

*The Principium of Friar Thomas d'Aquino*

When he incepted in Paris as Baccalarius Biblicus

**De Commendatione Et Partitione Sacrae Scripturae**  
(On the Commendation and Division of Sacred Scripture)

This is the book of the commandments of God, and the law, that is forever:  
all they that keep it shall come to life. *Baruch 4:1*

**I. Commendation of Sacred Scripture**

**1199.** According to Augustine, in Book IV of On Christian Doctrine {ch. 12, PL 34, 101}, the learned “eloquent man ought to speak in such a way that he might teach, that he might delight (*delectet*), that he might move (*flectat*)”: that he might teach the ignorant, delight the weary (*tediosos*), move the sluggish.

These *three* are most completely an expression of Sacred Scripture. –For it teaches firmly by its own eternal truth, “Your word, O Lord, remains forever (Ps. 118: 89-90). –It delights sweetly by its own utility, “How sweet your words to my palate (Ps. 118: 103).” –It moves efficaciously by its own authority, “Are not my words like fire, says the Lord? (Jer. 23: 29).”

And therefore Sacred Scripture is commended from three things in the proposed words: --*First*, from the authority by which it moves: *This is the book of the commandments of God*. --*Second*, from the eternal truth by which it instructs: *And this is the law, that is forever*. --*Third*, from utility by which it draws, when it says: *All they that keep it shall come to life*.

**1200.** The authority, moreover, of this Scripture is shown to be efficacious from three things. *First* from origin, because God is its origin. Whence it says: *Commandments of God*; --“He found out all the ways of knowledge (Bar. 3:37); -- “Which, having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard him (Heb. 2:3).” Which author, indeed, must be infallibly believed; . --first on account of the condition of His nature, because He is Truth, “I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)”; –then on account of the fullness

of knowledge, “O the height of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom. 11:33)”; --then on account of the power of words, “the word of the Lord is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12).”

*Second*, it is shown to be efficacious from necessity, namely, which it imposes, “He who will not have believed, moreover, will be condemned (Mark 16).” Therefore, the truth of Sacred Scripture is proposed by way (*per modum praecepti*) of precept, whence it says: *Commandments of God*. Which commandments, indeed, direct the intellect through faith, “You believe in God, believe also in me (Jn. 14:1)”; --inform the affection through love, “This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you (Jn. 15:12)”; --which [precept] they lead to act and execution, “Do this and you will live (Lk. 10:28).”

*Third*, it is shown to be efficacious from the uniformity of the things spoken, because all those who handed down sacred doctrine, taught the same doctrine, “For whether I or they, so we preach, and so you have believed (I Cor. 15:11).” And this is necessary because all had --one teacher, “One is your teacher (Mt. 23:8)”; --they had one spirit, “Did we not walk with the same spirit (I Cor. 12:18)?”; --one affection above all, “The multitude of believers were one soul and heart in God (Acts 4:32).” And therefore, as a sign of the uniformity of doctrine, it is said: *This is the book*.

**1201.** The truth of this teaching of Scripture is immutable and eternal. Whence, what follows: *and the law that is eternal*—“Heaven and earth will pass, but my words will not pass (Lk. 21:33).” Moreover, this law remains forever on account of *three* things: --*First*, on account of the power of the legislator, “For the Lord of hosts hath decreed, and who can disannul it (Is. 14:27) ?” --*Second*, on account of His immutability, “I am God and I do not change (Mal. 3:6).” “The Lord is not like man that He lies, nor as the son of men that He changes (Num. 23:19).” --*Third*, on account of the truth of the Law, “All your commandments are truth (Ps. 118: 86).” “The lip of truth will be steadfast forever (Prov. 12:19).” “The truth remains and is strengthened forever.”

**1202.** The usefulness (*utilitas*) of the Scriptures, moreover, is the greatest, “I am the Lord thy God that teach thee profitable things (Is. 48:17).” Whence, it follows: *All they that keep it shall come to life*; which, indeed, is *three-fold*. —*First*, there is the life of grace, to which Sacred Scripture disposes, “The words which I speak to you are spirit and life (Jn. 6:64).” For, through this life the spirit lives unto God, “I live, however, now not I: but Christ lives in me (Gal. 2:20).” —*Second*, there is the life of justice consisting in works, to which Sacred Scripture directs, “I will never forget your justifications; because in them you have given me life (Ps. 118: 93).” —*Third*, is the life of glory, which Sacred Scripture promises and to which it leads, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:69).” “These things, moreover, are written that you might believe; and that believing you might have life in His name (Jn. 20: 31).”

## II. On the division of Sacred Scripture

**1203.**—Sacred Scripture leads to this life, moreover, in *two ways*: namely, by commanding and by helping.—*Commanding* through the commandments which it proposes, which pertain to the Old Testament, “Moses gave to us the law (Eccl. 24:33).” —*Helping*, moreover, through the gift of grace the legislator gives, which pertains to the New Testament. “The Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).”

Therefore, the whole of Sacred Scripture is principally divided into two parts, namely, into the OLD and NEW TESTAMENT; which two are touched upon in Matthew 13:52, “Every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is similar to a householder, who brings forth from his own treasure things new and old.” And in Cantic of Canticles 7:13, “Every fruit, new and old, my beloved, I have kept for you.”

**1204.**—Moreover, the Old Testament is divided according to the teaching of the commandments. For a commandment is *two-fold*, namely *compulsory* and *monitory*. The *compulsory* is the commandment of the king who is able to punish transgressors, “Just as the roar of the lion, so also is the terror of the king (Prov. 20:2).” The *monitory* is the

precept of the father who has to instruct, “Are these your sons? Instruct them (Eccl. 7:25).” Moreover, the precept of the king is *two-fold*, namely the *one* by which he establishes a law; the *other* which leads to the observance of the statute of the law, which he was wont to promulgate through heralds and messengers. And thus *three* precepts are distinguished, namely the precept of the *king*, of the *herald*, and of the *father*. And according to these three things the Old Testament is divided into three parts, according to Jerome in the *Prologue* to the book of Kings (PL 28, 598-600).

The *first* part is contained in the law, which is like a precept proposed by the king himself, “The Lord our God, the Lord our lawgiver (Is. 33:22).” The *second* part is contained in the Prophets, who were like messengers and heralds of God speaking in the person of God to the people and drawing (*inducentes*) them to the observance of the law, “Aggeus said, concerning the messengers of the Lord (Agg. 1:13).”

The *third* part is contained in the hagiographers, who spoke as inspired by the Holy Spirit, nevertheless not on the part of the Lord, but (spoke) as if from themselves (*sed quasi ex se ipsis*). Whence, they are called hagiographers as in sacred writers, or as in sacred scribes, from *agios*, which is *sacred* and *graphia* which is *writing*: and so the precepts which are contained in them are like paternal (precepts). As is evident from Proverbs, 6:20, “My son, guard{keep} the precepts of your father.”

Jerome, however, posits a *fourth* order of the books (op. Cit., PL 28, 601 ss.), namely, the apocryphal books: and they are called apocryphal from *apo*, which is *greatly* and *cryphon*, which is *obscure*, because it is doubted as concerns their thoughts or authors. Truly, the Catholic Churches receives certain books into the number of the Sacred Scriptures, about whose thoughts it is not to be doubted, but about their authors. Not because it is not known who the authors of these books would have been, but because those men were not of known authority. Whence, they do not have strength from the authority of the authors, but rather from the reception of the Church. Nevertheless, because the same mode of speaking is observed in these books as is observed in the hagiographic books, therefore they are presently reckoned together with the others.

**1205.**—The *first part*, moreover, which contains the Law, is divided into *two parts*; according as the Law is *two-fold*, namely, public and private. The *private* law is what which is imposed, as having to be observed, upon one person or family. And such a law is contained in *Genesis*, as is evident from the first precept given to man, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat (Gen. 2:7);” and to Noe, “You are not to eat flesh with blood (Gen. 9:4);” and to Abraham, “You are to keep my covenant and your seed after you in their generations (Gen. 17:9).”

The *public* law moreover, is that which is handed down to the people. For the divine law was handed down to the Jews through a mediator, because they were not a people worthy to receive it immediately from God, whence, “I was made a go-between and mediator between you and the Lord (Duet. 5: 5).” “The law was ordained through angels in the hand of mediators (Gal. 3:19).” And therefore a two-fold degree of legislation is observed.—*One*, by which the law comes from the Lord to the mediator, and this pertains to three books, namely: Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Therefore, *God spoke to Moses* is frequently read in these books.—The *second* degree is that by which the law is explained (*exponitur*) to the people through the mediator; and this pertains to Deuteronomy, as is evident from this which is spoken in its beginning: *Moses spoke...*, etc.

Moreover, the three aforementioned books are distinguished according to the *three* things in which it was necessary for the people to be ordered: *first*, in precepts concerning the equity of judgment, and this is done in Exodus; *second*, in the sacraments concerning the offering (*exhibitionem*) of worship, and this is done in Leviticus; *third* in duties, concerning the administration of the state, and this is done in the book of Numbers.

**1206.**—Moreover, the *second part*, which is of the Prophets, is divided into *two parts*, according as a messenger must do *two* things. For he must explain the favor (*beneficium*) of the king in such a way that men are inclined to obey;--and he must propose the edict of law.

Moreover, the prophets explained a *three-fold* divine favor to the people:--*first*, the obtaining of the inheritance (*consecutionem haereditatis*), and this in Joshua, of whom Ecclesiasticus says “Joshua strong in war (46: 1)”; --*second*, the destruction of enemies, and this in the book of Judges, concerning whose destruction (we read), “Do to them as thou didst to Madian and Sisara (Ps. 82:10);-- *third*, the exaltation of the people; which indeed is *two-fold*, namely: the *private* exaltation of one person, and concerning this in Ruth; and a *public* exaltation which is of the whole people, even to the royal dignity, and concerning this in the book of Kings: which favor God reproaches to them, “Thou wast made exceedingly beautiful [...But trusting in thy beauty, thou playedst the harlot...] (Ez. 16:13-15).” Indeed, these books, according to Jerome, are placed in the list of the Prophets. In the other books which are commonly called books of the *Prophets*, the prophets set out the divine edicts for the observance of the law. And this is said, --*first* in general; and this in the major prophets who were sent to the entire people and led them to the observance of the whole law; --*second* in particular; and this in the minor prophets, the different ones of whom were sent to specific peoples because of different things, just as Osee to the ten tribes; Joel {to the elders of Israel?}; Jonah to the Ninivites; and likewise concerning the others.

Moreover, the major prophets are divided according to the things by which the prophets led the people to the observance of the law: namely by coaxing them through promises of blessings; --by frightening through the threat of punishments; --by arguing through reproofs (*vituperationes*) of their sins. Although these three are found in each of the prophets, nevertheless Isaias principally coaxes; concerning whom it is said, “He comforted the mourners in Sion (Eccl. 48:27)”; but, Jeremias threatens, whence he said: “For on purpose he weakens the hands of the men of war (Jer. 38:4)”; but Ezechiel argues and scolds: “Thy father was an Ammorhite and thy mother a Cethite (Ez. 16:3).”

Nevertheless, it can be distinguished in *another* way, so that it may be said that Isaias principally prophesies the mystery of the Incarnation, and therefore it is read in the Church in the time of Advent; but, Jeremias prophesies the mystery of the Passion, wherefore it is read in the time of

the Passion: Ezechiel the mystery of the Resurrection, wherefore he finishes his book with the resurrection of the bones (*ossium*) and the repairing of the temple; Daniel, moreover, as he (*secundum quod*) is reckoned amongst the prophets on account of this, that he predicted future things by a prophetic spirit, although he did not speak to the people in the person of the Lord, attends to the divinity of Christ, such that the four prophets would correspond to the four evangelists, or also, [he attends] to the call to judgement.

**1207.**—Moreover, the *third part*, which contains the hagiographic and apocryphal books, is distinguished into *two*, according to the two things by which a father leads his sons to virtue, namely by *word* and *deed*; because examples in morals are not worth less than words. Moreover, they teach some things by deed only; --some by word only; --some by word and deed.

Moreover, by *deed* in *two* ways. —In *one way* by instructing unto caution concerning the future; and this in Joshua, which Jerome places amongst the hagiographic books. For, even though he may have been a prophet from the gift of prophecy, nevertheless he is not a prophet by office; because he was not sent by the Lord to prophesy to the people. Whence what is said in Wisdom 8:8, is able to be understood about him, “She knoweth signs and wonders before they are done.” —In *another way* by narrating past deeds for an example of virtue. The principle virtues, moreover, are *four*, namely: *justice*, which is a common good, the example of which is placed in Paralipomenon, in which the state of the whole people is described, which is governed through justice. *Second* is temperance, the example of which is placed in Judith; whence Jerome says: Receive the widow Judith, an example of chastity {Preface to the book of Judith, PL 29, 41}. “For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity (Judith 15:11).” *Third* is fortitude, to which two things belong, namely, to attack; and according to this the example is placed in the book of Machabees; and to endure (*sustinere*) and according to this the example is placed in Tobit, “Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience (Tobit 2:12).” *Fourth* is prudence, whose (activity) is to withstand

treacheries (*obviare insidiis*); and according to this its example is placed in Esdras. For in that book is shown the manner in which Esdras and Nehemiah and the other princes prudently guarded against the plots of their violent enemies to impede the building of the temple and city. It also belongs to prudence to repel violent acts wisely; and according to this its example is given in the book of Esther; where it is shown in what way Esther and Mordochai shattered the deceptions of the most powerful Aman.

Moreover, the hagiographic and apocryphal books, which only instruct by *word*, are distinguished according as a word serves for instruction in *two ways*: --*In one way*, by seeking the gift of wisdom, “Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given to me, and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me (Wis. 7:7).” And the Psalter serves for instruction, speaking to God through the mode of prayer. --*The second way* is by teaching wisdom, and this in *two ways*, according to the two-fold work of the wise man; *one* of which is to be able to expose a liar: and as concerns this there is the book of Job, which expels errors through the mode of the disputation, “But yet I will speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God. Having first shewn that you are forgers of lies, and maintainers of perverse opinions (Job 13:3-4).” His *other* work is not to lie concerning these things which he knows; and thus we are instructed in *two ways*: because *either* wisdom is commended to us, and this in the book of Wisdom; *or* the precepts of wisdom are proposed, and this in the three books of Solomon: which, indeed, are distinguished according to the *three* degrees of virtues which Plotinus distinguishes (Ennead. I, 1. II, chs. 2-7); because the precepts of wisdom ought not to be unless concerning acts of virtue. In the *first* degree, according to him, there are the political virtues, by which a man moderately uses the goods of the world and is associated amongst men; and according to this is the book of Proverbs. In the *second* degree there are the virtues of purgation, by which a man puts off the goods of this world through contempt; and according to this is the book of Ecclesiastes which is ordered to contempt of the world, as is evident from Jerome in his Prologue {Preface, PL 23, 1061}. In the *third* degree are the virtues of the purified soul, by which a man, with the cares of the



world having been utterly trampled upon, delights in the contemplation of wisdom alone; and as concerns this there are the Canticles. Moreover in a *fourth* degree are the exemplary virtues existing in God, concerning which, the precepts of wisdom are not given, but are rather (*magis*) derived from them.

Moreover, Ecclesiasticus instructs *simultaneously* by *word and deed*. Whence he who proposed the precepts of wisdom ended his book in praise of the fathers, as is evident from the forty-forth chapter and what follows it.

The New Testament, moreover, orders to eternal life, not only through precepts, but through the gifts of grace, is divided into *three* parts. –In the *first* it treats of the origin of grace: and this in the Gospels. –In the *second* part concerning the power (*virtute*) of grace: and this in the Epistles of Paul; whence in the beginning he begins from the power of the Gospel saying: “The power of God is unto salvation for all those who believe (Rom. 1:16).” –In the *third* part, it treats of the execution of the above mentioned power: and this in the remaining books of the New Testament.

The *origin of grace*, moreover, is Christ: “Of His fullness we have all received, grace for grace, because the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:16-17).” In Christ, moreover, there are *two* natures to be considered, namely: the *divine*: and concerning this there is principally the Gospel of John, whence it begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).” –and the *human*: and the other Evangelists principally treat of this nature, which are distinguished according to the *three dignities*, which belong to Christ the man. For Matthew orders (determinat) according to His *regal* dignity; wherefore in the beginning of his Gospel he shows Him to have descended, according to the flesh, from kings and as adored by the Magi kings. But Mark orders according to His *prophetic* dignity; therefore his gospel begins with preaching. Luke orders according to His *priestly* dignity; therefore he begins his gospel from the Temple and the priesthood, and ends his gospel in the Temple, and it is frequently moving around the

Temple, as a certain Gloss on Luke 2:46 says about that: “They found him in the temple sitting amongst the doctors.”

Or [it may be divided] in *another way*, so that it may be said that Matthew orders concerning Christ principally as to the mystery of the Incarnation; and therefore he is described in the figure of a man; --Luke as to the mystery of the Passion; and therefore he is described in the figure of an ox, which is the sacrificial animal; --but Mark, as to the victory of the Resurrection; and therefore he is described in the figure of a lion; -- but John, who flies to the heights of His divinity, is designated through the eagle.

{The second part, namely, the Power of grace, which is treated in the EPISTLES of Paul, is not in the codices, at least in the vulgate text} -- annotation of the editor --**See Insert below--**

The *execution*, moreover, *of the power of grace* is shown in the progression of the Church, in which one is to consider three things. – *First*, the beginning of the Church; and this is treated in the Acts of the Apostles; whence Jerome says: “The Acts of the Apostles seem to tell the naked story and weave the infancy of the nascent Church (Preface in the Pentateuch., PL 28, 177).” –*Second* the advancing of the Church; and the apostolic instruction in the canonical Epistles is ordered to this. – *Third*, the term of the Church; in which the Apocalypse concludes the content of all of Sacred Scripture, until the Spouse enters into the chamber of Jesus Christ to participate in the glorious life: to which may Jesus Christ Himself, blessed in all ages, lead us. Amen.

**--Insert--**

From the Prologue to the Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul by St. Thomas Aquinas (pgh no. 11):

Indeed, he [St. Paul] wrote fourteen epistles, of which nine instructed the Church of the Gentiles; four [instructed] the prelates and princes of the Church, that is the rulers; and one [instructed] the people of Israel, namely that [epistle] which is to the Hebrews.

And truly this whole teaching [i.e., found in these epistles] is concerning the grace of Christ, which is able to be considered in three respects.

In one way [the grace of Christ can be considered] according as it is in the head itself, namely Christ, and this is treated in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

In another way [the grace of Christ can be considered] according as it is in the principal members of the Mystical body, and this is treated in the epistles which are [addressed] to the prelates.

In a third way [the grace of Christ can be considered] as it is in the Mystical Body itself, that is the Church. And this is treated in the epistles which are sent to the Gentiles, which Epistles are distinguished as follows: for the grace of Christ [as it exists in the Mystical Body] is able to be considered in three ways. In one way it can be considered simply in itself, and this is treated in the Epistle to the Romans. In another way according as it is in the sacraments of grace, and this is treated in the two Epistles to the Corinthians (in the first of which is treated the sacraments themselves, and in the second of which is treated the dignity of the ministry [of the sacraments]), and in the Epistle to the Galatians (in which is excluded the superfluous sacraments, contrary to those who wanted the old sacraments [of the law] to be added to the new sacraments [of grace]). In a third way, [the grace of Christ] is considered insofar as it effects the unity which it makes in the Church.

Therefore, the Apostle teaches first concerning the institution of the unity of the Church in the Epistle to the Ephesians; second concerning its confirmation and progress in the Epistle to the Philippians; third concerning its defense: against certain errors in the Epistle to the Colossians and against present persecution in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians and future persecutions, especially those in the time of the Antichrist, in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians.

He instructs the prelates of the Church with regard to both spiritual and temporal matters. The spiritual matters concerning the institution, instruction and governance of the unity of the Church he treats in the first Epistle to Timothy; and concerning steadfastness against persecutors in the second [Epistle to Timothy]. Third he instructs [the prelates of the

Church] concerning the defense against heretics in the Epistle to Titus. He instructs the rulers [of the Church] regarding temporal matters in the Epistle to Philemon.

And, thus, the reason for the distinction and order of all the epistles [of Paul] is clear.