to Canon 750.2 of the *Code of Canon Law*:

47 See *De Malo* q. 8, a. 1 ad 7.

48 *S.Th.*, III, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3.

Each and every thing which is proposed definitively by the magisterium of the Church concerning the doctrine of faith and morals, that is, each and every thing which is required to safeguard reverently and to expound faithfully the same deposit of faith, is also to be firmly embraced and retained; therefore, one who rejects those propositions which are to be held definitively is opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

The then-Cardinal Ratzinger, as head of the Congregation of Doctrine and Faith, wrote a doctrinal commentary and said:

With regard to the nature of the assent owed to the truths set forth by the Church as divinely revealed (those of the first paragraph) or to be held definitively (those of the second paragraph), it is important to emphasize that there is no difference with respect to the full and irrevocable character of the assent which is owed to these teachings. [...] In the case of the truths of the second paragraph, the assent is based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Magisterium and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium (doctrines de fide tenenda).

For St. Thomas Aquinas, as for the Church herself, pastoral praxis is subordinate to orthodoxy of doctrine, not the other way around. Thomas defended and explained the Church's perennial teachings on marriage, Holy Communion, the Sacrament of Penance, intrinsic evils, and so on. Looking through the pages of *AL*, in contrast, one gets the impression that the text is not so much Thomistic, but rather some loosely knit ideas that quote Thomas.