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The Commentary of St Thomas on Mt 24: the Destruction of Jerusalem

ST THOMAS AQUINAS is usually associated with Philosophy and dogmatic speculation; hence an article on his work would immediately give rise to the idea of Aristotelianism or some abstruse discussion on predestination or something else of the kind. The Angelic Doctor, however, being a son of the Middle Ages during which education was, perhaps, deeper than ours, although not so extensive, treated other subjects as well with his usual thoroughness and lucidity of exposition. For him Theology, whose object is God Himself, was the queen of all other sciences and the sources of this sacred science were Tradition and Holy Scripture; both of them feature conspicuously in his works. This does not mean that he considered them as something of secondary importance which should give place to human speculation; he strongly believed that every other source must bow itself to the supreme authority of Tradition or Sacred Scripture. St Thomas, therefore, turned his attention to Holy Scripture and gave us solid and complete commentaries on the greater part of the New Testament. His work is thorough, and there is in it much that is of value for all times. It is our purpose, therefore, to analyse a section of his commentary on St Matthew's Gospel to see whether we can find out his principles of interpretation and whether these same principles are in harmony with modern principles of interpretation as laid down in the recent Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

We intend to take for our study Chapter 24 of St Matthew's Gospel, where Our Lord's Eschatological Discourse is recorded (1). Verses 45-51 are excluded from our treatment for reasons to be explained further on. First we shall analyse the commentary of the Angelic Doctor to see his method of interpretation and the principles on which it is based; then we shall examine the

(1) Quotations are according to the text of: Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici O.P. opera omnia ad fidem optimarum editionum accurate recognita. Vol. XI Parmae 1869, pp. 215-227.

conclusions to which his principles lead him. Finally, comparing these principles with those laid down in the Encyclical, we shall see how St Thomas, using the same principles a modern exegete would use, arrived at conclusions different from those which the latter would reach because the way of approach was different. Such an analysis leads us to a conclusion of the utmost importance about the use of the Old Testament in the exegesis of the New—a conclusion which to-day forms the basis of the latest commentaries on the Gospels and Apostolic writings. We would be justified in prefacing our analysis of St Thomas's work by a brief exposition of the principles expounded in the Encyclical.

The Pope makes a clear-cut and neat distinction between two senses in the bible: the *literal sense* and the *spiritual sense*. The former is the meaning directly intended by the sacred writer; the latter is that sense which was intended by the Old Testament as a prefigurement of the New Order of Grace. Placing the former sense beyond dispute is not a difficult task, but it is not as easy to define the latter sense. It is very important, hence, to have clear ideas about its nature and extension.

The literal sense is that conveyed by the words of a given text examined according to strict scientific principles. The import of this sense is obvious: "*ante oculos habeant interpretes sibi illud omnium maximum curandum esse ut clare dispiciant ac definiant quis sit verborum biblicorum sensus quem litteralem vocant, ex quo solo, ut optime ait Aquinas, potest trahi argumentum*". An explanation of the method and principles for its investigation follows. The interpreter must be equipped with a sound and deep knowledge both of the original languages in which the Sacred Books were written and of the History and the Archaeology of the Ancient East; these three are grouped together because they shed light on one another: language is not a mere collection of a list of words strung together in a dictionary or of a dry series of grammatical rules; it is something living in a concrete historical and archaeological context which gives it life and shape.. The text in the hands of the interpreter must be critically sound; parallel passages in both the New and Old Testaments must be compared; the Vulgate should not be taken as a last authority in deciding critical questions in textual criticism but only in questions of doctrine; and, finally, every conclusion is to be controlled and harmonised with already well-established beliefs, which is according to the principle of the analogy of

faith. It is thus that the interpreter would be able to sympathise with those people of far off days whom the sacred writers addressed and whose views and beliefs they shared: "*omnino oportet mente quasi redeat interpres ad remota illa Orientis saecula ut... discernat atque perspiciat quatenus litteraria genera vetustae illius aetatis scriptores adhibere voluerint ac reapse adhibuerint.*"

Having defined the nature of the literal sense and described the method for its investigation, the Pope passes on to explain what the spiritual sense is: "*quae enim in Vetere Testamento dicta vel facta sunt ita a Deo sapientissime sunt ordinata atque disposita ut praeterita spirituali modo ea praesignificarent quae in Novo Gratiae foedere essent futura*". The spiritual sense is that, therefore, which was intended by God through the history of the Old Testament which was meant to prepare the way for Christ; hence it is based on the relation that exists between the Old Testament and the New, the one being the fulfilment of the other. It is generally believed that there is a clear-cut distinction between the Old Law and the Law of Christ as if it were that Christ came to abolish the Old Dispensation altogether and not to perfect it. But the coming of Christ was the crowning event in the long process of a slow but steady purification of the chosen race, led as it was to its high spiritual conceptions only gradually and painfully through hundreds of years. In the Bible we have the history of Revelation mediated in stages to mankind in the way of truths to be believed and moral precepts to be followed.

Defending the spiritual sense of the Old Testament, therefore, the Pope is not reviving the old allegorical interpretations of Origen and the Alexandrian School; he is calling our attention to God's fatherly care for humanity in leading men to their former splendours which our first parents lost in Eden.

Combining together the literal sense and the spiritual sense, the exegete can make a synthesis of all the doctrine contained in a given extract or Book by putting it in its true context in the history of Revelation. This method to-day is the basis of many of the latest works on Biblical theology which, because it was revealed through history, cannot be studied outside its own historical setting.

Having seen the principles underlying true Biblical exegesis we can now examine St Thomas's methods and principles.

The Angelic Doctor makes a clear distinction between a

literal sense and what he calls a *mystical sense*. All that was not included in the literal sense was mystical sense. Literal sense was that conveyed by the obvious meaning of the words as it can be easily proved by the pains that the Doctor takes in establishing the meaning of the single words; the mystical sense cannot be so easily defined and we will leave it for further examination. The literal sense comes first; on this St Thomas bases his arguments and conclusions.

In the investigation of this literal sense he makes use practically of all the means enlisted in the Encyclical. He avails himself of all philological, historical and archaeological information at his disposal; this is scanty, but in his days those sciences were yet in their prenatal stage. He uses the Bible itself for the explanation of words and phrases and finally the writings of the Fathers feature in every line. In the section under consideration we do not see applied the principle of the analogy of Faith; perhaps because here it was not needed.

He starts with philology, history and archaeology. In St Thomas's days the study of Philology was practically unknown, and archaeology, in the modern sense, still undreamt of, and history was familiar to them through classical authors and Josephus Flavius's writings; hence it was very restricted. The Angelic Doctor exploits the scanty information at his disposal. Commenting on the word *tunc* in verse 23 *Tunc si quis vobis dixerit...* he quotes Mt 3, 1 where the meaning thereof is an *indeterminate time*; in explaining *ubi* in verse 28, *ubi fuerit corpus illic congregabuntur et aquilae* he remarks "*notate quod in hebraeo habetur Anathe quod idem est ac cadaver. unde voluit significare passionem Christi*". In examining the apparently strange expression *abominationem desolationis* he quotes Dan 9, 26 where it occurs for the first time in the O.T.; a modern interpreter would press such comparisons to their utmost but in those days there were no Greek Concordances to apply such method with profit.

Why did not Christ know the day of judgment? asks St Thomas; and he answers: *Augustinus et Hieronymus dicunt* (note that both Augustine and Jerome each in his own way were familiar with Semitic Languages) *quod consuetus modus loquendi est dicere nescire aliquid quando non facit illud scire...*

St Thomas is no less careful to use all historical information available. He cites frequently classical writers and Josephus Flavius: he notes that Judaea was governed by *pessimi impe-*

ratores; that the wars between the Jews and the Romans were frequent; that the Gospel was preached throughout the world, i.e. throughout the Roman world, and he cites St Paul in confirmation of this statement; that the Roman Eagle was affixed on the Temple of Jerusalem; that Jerusalem was destroyed twice, by Titus and by Hadrian; that Palestine was invaded by the Roman army; that the Tetrarchy of the peace-loving Agrippa could offer a sound shelter to the fugitive Jewish Christians; that a tremendous hunger took hold of Jerusalem during the siege in the year 70 A.D.; forcing a woman to eat her own child; that the Romans allowed a large number of Jews to celebrate the Pasch in the Holy City and then blocked them there to die of hunger. Nor is archaeological information lacking: we are informed that women stayed at home weaving while the menfolk worked in the fields, and St Thomas adds: *Solebat esse quod mulieres molerent, et loquitor secundum consuetudinem terrae ubi non est aqua et nunc molitur cum equis vel cum hominibus sed tunc erat officium mulierum.* Many pseudo-christs arose before the destruction of Jerusalem. In verse 43 Christ's words are confirmed by recording the custom of robbers' coming by night.

St Thomas makes frequent use of the rest of the Bible in his interpretation of this text. There are no less than 90 quotations from both Testaments to explain just 43 verses; not only to confirm or elucidate some philological explanation but mostly to corroborate some doctrine. We note 40 N.T. quotations from 20 Books; and no less than six times reference is made to parallel passages in Lk and Mk as a supplement to the information in Mt or as an explanation thereof. These quotations are used to confirm some doctrine or other; thus commenting v. 29: *Statim post tribulationem dierum illorum sol obscurabitur et luna non dabit lumen suum.* he writes: *De istis tribus habetur una auctoritas* i.e. Apocalypse 6, 13; or to illustrate a truth or the meaning of a symbol v.g. of the clouds he quotes Acts 1, 5 where it is read that a cloud appeared enshrouding Our Lord during His Ascension into Heaven, the cloud being the symbol of Divine presence in the O.T. or to support some allegorical interpretation; thus the Christian soul is a temple of God (Phil 2); or the fig-tree symbolises the Synagogue (Lk 13, 6); the mill-stone represents the Mosaic Law (Acts 15, 10).

The O.T. is no less frequently used; one meets some 50 quotations representing 23 Books including the Major Prophets and

the Psalms. The O.T. is used to establish some allegorical interpretation: the exit of Christ from the temple means his exit from the sinful soul and Thren 1, 6 is quoted: *Egressa est a filia Sion decor eius*; to make an accommodation based on word similarity at times in contradiction to the original meaning in its proper context Ps 136, 7; Is 13, 8; Zac 12, 10; Ps 18, 5 etc.; to confirm some doctrine Dt 33, 3; Eccl 1, 15; Ez 13, 15; Mal 1, 10; Os 6, 10. We note three special cases for their importance: in two cases the O.T. is used as a help to explain a difficult word or expression thus *generatio haec non praeteribit* is explained by quoting Ps 23, 61 *generatio rectorum*, therefore Christ, concludes St Thomas, was speaking not of the physical generation but of the class of the righteous. According to Mt. 24, 29 the sun would be darkened; but this is in plain contradiction to Is 30, 26 where it is said that the light of the sun would be sevenfold. To solve the difficulty St Thomas brings in Joel 2, 31, where we read that the sun would be changed into darkness before the coming of the Lord. Another important use of the O.T.—and it is very unfortunate that he did not press it to its logical conclusion—is the application of prophetic texts about the destruction of Jerusalem in punishment for her sins: Jer 7, 16; Amos 5; Ps 43, 22; Ez 7, 3; Zac 2, 6; Dan 9, 26-27; to elaborate his own interpretation. Thus St Thomas quotes Is 1, 9: *Nisi Dominus exercituum reliquisset nobis semen, quasi Sodomam fuisset et quasi Gomorraha similes essemus* to explain Mt's *sed propter electos brevia buntur dies illi*. The prophet was speaking of the punishment to be meted out to the sinful city of Jerusalem through the much feared hordes of the Assyrian and Babylonian armies in the 6th Cent. B.C.; God would leave a remnant out of which there would rise the new Israel. Jerusalem would be again punished for having rejected Jesus, but there would remain a remnant out of which the Church of Christ would rise.

The writings of the Fathers of the Church feature prominently in St Thomas's commentaries. Out of 17 Greek or Latin commentators of St Matthew 8 are quoted in this short section of 43 verses. Origen is quoted 11 times and St Augustine 13; next comes Chrysostom with 9 quotations and Jerome with 7; the rest are quoted once each. St Thomas is charitable and fair enough to record views different from his own without any acrimony or satirical tone even when they are directly opposed to

his. Although he inclines to believe that Christ is speaking about two distinct events, the destruction of Jerusalem and the last judgment, he has not a word of criticism against Origen, who refers the whole sermon to the last judgment, or against St Augustine, who maintains that Our Lord is prophesying on the inauguration of the Church symbolised by the destruction of the old order to give place to the new one of Christ. The Angelic Doctor first puts his own view; then he inserts those views not in accord with his own; where the case is doubtful he does not pronounce himself. A typical quotation would make us appreciate the spirit with which he examines others' views: *Notate quod Augustinus facit vim in hoc quod dicit...* or this one with reference to St Jerome's interpretation about the destruction of Jerusalem: *sed melius ut retorquetur ad finem*. Whenever there is already a satisfactory interpretation he accepts it without any ado. Origen's interpretations are given their due weight although St Thomas himself believes that the first part is dealing only with the fate of the Holy City, whilst Origen projects everything to the last days.

With all these means St Thomas arrives at the literal interpretation of a given text; he does not give a synthetic view of the doctrine, but he divides and subdivides the text according to scholastic usage. At the head of each division and subdivision he gives briefly the doctrine or truth contained therein. He divides this chapter into two main sections; one 24, 4-22 deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the second one with the last judgment. In interpreting the former part St Thomas is on firm ground having the history of Josephus to rely upon: the destruction of the holy city would be preceded by all sorts of trouble within and outside the Church; war, pestilence, persecutions, hunger, earthquakes, apostasies, false prophets, and the preaching of the gospel throughout the world are the signs of the times. Then the destruction itself would follow: *the abomination of desolation*, a horrible punishment, but the time will be shortened for the sake of the elect.

The second coming of Our Lord will also be preceded by signs. Here St Thomas is on slippery ground; in fact here he is less dogmatic and frequently resorts to allegory with the destruction of the Holy City at the back of his mind; commenting the words: *Surgens enim pseudochristi*, he writes, *id est qui dicent se Christos; et hoc factum est ante destructionem Jerusa-*

lem. Here is more place for diversity of opinion. Christ's coming at the end of time would be preceded by signs in human history and in the cosmic order; Antichrist would appear together with false prophets and would lead astray even the elect if it were possible; Jesus warned them not to follow such leaders because He would come in full majesty to save his chosen ones. In the cosmic order, the sun would be darkened, the stars would lose their brilliance. Then there would appear the sign of the Son of Man which St Thomas does not define. Christ himself would then come riding on the clouds, symbol of his divinity; thunder and lightning would accompany Him. The Angels would gather the elect from the four corners of the earth. All this would take place literally. Christ closes His prophecy by the parable of the fig-tree and the solemn statement of the passing of "this generation".

So far for the literal sense of this section which St Thomas, with the mass of Catholic interpreters, believes to deal with two distinct events, that is, the destruction of Jerusalem and the last judgment respectively.

Besides this literal sense St Thomas finds also, in certain verses, what he calls a mystical sense; with respect to v. *Sol obscurabitur* we read: *Hoc dictum habet sensum litteralem et mysticum: secundum quod ad ultimum adventum referebat, sensum litteralem; secundum quod ad alium, mysticum;* and with regard to *Tunc plangent omnes tribus terræ*, one reads: *Haec est litteralis expositio sed si referatur ad secundum adventum tunc tantum exponitur mystice. Origenes: Per solem diabolus signatur, per lunam antichristus... vel per solem Ecclesia signatur Unde Ecclesia propter tribulationes videbitur non lucere.*

Commenting the text: *Tunc unus assumetur alter relinquetur*, the Angelic Doctor remarks: *Potest etiam exponi allegorice et haec est expositio Hilarii.* Therefore any interpretation that is not a literal one, that is, based on the obvious meaning of the words in the text, is a mystical sense which most often if not always is an allegorical interpretation. But also here one must be careful to distinguish between an allegory intended by the sacred author himself and a pure allegorical interpretation based on some similarity, either verbal or real; both kinds of allegory are found in St Thomas. It is interesting to note however that allegorical interpretations are drawn from other writers; St Thomas stands for the literal interpretation. The term *sensus accomo-*

datum does not recur but some of the allegorical interpretations accepted or recorded from other writers are pure accommodations. A few examples would suffice for our purpose.

Christ's exit from the temple of Jerusalem signifies the exit of Grace from the human soul through sin; Christ's going to the Mount of Olives means his passing into the Church, full of Olive-trees; the request of Peter, John and Andrew and James to know the hour of the consummation of times is an example of the intercession of the Saints on our behalf. These applications are based on general principles on which Divine Providence acts; but there are other applications which are the fruit of human imagination, and these are most frequent in the second part. Thus those who are on the roof are the *contemplatives*, those in the fields the *actives*; the pregnant signify *sinner*s, nursing mothers the *imperfects*; winter symbolises sadness, Saturday joy; lightning is the coming of truth; the obscuration of the sun is the persecution of the Church or even, strange to say, the devil himself. The figure may be explained either in a bad or in a good sense: *vel potest exponi in bono*. The two applications of the text about the men on the roof and those in the fields or in bed are a typical example of this double sided interpretation: *Per agrum assignatur mundus..... Per duos homines populus fidelium et infidelium. De istis unus assumetur sc. populus fidelium alter relinquetur sc. populus infidelium. Item Lex vetus per molam assignetur..... Omnes illi dicuntur in mola molere qui veterem legem recipiunt; illi quidem assumuntur qui veterem legem cum nova recipiunt; illi vero qui non relinquuntur. Item qui Christum recipiunt sicut iacentes in lecto, quia per lectum signatur memoria passionis; et de talibus quidam assumuntur, quidam relinquuntur..... Potest aliter exponi ut ad tres status fidelium referatur, qui sunt tria genera hominum; quidam contemplativi quidam praelati, quidam activi. Nullus status est securus, quin aliqui damnentur in statu aliquo. Status contemplationis per lectum significatur..... status activorum per molentes in mola signatur quia ponderositatem habent et sunt solleciti..... unde inter eos aliqui damnantur. Per agrum in quem homines exeunt ad laborandum signantur praelati. In talibus quidam assumuntur et quidam relinquuntur.*

It is evident from all this that together with the literal sense St Thomas admits the mystical sense which is either based on

logical analogy, that is a conclusion based on the text, or a purely allegorical interpretation redolent of Origenism.

Having analysed the method of St Thomas we proceed to compare his principles with those outlined in the Encyclical and used by modern interpreters. We cannot enter into all the details, but it is clear that in St Thomas we find more or less all the principles enunciated in the Encyclical and in the latest Instructions issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission with respect to the teaching of Holy Scripture in the schools of Theology. First there is the distinction between the literal sense based on the obvious meaning of the text and the other senses. As we have seen the mystical sense of St Thomas is not the spiritual sense defined in the Encyclical; the latter is based on the nexus that runs between the Old Testament and the New, as we shall see further on, and the former is either a logical deduction or a simple allegorical application. The method used by the Angelic Doctor in the investigation of the literal sense is mostly based on the same principles, that is the use of subsidiary sciences as philology, history and archaeology; naturally we should not expect him to use them in the same measure as they are used to-day. He applied the analogy of faith connecting one truth with another; and he also used the Old Testament to illustrate some doctrine.

St Thomas used the Old Testament very frequently but not as a modern interpreter would use it; it is exactly here that there is a radical difference between his method and to-day's method. This point merits a more thorough examination. A careful analysis of all the O.T. quotations would show that for St Thomas the O.T. is there to confirm some already well established interpretation or to raise some fine allegorical structure; naturally there are exceptions but they are very scanty. He does not approach the New Testament through the Old but vice versa; now this method is faulty. The Old Testament must help in the interpretation of the New in two ways: first as a living document of the hieratical language of the contemporaries of Our Lord and the Apostles; indeed Christ and His disciples were Jews brought up in the Synagogue where the Bible was regularly read; and secondly as a source of their religious beliefs. The O.T. coupled with the Jewish writings of the intertestamental period can shed a brilliant light on the precious stones embedded in the New Testament. Jewish religious and secular education, both popular

and academic, in the intertestamental period was fundamentally based on the reading of the Old Testament and hence their language was saturated with Biblical expressions and idioms; hence it was absolutely necessary for the Founders of Christianity to speak in the language of the Sacred Writers; it was impossible for them to do otherwise because neither they themselves nor their hearers were familiar with any other. Was it possible for St Paul to jettison all his rabbinical education, to create overnight a new language and way of expression, or to throw overboard all those O.T. quotations which he for so many years treasured in his heart? It is absolutely necessary, therefore, to take into account this fact in the interpretation of any New Testament text. But the O.T. has another intrinsic value namely it afforded to Christ and his collaborators those elementary truths without which Christian belief and practice cannot subsist; the New Testament stands at the end of a long evolutionary process of revelation and purification of the Chosen race in preparation for the coming of the Son of God. Hence Our Lord did not waste any time in proving to his hearers the existence of God which they already knew from the Book of Genesis and other writings of old, any more than a professor of higher mathematics would waste time in explaining to his students the rudimentary rules learned in the primary school. These rules however must be retained in their minds because they form the basis of higher mathematics no less than of those simple problems worked out at school; so also with our problem; Christ took for granted many religious truths to which he added his own; these truths are found in the Old Testament and the Jewish literature of the time. We must approach the New Testament through the Old and not vice-versa; a Concordance of the Hebrew Text and of the Greek version of the Old Testament are indispensable instruments in the hands of the New Testament exegete, according to St Augustine's maxim: *In veteri testamento est occultatio novi, in novo testamento est manifestatio veteris* (De Catechizandis rudibus iii, 8). We shall illustrate this point by seeing how such a method applied to this Gospel chapter under our consideration would lead one to a totally different interpretation from that of St Thomas.

Before proceeding further we must state that Mt 24-25 consists of a collection of different discourses of our Lord pronounced on various occasions; this is proved by a simple comparison with

St. Luke and St Mark where the passage Mt 24, 1-44 stands by itself. It is generally, if not unanimously, admitted that Christ is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem in the first part; the argument of the second part would be the second coming at the end of time. Origen however applies the whole to the second coming while St Augustine to the coming of Christ in the Christian soul or rather to the inauguration of the Church after the passing of the old order symbolised by the destruction of the Holy City. St Thomas holds to the former double interpretation. An approach to the whole problem through the Old Testament would show that St Augustine hit the mark pretty well (2).

Even a cursory reading of this chapter would show that it is strongly charged with Old Testament phraseology especially prophetic. The Old Testament is quoted literally 13 times; 7 times from the Prophets according to the LXX version. Thus we have *sunteleia*, *aionos* being a reminiscence of *Dn sunteleia hemeron* or *kairon* (Dn 9, 27; 12, 13; 12, 4.7); of other prophecies in Hosea, 3, 5; Is 2, 2; Mich 4, 1; Jer 23, 20; Ezek 20, 18; and of the apocalyptic writings of the New Testament period. In all these works the meaning is *the end of an old order to give place to a new one*. Unless there be proof to the contrary it must be taken in that technical sense. Hence in asking Our Lord: *What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the consummation of the world. (aion or century)* (Mt 24, 3), the Apostles meant the punishment of Jerusalem and the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom which, according to their still crude conceptions, was to be a worldly universal empire of the Rabbinic type. *Parousia*, in this context, corresponds to the Aramaic *mateta*, presence, arrival, advent or the beginning of a coming; by itself it may mean either Christ's coming at the end of time or His presence in human history through his action; the last meaning is the only one possible in vv 27. 37. 39; this explanation squares with the prophetic saying that Yahweh would come and punish Jerusalem for her sins and then establish the Messianic Kingdom. Hence the theme of the whole discourse is the destruction of Jerusalem and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom into which the

(2) This method was thoroughly applied to the Eschatological Discourse as recorded in the Synoptics by Prof. A. Feuillet, P.S.S. *Revue Biblique* 55(1948)481-502; 56(1949)61-92, 340-364; 57(1950)62-91, 180-211.

Gentiles would be admitted; it would be the beginning of what St Luke calls the era of the Gentiles

This period would be heralded by errors, wars, pestilence, persecutions and all sorts of misery. This was the literary apparatus by which the Prophets of old, Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others expressed their tremendous significance of the punishment to come. Is not Mt 24, 27 : *For as lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth even into the west so shall also be the coming of the Son of Man* a resonance of Is 29, 6; *And it shall be at an instant suddenly. A visitation shall come from the Lord of hosts in thunder and with earthquake.....?* or is not the simile of the vulture sweeping onto its prey an echo of Jer's : *And the carcasses of these people shall be meat for the fowls of the earth and there shall be none to drive them away* 19, 7. The expression 'the sign of the Son of man' recchoes Is. The word for sign in the LXX is *semeion* (used also in our passage) corresponding to the Hebrew *Nas*. We read in Is 11, 12 : *and he (Yahweh) shall set up a standard (nas) unto the nations and shall assemble the fugitives of Israel and shall gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four quarters of the earth* and in Is 11, 10 the text runs thus : *In that day the root of Jesse who standeth for an ensign of the people, him the gentiles shall beseech.* The prophets here are speaking of the restoration of the Messianic Kingdom; the Resurrection of Our Lord would be the sign raised to the nations; did not Christ himself declare in the Temple of Jerusalem that his Resurrection would be the sign given to mankind? and did he not himself join together the destruction of the temple and his own resurrection in Jn 11, 18-12? The labours and sorrow in v 8 *odion* echo Mich 4, 9-10 which runs : *Be in pain and labour, O Daughter of Sion, as a woman that bringeth forth, for now thou shalt go out of the city and shalt dwell in the country and shalt come even to Babylon; there thou shalt be delivered: there the Lord will redeem thee out of the hands of thy enemies.* The birth of a new order is symbolised by the birth of a child; in our case it would be the birth of the Church whose mother, the city of Jerusalem, would die in childbirth. The collapse of the heavenly bodies, the coming of the Son of Man, the gathering of the elect, all these have their corresponding expressions in the prophetic literature, dealing with the future Messianic Kingdom to be inaugurated after the punishment of the sinners. Here the prophets are speaking about the invasions of the

Assyrian or Babylonian or Seleucid Empires, which all in their own turn, swept with their hordes across the Palestinian countryside and cities; Christ used the same language in dealing with the invasion of the Roman Armies under the leadership of Vespasianus and his son Titus to destroy the remnants of Judaism to make place for the advent of Christianity, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ himself. Would not this be the coming of the Lord, the Son of Man? The simile of the fig-tree is revealing; we read in the Canticle 2, 13: The fig-tree hath put forth her green leaves..... Arise my love, my beautiful and come. The symbol of the fig-tree, far from being the symbol of sorrow and trial, is the harbinger of joy and peace, the herald of spring and summer.

All these literary reminiscences lead to one conclusion, that is, Christ is using the same language; is he also expounding the same doctrine? An affirmative answer is not unjustified. The cardinal doctrine in the preaching of the prophets was that God would punish severely Israel for her sins, but he would never destroy her completely; there would remain a faithful remnant out of whom God would raise the Messianic Kingdom: "*Be ye multiplied there*", writes Jeremiah to the exiled in Babylon, "*and be not few in number. And seek the peace of the city..... when the 70 years shall begin to be accomplished in Babylon I will visit you and I will perform my good work in your favour to bring you again to this place*" (29, 4-9). This would be a universal kingdom: "*Behold I will lift up my hands to the Gentiles and will set up my standard to my people*", exclaims the prophet in exultation (Is 49, 24). It would be a new creation and all the earth would be filled with the Glory of Yahweh (Is 40-65; 2, 4-6). This doctrine is, in a remarkable degree, in harmony with the ideas of Christ in this discourse: he speaks about the punishment to be meted out to the deicide City of Jerusalem, which is to reject Him. On its ruins, however, there would be built the Messianic Kingdom promised by the prophets. Out of the faithful remnant of Israel, such as Our Lady and the twelve Apostles, the Kingdom of God would arise. These are the *eklekttoi* of whom Jesus speaks; together with them there would be gathered also the Gentile world; hence St Luke would call this era "the era of the Gentiles". The passing of Judaism meant the emancipation of the Christian Church from the intolerable burden of the Mosaic Law which had served its purpose; now it

must give place to the Kingdom of Grace and love. Such an event, certainly, was worthy of being expressed in the most solemn language that our Lord could harness and glean from the Sacred Books, contrary to what St Jerome says about the disproportion between the siege of Jerusalem and the collapse of the heavenly bodies.

Thus we may see how applying the same principles as St Thomas but with a different approach, we arrive at a totally different conclusion from his. For St Thomas the Old Testament served mainly as a means for some allegorical interpretation or to confirm some doctrine already established on some New Testament text; in this interpretation on the other hand the Old Testament serves as a key to untrammel and discover the immense riches hidden in the apparently queer phraseology of the Gospels and the Apostolic writings. Christ spoke to his contemporaries in their own language which was charged with Old Testament phrases and conceptions just as He found in their daily lives rich material for his parables. This does not however mean that St Thomas did not sometimes use the Old Testament in this way; it means that he did not take it as a principle of interpretation. In fact he explained how the cloud in the Old Testament signified Divine presence, therefore also in the New; he explains *abominatio desolationis* by having recourse to Daniel and mentions also the prophetic doctrine about the remnant of Israel and expressly states that the passing of Jerusalem meant the establishment of Christianity. Had he however started with the Old Testament and had he taken the cue from these contacts and started with the Old Testament as Christ himself had done as an introduction to the New, he would have arrived surely at the same interpretation as that of St Augustine about the coming of Christ in the Christian soul through the Church, an idea with which St Thomas was quite familiar, but could not accept because he felt it too much to have the destruction of a city in a corner of the world described in such tremendous language. He would have been spared from adopting all those allegorical interpretations without any foundation in the text, and would have never taken all those symbolical representations in their literal sense. What Jewish national exclusiveness meant to the nascent Church can be fully gauged from the apostolic writings; it was the cause of all the troubles through which St Paul had to pass. Only the demolition of the Temple could give that full emancipation that

every Christian craved for. Christ was in the full stream of Biblical tradition in using the language that he used in this discourse and just as Christian theologians interpret Christian doctrine in the light of Tradition so also the interpreter of the New Testament must examine his documents in the light of Biblical tradition which, in his case, is enshrined in the Old Testament. It must be remembered that God prepared the Jews for Christian revelation through the Old Testament, which starting with the most elementary religious truths kept on overwidening the sphere until they were mature enough to digest Christian truths.

One may synthesise our results thus : it may be confidently stated that in St Thomas one finds practically all the principles of Biblical exegesis as enunciated in the Pontifical Encyclical. He bases himself on the literal sense and he uses all subsidiary material at his disposal to establish it as firmly as possible. His mystical sense is not the same as the spiritual sense taken in the modern meaning of the term which is based on the intimate nexus that exists between the Old and the New Testament, the one being the introduction to the other and of a permanent value no less than the introduction to a book. The way he used the Old Testament is not the one in which a modern interpreter would use it. St Thomas made extensive use of the Fathers as we have seen; the modern interpreter must start with the results already firmly established in days gone by through strenuous labours of Christian antiquity and add to them, extend them, and develop them, making use of all the technical means at his disposal; only such a sound progressive evolution and not revolution can give lasting results. "*Sic enim tandem aliquando writes His Holiness the Pope, fiet ut et veterum doctrinae spiritualisque dicendi suavitatis et recentiorum maiorum maioris eruditionis adultiorisque artis felix et fecunda coniunctio, novos utique fructus allatura in Divinarum Litterarum campo, nunquam satis exculpto nunquam exhausto* (Enc. 19).

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