

# *The Angelic Doctor and Angelic Speech: The Development of Thomas Aquinas's Thought on How Angels Communicate*

HARM GORIS

Catholic Theological University Utrecht

## I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of angels is not currently one of the most studied parts of Aquinas's thought, and this goes *a fortiori* for the topic of angelic speech.<sup>1</sup> Angelology is often seen as an outstanding example of the barren metaphysical speculations that, allegedly, characterized (late-) medieval thought, or, at best, as a rather arcane curiosity that might be of some interest to specialists

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1. General studies on Aquinas's angelology are: James Collins, *The Thomistic Philosophy of the Angels* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 1947) and (rather basic) Jean-Marie Vernier, *Les anges chez saint Thomas d'Aquin. Fondements historiques et principes philosophiques* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1986). For more references on Aquinas's doctrine of angels and medieval angelology in general, see David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Aquinas's view on the speech of angels is dealt with in Collins, *Thomistic Philosophy*, pp. 294–302. A more detailed description can be found in Barbara Faes de Mottoni, "Thomas von Aquin und die Sprache der Engel," in *Thomas von Aquin. Werk und Wirkung im Licht neuerer Forschung*, ed. Albert Zimmermann, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 19 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 140–55. A revised and more elaborate version of the same article is: "Enuntiatores divini silentii: Tommaso d'Aquino e il linguaggio degli angeli," *Medioevo* 12 (1986): 197–228. For a systematic discussion from the point of view of contemporary philosophy of language (Searle, Wittgenstein), see Mart Raukas, "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Speech of the Angels," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 43 (1996): 30–44. For a contrast between the views of Aquinas and Ockham on angelic language: Claude Panaccio, "Angel's Talk, Mental Language, and the Transparency of the Mind," in *Vestigia, Imagines, Verba. Semiotics and Logic in Medieval Theological Texts (XIIth–XIVth Century)*. *Acts of the XIIth Symposium on Medieval Logic and Semantics. San Marino, 24–28 May 1996*, ed. C. Marmo (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 323–35. A speculative reinterpretation of angelic speech from a phenomenological point of view is offered in: Emmanuel Falque, "L'altérité angélique ou l'angelologie thomiste au fil des "Méditations Cartésiennes"," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 51 (1995): 625–46.

in the history of mentality, but is embarrassing to philosophical commentators. However, this humanist caricature of the scholastic discussion on angels does not do justice to the historical motives behind it or to its systematic importance. On the contrary, the scholastic views on the nature and operations of the separated substances originated from crucial philosophical and theological debates. Furthermore, they can still be of relevance to present-day discussions. Located in the hierarchy of being below God but above corporeal creatures, in particular, human beings, angels offered to medieval scholars an important clue for their reflections both on God and on human beings.

In theology, the very notion of purely spiritual beings that are yet not divine but created by a free Creator, gave medieval scholars the opportunity to refine and reformulate the distinction between God and the non-divine in other terms than the dichotomy of spirit and matter with which most ancient philosophers (with the exception of some Neoplatonists) had identified it. Aquinas's views on the distinctions between *esse* and essence and between essence and *supposit* are developed most pointedly in his discussions on the nature of angels. Likewise, theories about time and space and their relation to God's eternity and ubiquity are spelled out in the treatise on the angels.

On the other hand, the angelic operations of knowing and willing served as a test case for anthropological speculations in medieval thought. According to the Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy of being, which most medieval scholars accepted, the top of each inferior level of being touches upon the bottom of the superior level without blurring the discontinuity between the two. For example, the highest human powers, *viz.* intellect and will, are similar to the intellectual operations of angels while remaining fundamentally distinct from the latter. In this way, angelology makes up a kind of philosophical laboratory to carry out thought experiments in which angelic knowledge and will serve either as contrasting counterexamples or as idealized forms of human knowledge and human will. What would it be for an immaterial creature to think, to know, to will, to choose etc. and what does that tell us about the intellectual operations of embodied rational creatures? Also communication is reckoned among the activities that angels can perform. Speculating about angelic speech may, therefore, tell us something about human communication.

In this article, I shall neither discuss the way angels can speak with human beings by adopting a physical body nor how they may speak to God. Instead, I shall focus on Aquinas's account of the internal celestial communication: how does one angel speak to another? In particular, I shall compare Aquinas's major texts on this subject with regard to three issues: the notion of *word* (section IV), the role of the will (section V), and the need of signification (section VI). I will argue that, with regard to each of these topics, Aquinas gradually developed, and sometimes even changed, his opinion by first juxtaposing and later integrating Augustinian and Aristotelian viewpoints. Before discussing these three topics in detail, I shall first introduce

the texts by giving an outline of their historical, textual, and systematic contexts (section II), and by summarizing their content and comparing them with the writings of some of Aquinas's contemporaries (section III).<sup>2</sup>

## II. CONTEXT

Both Scripture and theological tradition provide Aquinas with the material for his reflections on angelic speech. Apart from texts in which angels speak to human beings either in a vision or a dream, biblical evidence for angelic speech is rather limited. Communication of angels among themselves or to God is reported in the call of Isaiah, where the seraphim call to one another the thrice holy (Is. 6:3), in the book of Revelation where the words of praise to the Lamb uttered by the elders and the angels are mentioned (Rev. 5:11f and 7:11f) and once in Zech. 1:12. However, all these examples occur within the context of human visions and, hence, describe angelic communication in a certain bodily form. This is not the case in 1 Cor. 13:1: "if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels. . . ." This verse only mentions angelic speech without giving further information, but it is the only biblical passage that led Aquinas, in his commentary on the Pauline letters, to discuss the way angels talk among themselves. Aquinas's commentary on 1 Cor. 13 is only known in the form of a *reportatio*, probably written in Italy at some time between 1259 and 1268. However, there is strong evidence that, at a very early stage, there was a second textual tradition that is so distinct from the *textus receptus* of the commentary on 1 Cor. 11–13, that it may be considered as another *reportatio*.<sup>3</sup>

More direct authoritative sources than Scripture for Aquinas's discussion of angelic speech were the speculations of Pseudo-Dionysius and, to a lesser degree, those of Gregory the Great and John of Damascus. Their comments had occasioned thirteenth-century theologians such as the authors of the *Summa Alexandri Halensis*, Bonaventure, and Albert the Great

2. Texts of Aquinas are taken from the Leonine edition. If a work has not appeared yet in this edition, I use the Marietti editions.

3. I am very grateful to Fr. Gilles de Grandpré O. P. of the Leonine commission for informing me on the current state of research on Aquinas's Pauline commentaries. Fr. de Grandpré, who is working on the critical edition of these commentaries, drew my attention to the second text version. It can be found in Fr. Busa's edition (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, Stuttgart-Bad: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), 6:372–74 under the heading 087 RIL n.3 cp 13. It is based on an Italian manuscript (Padova, Antoniana 333), of which Fr. de Grandpré gave me a partial transcription (the part dealing with angelic speech), which has some minor text emendations. In this article, references to the *textus receptus* of the *reportatio* on 1 Cor. 13 are according to the Marietti edition (*Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, vol. 1, 8th ed., 1953) and are indicated by the siglum *In I Cor.*

to reflect extensively on angelic speech.<sup>4</sup> By the mid 1250s, when Aquinas was writing his commentary on the *Sentences*, angelic speech had become a standard subject of academic discussion. In the commentary on the second book (ds. 11 q. 2 aa. 2–3), Aquinas dealt for the first time extensively with angelic speech, and he would resume the discussion twice in later works: in the *De Veritate* (q. 9), written in Paris between 1256 and 1259, and in the *Summa Theologiae* (I, qq. 106–7), written around 1267 to 1268 while Aquinas was in Rome. These three systematic texts and the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:1 constitute the main sources for studying Aquinas’s views on angelic communication.

The remote setting of Aquinas’s discussions in the commentary on the *Sentences* and in the *Summa Theologiae* is the role that angels play in carrying out God’s providential plan by acting upon other creatures. The immediate context in all three systematic texts is the non-natural knowledge that angels have and the way this knowledge is communicated to other angels.

Within angelic communication Aquinas adopts a traditional distinction: enlightenment (*illuminatio*) and speech (*locutio*) in the strict sense. These two forms are not exclusive: every enlightenment implies speech but not vice versa.<sup>5</sup> An angel can only be enlightened by one higher in rank, and the subject always concerns the supernatural divine mysteries. On the other hand, lower angels may speak to higher angels, not about the divine mysteries—for that would be futile as the higher angels understand them more fully—but about something that is hidden (*occultum*) from the higher angels, *viz.* that what a lower angel is actually thinking of. Only God and the angel himself know the content of the actual thought of an angel naturally, other angels have to be told. In this article, I shall not deal with angelic enlightenment, but shall limit myself to angelic speech in the strict sense.

From a systematic point of view, it is the confrontation between the Augustinian tradition on speech and the Aristotelian philosophy of mind that is in the background of Aquinas’s discussions. The question in what way it can literally and properly be said that angels speak (*loqui*) is the driving force behind his reflections. This issue does not constitute an isolated topic in Aquinas’s work. In particular, it has close affinity to two other, specifically

4. Alexander of Hales (attr.), *Summa Theologica* II, q. 27 (Quaracchi ed., 1928, 2:190–98); Bonaventure, *In I Sent* d. 9, dubium IV (Quaracchi ed., 1882, 1:189), *In II Sent* d. 10, a.3, qq. 1–2 (Quaracchi ed., 1885, 2:267–73); Albert the Great, *In I Sent* d. 9 aa. 13–16 (Borgnet ed., 1893, 15:292–97), *Summa Theologiae* II, q. 35 (Borgnet ed., 1895, 32:376–87), *Summa de Creaturis* I, tr. IV, q. 60 (Borgnet ed., 1895, 34:631–42). For references to later scholastics, see the editorial *scholion* attached to Bonaventure’s *In II Sent* d. 10a. 3 q. 1 (Quaracchi ed., 1885, 2:270–71).

5. Particularly in *De Ver* q. 9 a. 5 and in *STI*, q. 107 a. 2 Aquinas emphasizes that every *illuminatio* is a *locutio*. This relation is formulated less clearly in the text from the commentary on the *Sentences* and in the *textus receptus* of the commentary on 1 Cor. The Italian text variant of the commentary on 1 Cor. 13 does call the revelation of divine mysteries by a higher angel to a lower angel (the word *illuminatio* is not used) a form of *locutio*.

theological problems, *viz.* 'Word' as a personal name of one of the divine persons, and the problem of the plurality of the divine Ideas. Aquinas's successive discussions of these two problems constitute an important parallel to the evolution of his view on angelic language.

### III. THE TEXTS: AQUINAS AND SOME CONTEMPORARIES

In the text from Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences*, the *occulta* that constitute the object of the angelic conversation are identified as the inner concepts of the mind or the inwardly conceived species (*interiores conceptus mentis, species conceptae interius*). By analogy with humans, Aquinas says, the conceived species of the angel can be considered in three ways. First, insofar as it remains in the simple conception of the mind, it has only the *ratio* of the intelligible. Next, when directed by the knower as to be manifested to someone else, it has the *ratio* of word, and is called 'word of the heart.' Finally, it can be connected to an intelligible sign, which expresses the inner concept. And this expression, Aquinas says, is called 'speech' (*locutio*).<sup>6</sup>

The tripartition that Aquinas uses here has its roots in Augustine. In a famous passage in the *De Trinitate* XV, Augustine talks about human thought as the inner word of the heart that is born out of one's memory, and, subsequently, if one wants to communicate it to other human beings, is connected to a sign.<sup>7</sup> However, Aquinas changes the Augustinian view profoundly by

6. *In II Sent* d. 11q. 2a. 3: "... locutio [fit] per hoc quod aliqua prius occulta proponuntur ut cognoscenda ... Qualiter autem aliquid possit proponi angelo ut cognoscendum ab ipso, patet ex simili nostrae locutionis. Est enim aliquid in homine quod aliud homo de ipso naturaliter percipere potest ... aliquid vero quod videri non potest, sicut interiores conceptus mentis. Species ergo conceptae interius, secundum quod manent in simplici conceptione intellectus, habent rationem intelligibilis tantum. Secundum autem quod ordinantur ab intelligente ut manifestandae alteri, habent rationem verbi, quod dicitur verbum cordis. Secundum autem quod aptantur et quodammodo ordinantur signis exterius apparentibus, si quidem sunt signa ad visum, dicuntur nutus; si vero ad auditum, dicitur proprie locutio vocalis ... Similiter in angelis interior conceptus mentis libero arbitrio subjacens ab alio videri non potest. Quando ergo speciem conceptam ordinat ut manifestandam alteri, dicitur verbum cordis; quando vero coordinat eam alicui eorum quae unus angelus in alio naturaliter videri potest, illud naturaliter cognoscibile fit signum expressivum interioris conceptus: et talis expressio vocatur locutio, non quidem vocalis, sed intellectualibus signis expressa."

7. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XV, 10 (CCSL 50A, p. 486): "Necesse est enim cum verum loquimur ... ex ipsa scientia quam memoria tenemus nascatur verbum ... Formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus verbum est quod in corde dicimus, quod nec graecum est nec latinum nec linguae alicuius alterius, sed cum id opus est in eorum quibus loquimur perferre notitiam aliquod signum quo significetur assumitur. Et plerumque sonus, aliquando enim nutus, ille auribus, ille oculis exhibetur ut per signa corporalia etiam corporibus sensibus verbum quod mente gerimus innotescat."

not viewing the actual thought itself as the inner word. ‘Word’ and ‘speech’ are only linked with communication to someone else. We shall come back to this in the next section. Also in both text versions of Aquinas’s commentary on 1 Cor. 13:1, angelic speech is understood parallel to human speech. Again, speech is defined, not as thought itself, but as the “manifestation of something unknown to someone else,” and signs are mentioned as an intrinsic element of angelic communication.<sup>8</sup>

Aquinas’s contemporaries also used the analogy with human communication, and adopted in one way or another Augustinian models in their accounts of angelic speech. However, the ways in which they elaborated their views differ. In both the *Summa Theologica* that is attributed to Alexander of Hales, and in Albert the Great, we find the same two elements that also characterized Thomas’s account in the commentary on the *Sentences*: ‘word’ is connected exclusively to communication and signs play a constitutive role in angelic speech. The *Summa Halensis* distinguishes four ways of considering the intelligible species: firstly, as ‘concept’ in the act of understanding itself, secondly, as ‘affect’ (*affectus*), thirdly, as ‘word’ insofar the angel wills to manifest the species to another angel, and finally, as ‘nod’ (*nutus*), in the actual manifestation. The *nutus* is said to be similar to the human external word, and, hence, seems to be considered as a sign.<sup>9</sup> Albert the Great’s wordings vary, but, basically, he distinguishes four constituents in angelic speech: actual understanding, the act of the will to communicate, addressing another angel, and ‘directing’ or “determining the conceived species to the extramental object,” which he identifies with *nutus*.<sup>10</sup> Also, Albert uses

8. *In I Cor* c. 13 l. In. 763: “Fit autem huiusmodi manifestatio dum inferior angelus superiori loquitur, non per illuminationem, sed per quemdam significatio- nis modum. Est enim in quolibet angelo aliquid quod naturaliter ab altero angelo cognoscitur. Dum ergo id quod est naturaliter notum, proponitur ut signum eius quod est ignotum, manifestatur occultum. Et talis manifestatio dicitur locutio ad similitudinem hominum . . .”; Italian text version of the *reportatio* on 1 Cor. 13:1 (Padova, Bibl. Antoniana 333, fol. 74<sup>vb</sup>, transcription by Fr. de Grandpré): “[37] sicut apud nos manifestatio eorum que unite habemus in corde nostro per [38] signa particulata et distincta verba dicitur loquutio . . . [46] manifestatio conceptus unius angeli alterius [Busa reads *alteri*, H.G] facta dicitur loquutio angelorum . . . [49] quando angelus vult manifestare conceptuum sui [50] cordis alteri angelo quod est sibi ignotum, accipit aliquod quod est in eo [51] illi angelo naturaliter cognoscibile et utitur eo ut signo . . .”

9. *Summa Theologica Alexandri Halensis* II–Iq. 27 c. 6 (Quaracchi ed., 1928, 2:198). In particular: “. . . tertio eadem species, scilicet illud quod sic conceptum est et circa quod sic afficitur, movet vel inclinatur ipsum angelum ad hoc ut eam alii manifestet . . . Item, ista species, prout est sub voluntate manifestandi, dicitur verbum, prout vero est in actu manifestandi, dicitur nutus, ut intelligamus ibi verbum habere similitudinem nostri verbi interioris, nutum autem similitudinem nostri verbi exterioris sive vocis . . .”

10. Strictly, Albert nowhere makes a fourfold distinction explicitly. In some texts, he combines either the second and the third or the third and the fourth element into one single phase; in other texts he omits either the first or the fourth element.

the terms 'word' and 'inner speech' only for communication to someone else, and he assigns an essential role to signs in angelic communication.<sup>11</sup>

Bonaventure also uses the Augustinian model, but in contrast with the *Summa Halensis*, Albert, and Thomas (in his commentary on the *Sentences*), he both maintains the Platonic-Augustinian idea of thought itself as inner speech and he denies that angels use signs. Speaking, he points out, is either to oneself in the internal act of begetting the inner word, and then it is identical with thinking (*cogitatio*), or it is the act of expressing the inner word to someone else so that it becomes an outer word.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Bonaventure states explicitly that only corporeal human beings need (sensible) signs because the signified intelligible is not immediately accessible to their minds; the spiritual angels, on the other hand, speak without signs.<sup>13</sup>

In the *De Veritate* (q. 9), written some five years after the commentary on the *Sentences*, Aquinas uses a different tripartition in his discussion of angelic speech. This new division has its roots not in Augustine, but in Aristotle. In the second book of the *De Anima*, Aristotle distinguishes between potential, habitual and actual knowledge. A human, Aristotle says, is said to be a knower in three ways, which are progressively more actual. First, a person is said to know in the sense that one has the innate capacity to learn; second, insofar as one has acquired knowledge; and third, when the person is actually considering that knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Aquinas adapts this

Cf. Albert, *In I Sent* d. 9 a. 13 (Borgnet ed., 25:294), a. 16 (25:296), *Summa Theologiae* II, q. 35 m. 2 sol. and ad 1 (Borgnet ed., 32:380–81), *Summa de Creaturis* I, tr. IV, q. 60, a. 3 sol. and ad 3 (Borgnet ed. 34:636, 639).

11. Albert, *Summa de Creaturis* I, tr. IV, q. 60, a. 2 (Borgnet ed., 34:636): "Dispositio autem illius [the innate species by which an angel knows, H. G.] ad innotescendum alteri, facit verbum sive sermonem qui est sine voce." Speaking (*loqui*), Albert emphasizes time and again, is more than mere understanding (*cogitare*): "... non enim quilibet motus qui in cogitativo est, dicitur sermo interior, sed motus qui est cum ratione et intentione prolationis ad alterum" (ad 8, 34:637).

12. Bonaventure, *In II Sent* d. 10 a. 3 q. 1 (Quaracchi ed., 2:268–69): "... loqui dupliciter est: uno modo loqui dicit actum in se sive intrinsecum; alio modo actum ad alterum sive quodam modo extrinsecum. Primo modo loqui idem est quod verbum formare sive gignere; secundo modo idem est quod verbum formatum depromere sive exprimere. Primo modo locutio ... non est aliud quam cogitatio. Secundo modo plus dicit quam cogitationem ... Et sicut illa species, dum eam sibi et in se contuebatur intellectus, erat verbum interius; sic, dum eam protendit ad alterum, efficitur quasi nutus et verbum exterius." Cf. also ad 4 (2:269) and q. 2 ad 2 (2:272).

13. Bonaventure, *In II Sent* d. 10 a. 3 q. 1 (Quaracchi ed., 2:269). Bonaventure discusses the semantic differences of 'speaking to another' when predicated of God, human beings or angels. When a human being is said to speak to another, the notion of 'speaking' implies four elements: thought, an effect in another person, the act of turning to the other person, and a mediating sign (*signum medium*), by which the 'intelligible similitude or intelligible signified' (*similitudo intelligibilis sive signatum intelligibile*) comes to be understood by the other person. When the expression 'speaking to another' is predicated of an angel, the last element is not included in its meaning.

14. Aristotle, *De Anima* II, c. 5, 417a22–30. Cf. also *De Anima* III, c. 4, 429b6–10.

tripartition to meet the topic under discussion. He omits the first stage, *viz.* the capacity to learn, and adds another one on the basis of the analogy he draws from the three ways in which a form exists in matter.<sup>15</sup> With these two Aristotelian models in the background, Aquinas says that the “intelligible form in the intellect” (*intelligibilis forma in intellectu*) exists in three ways: first ‘habitually,’ next “in act with regard to the knower himself,” and, finally, “in act with regard to someone else.”<sup>16</sup> The final stage represents external communication and speech. Furthermore, Aquinas notes explicitly that the transition from one stage to the other happens by the will.<sup>17</sup>

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas reaches the full integration of the Aristotelian and Augustinian views. We find again the same tripartition as in the *De Veritate*; however, now, the Aristotelian background of the first two stages is explained with explicit reference to Augustine. In the first stage, Aquinas says, the intelligible exists in the intellect “habitually, or according to memory as Augustine says.”<sup>18</sup> More importantly, he now interprets Aristotle’s second stage, the actual intellection, in terms of Augustine’s theory of the ‘inner word’: ‘When the mind turns itself to actually considering what it habitually possesses, one is speaking to oneself. For the concept itself of the mind is called ‘inner word’.’<sup>19</sup> The third stage is the intelligible in the intellect insofar as it is related to someone else: by manifesting the inner concept to someone else, one angel speaks to the other.<sup>20</sup> As in the *De Veritate*

15. *De Ver* q. 9 a.4: “Invenimus autem formam aliquam existere in materia tripliciter: uno modo imperfecte, medio scilicet modo inter potentiam et actum, sicut formae quae sunt in fieri; alio modo in actu perfecto, perfectione dico qua habens formam est perfectum in se ipso; tertio modo in actu perfecto secundum quod habens formam potest communicare alteri perfectionem, aliquid enim est in se lucidum quod alia illuminare non potest.”

16. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4: “. . . intelligibilis forma in intellectu existit tripliciter: primo quasi mediocriter inter potentiam et actum, quando scilicet est ut in habitu; secundo ut in actu perfecto quantum ad ipsum intelligentem, et hoc est quando intelligens actu cogitat secundum formam quam penes se habet; tertio vero in ordine ad alterum.”

17. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4: “Et transitus quidem de uno modo in alterum est quasi de potentia in actum per voluntatem. Ipsa enim voluntas Angeli facit ut actualiter se convertat ad formas quas in habitu habebat; et similiter voluntas facit ut intellectus Angeli adhuc perfectius fiat in actu formae penes ipsum existentis: ut scilicet non solum secundum se, sed in ordine ad alium tali forma perficiatur.”

18. *ST I*, q. 107 a. 1: “Intelligibile autem est in intellectu tripliciter: primo quidem, habitualiter, vel secundum memoriam, ut Augustinus dicit.”

19. *ST I*, q. 107 a. 1: “Quando autem mens convertit se ad actu considerandum quod habet in habitu, loquitur aliquis sibi ipsi: nam ipse conceptus mentis interius verbum vocatur.”

20. *ST I*, q. 107 a. 1: “. . . [intelligibile est in intellectu] tertio, ut ad aliud relatum . . . Ex hoc vero quod conceptus mentis angelicae ordinatur ad manifestandum alteri, per voluntatem ipsius angeli, conceptus mentis unius angeli innotescit alteri: et sic loquitur unus angelus alteri. Nihil est enim aliud loqui ad alterum, quam conceptum mentis alteri manifestare.”



text, Aquinas emphasizes that the intellect moves from one stage to the next by an act of the will.<sup>21</sup>

In the following sections I shall analyze in greater detail three questions that play a key role in Aquinas's discussion of angelic speech: What constitutes a word or speech, how does the will function, and do angels need signs?

#### IV. NOTIONS OF *INNER WORD* AND *INNER SPEECH*

As we noted above, Augustine is in the background of the account of angelic speech that Aquinas gives in the commentary on the *Sentences*. Yet, in one important respect, it differs from the Augustinian view: Aquinas does not share the Platonic idea of thought itself as a kind of inner speaking to oneself.<sup>22</sup> For Augustine the actual complete thought (*formata cogitatio*) is the 'word of the heart'. Aquinas, on the other hand, like Albert the Great and the *Summa Halensis*, does not use the terms "word of the heart" and "speech" to designate the intellection itself, whether human or angelic, but connects both exclusively with the outward communication to someone else. Actual thought only has the character of 'the intelligible,' not of 'word.'

In comparison with the text from the commentary on the *Sentences*, the term 'word' is conspicuously absent from the discussion in *De Veritate*, question nine. It is mentioned only once in article four, when Aquinas states that, because one angel cannot directly know the secrets of the heart of another angel, 'it is necessary that one (angel) manifests his concept to another; and this is the speech of the angels; for in us, the manifestation of the inner word that we conceive in the mind, is called speech.'<sup>23</sup> This text suggests that 'speech' and '[inner] word' are still understood in terms of 'manifestation to another', that is, they are still confined to external communication, and are not applied to the inner intellection itself. This suggestion is corroborated by the ways in which Aquinas deals with three objections that make use of the idea of 'inner speech.' In the first objection of the article, Aquinas denies that one should speak to oneself in order to know one's own concept. In his answer to the objection, Aquinas does not

21. *ST* I, q. 107 a. 1: "Manifestum est autem quod de primo gradu in secundum transfertur intelligibile per imperium voluntatis . . . Similiter autem et de secundo gradu transfertur in tertium per voluntatem."

22. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 189e–190a. The Platonic idea of thought as inner speech was transmitted to the Latin West in particular by Augustine and John of Damascus. John's *De Fide Orthodoxa* II, c. 21 was a much quoted *auctoritas*. For a more detailed overview of the history of this idea, see Claude Panaccio, *Le discours intérieur: de Platon à Guillaume d'Ockham* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

23. *Theaetetus* 189e–190a: "... oportet quod unus alteri manifestet suum conceptum; et haec est locutio angelorum. In nobis enim locutio dicitur ipsa manifestatio interioris verbi quod mente concipimus."

dispute the validity of this argument, and he seems to accept it tacitly.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, with reference to Augustine, in the ninth objection, he mentions ‘inner speech,’ which is identified with ‘cogitation’ and distinguished from ‘outer speech.’ In answering to the objection, Aquinas does not come back to the notion of ‘inner speech,’ but he does assert that angels have ‘outer speech,’ which consists in “directing the cogitation to someone else” without sensible, vocal signs.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in the thirteenth objection, he states that speech is a movement of the cognitive faculty, and, therefore, is not directed outward, toward someone else. Aquinas answers that because speech is not the act of knowing itself, but its manifestation, it is directed to someone else.<sup>26</sup> Although Aquinas’s wordings are less explicit than in the text from the commentary on the *Sentences*, it seems reasonable to conclude that also in the *De Veritate* Aquinas still connects ‘word’ and ‘speech’ only with outward communication and not with the inner intellection itself.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas embraces unambiguously the idea of thought as inner speech to oneself: “When the mind turns itself to actually considering what it habitually possesses, one is speaking to oneself: for the concept itself of the mind is called ‘inner word.’”<sup>27</sup> The actual intellection itself is understood as speaking internally to oneself, and the concept—before, and apart from, its being directed toward someone else in communication—is identified with the inner word. It is also for this reason that, while in the *De Veritate*, Aquinas had called the external angelic communication a form of (non-vocal) ‘outer speech,’ he can now consider it to be one of the two forms of ‘inner speech’; not the one to oneself, which is the actual intellection, but the inner, non-vocal speech to someone else.<sup>28</sup> Actual understanding

24. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4 ob. 1: “. . . sed nunc non oportet quod aliquis sibi loquatur ad hoc quod conceptum suum cognoscat.” The objection quotes from Gregory’s *Moralia in Job*, where it is said that, in heaven, “tunc erit unus conspicibilis alteri sicut nunc non est conspicibilis ipse sibi.” In his answer, Aquinas points out that, in heaven, with glorified bodies and spiritual eyes, we may know and see things in others that now, on earth, we cannot see or know in ourselves; however, he denies that the secrets of the heart are among these things.

25. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4 ob. 9: “Praeterea, duplex est locutio in nobis, interior scilicet et exterior; exterior autem in angelis non ponitur, alias oporteret quod voces formarent dum unus alii loqueretur; locutio autem interior non est nisi cogitatio, ut patet per Anselmum et Augustinum; ergo in angelis non potest poni aliqua locutio praeter cogitationem.” Aquinas answers: “Ad nonum dicendum quod, quamvis in angelis non sit locutio exterior sicut in nobis, scilicet per signa sensibilia, est tamen alio modo, ut ipsa ordinatio cogitationis ad alterum exterior locutio in angelis dicatur.”

26. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4 ad 13: “. . . locutio est motus cognitivae, non qui sit ipsa cognitio, sed est cognitionis manifestatio; et ideo oportet quod sit ad alium.”

27. *ST I*, q. 107 a. 1: “Quando autem mens convertit se ad actu considerandum quod habet in habitu, loquitur aliquis sibi ipsi: nam ipse conceptus mentis interius verbum vocatur.”

28. *ST I*, q. 107 a. 1 ad 2: “. . . locutio exterior quae fit per vocem . . . non convenit angelo, sed sola locutio interior; ad quam pertinet non solum quod loquatur sibi interius concipiendo, sed etiam quod ordinet per voluntatem ad alterius

is already by itself a (inner) speech, the only thing that is required for angelic communication is the will to relate or direct the inner word to another angel.<sup>29</sup>

The development of Aquinas's view on the inner word as it is found in his texts on angelic speech, is reflected in other passages of his work, in particular in the discussions on the plurality of divine Ideas, and on 'Word' as an exclusively personal name for the Second Person of the Trinity. It is beyond my scope to reproduce these intricate discussions in detail, but a concise summary should suffice.<sup>30</sup> In the commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*, Aquinas reinterprets Augustine's inner word in terms of Aristotle's noetics so that it is understood either as the act of understanding itself or as the intelligible species. Both of these are formal principles of understanding (*id quo intelligitur*) and, in God, they are not distinguished really, but only conceptually (*ratione tantum*).<sup>31</sup> On these grounds, Aquinas admits, one cannot account for 'Word' as an exclusively personal name *ex virtute vocabuli*. By itself, it may also signify the divine essence. Only scriptural and theological usage warrant that it cannot be used but personally.<sup>32</sup>

Next, in question four of the *De Veritate*, Aquinas does argue for the exclusive use of 'Word' as a personal name on the basis of the proper meaning of 'word.' For 'word,' he says, is that which has been understood (*id quod est intellectum*), and, in human beings, this necessarily implies a "real procession from something else." However, Aquinas bases this real procession on the discursivity of human understanding.<sup>33</sup> He does not seem to realize that

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manifestationem." The phrase "quae fit per vocem" is to be read as a non-restrictive relative clause. See also *ST I*, q. 107 a. 4 ad 1.

29. See the quotation from *ST I*, q. 107 a. 1 in n. 20 above.

30. I have examined these discussions in more detail in my *Free Creatures of an Eternal God. Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will* (Louvain: Peeters, 1996), 164–84.

31. In *In I Sent* d. 27 q. 2 a. 2 qa. 1, Aquinas mentions the opinion of some anonymous *alii* that 'word' is always personal because one may speak a word either to oneself or to someone else, but he rejects it: "si inquiratur quid sit istud verbum quo aliquis sibi loquitur, non invenitur esse nisi conceptio intellectus. Conceptio autem intellectus est vel operatio ipsa quae est intelligere, vel species intellecta . . . quae est similitudo rei intellectae . . . utrumque enim istorum est id quo quis intelligit formaliter." Within the context of the commentary on the *Sentences*, the *species intellecta* mentioned here is the *species intelligibilis* insofar actually abstracted: Goris, *Free Creatures*, 167 n. 69. Aquinas does allow of a form of 'inner speech' or 'speaking in the heart' here, but this concerns only the reflection upon one's understanding in order to verify it: ". . . per modum quo aliquis convertitur supra id quod intellexit, ut manifestum fiat utrum verum sit vel non quod intellectu percipit; hoc enim proprie est loqui in corde" (*In I Sent* d. 27 q. 2 a. 2 qa. 1ad 2).

32. *In I Sent* d. 27 q. 2 a. 2 qu. 1 (*in fine*).

33. *De Ver* q. 4 a. 2: "Omne autem intellectum in nobis est aliquid realiter progrediens ab altero, vel sicut progrediuntur a principiis conceptiones conclusionum, vel sicut conceptiones quiddatum rerum posteriorum a quiddatibus priorum, vel saltem sicut conceptio actualis progreditur ab habituali cognitione." Even if the last

this implies that 'Word' could only be said metaphorically of God because discursive knowledge expresses an imperfect mode of understanding, and, hence, cannot be said properly of God.

Aquinas's mature view on the inner word occurs for the first time in the third and final redaction of the *Summa contra Gentiles* (I. 53) and is repeated in a number of other texts.<sup>34</sup> He now argues that the meaning of 'word' implies a real procession from something else; however, he no longer bases his argument on the discursivity of knowledge. The core of Aquinas's mature view is that when our (possible) intellect has been informed and brought to act by the intelligible species (abstracted by the agent intellect), it brings forth immediately its concept or inner word. Aquinas clearly distinguishes the inner word from the cognitive faculty, the act of understanding, the intelligible species and the extramental object. Not the extramental object itself, but what the intellect understands about it, is what is primarily and *per se* understood. This is the concept or inner word.<sup>35</sup> In this way, Aquinas interprets Augustine's notion of the 'word of the heart' (*verbum cordis*) as the concept (*conceptus*), begotten in the act of understanding, and, consequently, supplements Aristotle's theory of human intellection with the formation of the concept as a process distinct from and subsequent to the abstraction of the intelligible species. We find in these theological discussions a similar development as in the texts on angelic speech: Aquinas gradually integrates Aristotelian and Augustinian insights, and comes to conceive of understanding as an inner speaking to oneself.

## V. ROLE OF THE WILL

In the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on 1 Cor. 13, Aquinas states that the topic about which angels speak to one another is what is subject to free will, and, hence, invisible to another angel, but he offers no further

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alternative means the Aristotelian transition from habitual knowledge to actual consideration (which is not necessarily discursive), it still cannot be said properly of God because God does not know habitually. Furthermore, as this transition depends on free will, it would even be heretical to apply it to the procession of the Word in God. Illuminating parallels to the discussion of *De Ver* q. 4 are *De Ver* q. 3 a. 2 and the first redaction of *ScG* I, c. 51, both of which deal with the plurality of divine Ideas: cf. Goris, *Free Creatures*, pp. 169–76.

34. In particular: *ScG* IV, c. 11; *In Joh* c. 11. 1; *De Pot* q. 8 a. 1 and q. 9 a. 5. Cf. Goris, *Free Creatures*, pp. 176–82.

35. *De Pot* q. 9a. 5: "Hoc ergo est primo et per se intellectum, quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta . . . Hoc autem sic ab intellectu conceptum dicitur verbum interius . . ."; *ScG* IV, c. 11 n. 6: "Dico autem intentionem intellectam id quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta . . . ipsa intentio verbum interius nominatur . . .".

explanation.<sup>36</sup> Adopting the Aristotelian scheme in the *De Veritate* text gives Aquinas the opportunity to highlight the role of the will more expressly. Probably with the Aristotelian axiom in mind that nothing can actualize itself as such, Aquinas points out that the intellect's transition from one, potential stage to the next stage of actualization, that is, from habitual to actual knowledge, or from inner, actual knowledge to outward communication, happens by the will. This double role of the will is also emphasized in the discussion in the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>37</sup> It serves two purposes in Aquinas's discussion on angelic speech.

First, the fact that the will moves the intellect from habitual to actual knowledge, explains why one angel cannot know the 'secrets of the heart' of another angel. By pointing out in the *De Veritate* that the transition to actual consideration depends on the will, it is made clear why what an angel is actually thinking of, depends not on nature, but on free will—and, hence, cannot be known by another angel, unless told. Aristotle had already touched upon the role of the will in the *De Anima*, when he remarks in passing that "a knower can (actually) contemplate if he wants to," but Aquinas draws attention to the will more explicitly.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the prominent role of the will coincides with the view of Augustine, expressed in the *De Trinitate* (XI), where it is said that it is the will that directs the internal vision toward the image retained in memory.<sup>39</sup> Aquinas does not refer to this text of Augustine in question nine of the *De Veritate*; however, he had already adduced it in the previous question in discussing that one angel cannot know the 'secrets of the heart' of another.<sup>40</sup>

The second role of the will concerns the transition from inner contemplation to outward communication. It suffices for angelic speech that an angel voluntarily directs his concept toward another angel. There is no more need for a separate act of connecting the concept with a sign. In the next section, I shall examine in more detail how Aquinas changed his view on the issue of signification in angelic communication.

36. *In II Sent* d. 11 q. 2 a. 3: "Sed locutio est de motibus liberi arbitrii, quos in uno alius non videt . . ." and ". . . in angelis interior conceptus mentis libero arbitrio subjacens ab alio videri non potest"; *In I Cor* c. 13 l. 1 n. 763: "Aliquid vero est in cognitione mentis angelicae, de quo superiores loquuntur inferioribus et e converso; et huiusmodi sunt occulta cordium quae ex libero arbitrio dependent . . ."

37. See the quotations in nn. 17 and 21.

38. Aristotle, *De Anima* II, c. 5, 417a27. Aquinas also refers to Averroes's definition of *habitus* as "quo quis agit cum voluerit": cf. *ST* I, q. 107 a. 1, *ST* I–II, q. 49 a. 3 s.c.

39. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XI, 2–4 (CCSL 50, pp. 338–43).

40. *De Ver* q. 8 a. 13: "... ad hoc quod mens aliquid actu cogitet, requiritur intentio voluntatis qua mens convertatur actu ad speciem quam habet, ut patet per Augustinum in libro De Trinitate."

## VI. SIGNS AND SIGNIFICATION

The Augustinian tripartition that Aquinas uses when discussing angelic speech in the commentary on the *Sentences*, has as its final stage the coordination of the conceived species to a sign. Following Augustine's discussion in *De Trinitate* (XV, 10), Aquinas states that, in human communication, this concerns "outward appearing signs," which are either visual or audible. The latter constitute vocal speech in a proper sense.<sup>41</sup> Among angels, however, there cannot be any vocal speech because they are purely spiritual beings. Nevertheless, Aquinas wants to maintain the correspondence between angelic and human communication. Therefore, he introduces, instead of the sensible signs, intelligible signs, that signify the concept and that complete the process of angelic speech:

When an angel coordinates the conceived species to one of the things that one angel can see naturally in another, this naturally known thing becomes a sign that expresses the inner concept. Such an expression is called speech, not vocal, but one that is expressed by intellectual signs.<sup>42</sup>

The same view is expressed in the *reportatio* on 1 Corinthians 13:1. Aquinas distinguishes angelic speech into 'speech by way of illumination' and 'speech by a certain way of signification' (*locutio per quemdam significationis modum*). Regarding the latter, we find again the parallel with human speech, and the 'naturally known thing' becoming a sign of the 'hidden things of the heart' (*occulta cordium*):

For there is something in one angel that is known naturally by another angel. Therefore, when what is naturally known, is presented as a sign of what is unknown, the hidden thing is manifested. And such a manifestation is called 'speech' by analogy with humans, who manifest the hidden things of the heart to others by way of sensible sounds. . . . That is why things that are naturally known in angels, when taken on for manifesting what is hidden, are called signs or nods.<sup>43</sup>

41. Cf. *In II Sent* d. 11 q. 2 a. 3, quoted in n. 6 above. For the relevant passage in *De Trinitate*, see n. 7 above. Note that Augustine has the same subdivision into visible and audible signs.

42. *In II Sent* d. 11 q. 2 a. 3, quoted in n. 6 above. See also ad 2: ". . . illud naturaliter notum in uno angelo ab alio, est quasi signum latentis interius cogitationis, non sensibile, sed intellectuale." In section three of this paper we already saw that also the *Summa Halensis* and Albert the Great consider signification an essential element in angelic speech.

43. *In I Cor* c. 13 l. 1 n. 763: "Est enim in quolibet angelo aliquid quod naturaliter ab altero angelo cognoscitur. Dum ergo id quod est naturaliter notum, proponitur ut signum eius quod est ignotum, manifestatur occultum. Et talis manifestatio dicitur locutio ad similitudinem hominum, qui occulta cordium manifestant aliis per voces sensibiles . . . Unde et ea quae sunt in angelis naturaliter nota, in quantum

The ‘naturally known things’ that become signs of the naturally unknowable secrets of the heart, seem to be the innate species by which angels know. But this need not concern us now. What is more relevant is that the notion of an intelligible sign is at odds with the Augustinian definition, which states that signs are sensible.<sup>44</sup> As purely spiritual beings cannot use sensible signs, Aquinas has to stretch the traditional notion of sign as to include intelligible signs.<sup>45</sup>

In the *De Veritate*, the final, separate stage of accommodating the inner concept with a sign has disappeared. For the third and final phase of the Aristotelian tripartition in the *De Veritate* (*viz.* directing one’s concept to someone else) coincides with the second phase of the Augustinian division in the commentary on the *Sentences*, while there is not an equivalent for the last phase of the Augustinian scheme in the Aristotelian model. The act of the will by which one angel directs his concept to another suffices to complete angelic speech. It is no longer required for angels to take on (intelligible) signs for communicating with one another.

The exact parallelism between angelic and human speech has disappeared in the *De Veritate*: human beings need (sensible) signs in order to communicate with each other because of their corporality, while angels communicate without signs. For, unlike angelic minds, our intellect is not led to the intelligibles immediately: it starts, by its nature, from sensibles.<sup>46</sup> Speech, however, being a proper operation of the intellect itself, does not require by itself a separate act of signification.<sup>47</sup>

In the answers to the objections in the *De Veritate*, (q. 9), Aquinas elaborates further on the role of signs in speech. He points out that in the strict sense of the word, a sign is what leads to knowledge of something else by way

assumuntur ad manifestationem occultorum, dicuntur signa vel nutus.” The Italian text version also makes the comparison with human speech and continues: “[49] et ideo quando angelus vult manifestare conceptum sui [50] cordis alteri angelo quod est sibi ignotum accipit aliquid quod est in eo [51] illi angelo naturaliter cognoscibile et utitur eo ut signo ad innotescen[52]dum. Et hoc signum dicitur nutus.”

44. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* II, 1 (CCSL 32, p. 32): “signum enim est res praeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire.”

45. It should be noted, however, that in *In IV Sent* d. 1 q. 1 a. 1 q. 2 ad 3, Aquinas state that the intelligible angelic signs are not properly, but “as it were metaphorically” (*quasi transumptive*) called ‘signs.’ The reason for this is, I think, the idea that sensible and intelligible things cannot univocally belong to the same species.

46. See *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4. As soon as one angel directs his concept to another, the latter perceives it: “. . . et secundum hoc dicitur alteri angelo loqui. Et similiter esset apud nos si intellectus noster posset ferri in intelligibilia immediate; sed quia intellectus noster a sensibilibus naturaliter accipit, oportet quod ad interiores conceptus exprimentos quaedam sensibilia signa aptentur quibus cognitiones cordium nobis manifestentur.”

47. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 6: “. . . locutio sit operatio intellectus ipsius.” See also *ST* I, q. 107 a. 4: “. . . locutio angeli in intellectuali operatione consistit.”

of discursivity, that is, by going from what is known to what is unknown. As angels know non-discursively, they have no signs. Human knowledge is discursive, which is why we need (sensible) signs.<sup>48</sup> Aquinas connects the sign (“that from which we go to knowledge of something else”) with discursivity (“to go from one thing to knowledge of something else”).<sup>49</sup> From this, he concludes that if there is no discursivity, there is no sign either. No mention is made anymore of the intelligible signs, which Aquinas considered to be constitutive of angelic speech in the commentaries on the *Sentences* and on 1 Cor. 13:1. A sign, in the proper sense, is sensible. In this way, Aquinas becomes more faithful to the traditional, Augustinian definition of the sign. But in an unexpected turn, Aquinas leaves open the possibility to consider the concept itself as a sign, albeit not in the proper sense of the word:

When taken in a common sense (*communiter*), we can call a sign anything known in which something is known. And in this way the intelligible form can be called a sign of the thing that is known through it. And accordingly, angels know things through signs, and one angel speaks with another through a sign, that is, through the species, by the act of which his intellect is directed to another.<sup>50</sup>

By so stretching the meaning of ‘sign’ as to include the intelligible form itself, Aquinas tries, in a roundabout way, to restore the parallelism between human and angelic speech, which had been disrupted by the introduction of the Aristotelian tripartition. In the same way, he reinterprets (and saves) the traditional formula that angels speak to one another by ‘signs and nods’ (*signa et nutus*).<sup>51</sup> A striking parallel is found in Albert the Great, who states

48. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4 ad 4: “... signum proprie loquendo non potest dici nisi aliquid ex quo deveniatur in cognitionem alterius quasi discurrendo, et secundum hoc signum in angelis non est cum eorum scientia non sit discursiva, ut in praecedenti quaestione est habitum [the reference is to *De Ver* q. 8 a. 15]; et propter hoc etiam in nobis signa sunt sensibilia quia nostra cognitio, quae discursiva est, a sensibilibus oritur.”

49. *De Ver* q. 8 a. 15: “... discurrere, proprie est ex uno in cognitionem alterius devenire.”

50. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4 ad 4: “Sed communiter possumus signum dicere quodcumque notum in quo aliquid cognoscatur; et secundum hoc forma intelligibilis potest dici signum rei quae per ipsam cognoscitur, et sic angeli cognoscunt res per signa, et sic unus angelus per signum alii loquitur; scilicet per speciem in cuius actu intellectus eius perfecte fit in ordine ad alium.”

51. Cf. *De Ver* q. 9 a. 4 ad 12: “... tamen dicitur in angelis locutio ad similitudinem eius quae in nobis fit... Nutus autem et signa hoc modo possunt in angelis distingui, ut signum dicatur ipsa species, nutus autem ordinatio ad alium.” The same interpretation of ‘signs and nods’ is given by Albert the Great; although, he holds on to a distinct act of signifying: *In I Sent* d. 9 a. 13 (Borgnet ed., 25:294). The division into signs and nods is derived from the *Glossa*: cf. Peter Lombard, *Collectanea in Epistolas Pauli, Ad I Cor* (PL 191, 1658C), where it is said that angels speak to each other by ‘signs and nods.’



explicitly that the conceived, innate species of the angel, insofar as it is directed to another angel, is a sign.<sup>52</sup>

However, this strategy to preserve the semiotic character of angelic speech seems to be rather forced and unconvincing. First of all, this is one of the very few texts in which Aquinas describes the concept as a sign. As a rule, he will use the traditional Aristotelian term ‘similitudo’ to designate the relation between the concept and the extramental object, while using the term ‘sign’ exclusively for the relation between the (vocal) word and the concept.<sup>53</sup> Next, as I indicated earlier, thinking of the concept as a sign does not fit very well into Aquinas’s mature view on the concept as ‘that which is understood about the extramental object.’ But however we are to interpret this passage in the *De Veritate*, it remains that a separate act of signifying the concept (that is, an act apart from the act of the will to communicate to someone else) is no longer required for angelic communication.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, (I, q. 107), signs have completely disappeared from the discussion of angelic speech. The only reason Aquinas gives why humans need (sensible) signs, is their corporality. An angel only needs to will to communicate his concept, the inner word, to another angel, and immediately his conversation partner knows the content of the concept.<sup>54</sup>

52. Albert the Great, *Summa Theologiae* II, q. 35 m. 2 (Borgnet ed., 32:381): “signum est ... species concepta sub voluntate manifestandi et inuentione luminis intelligentiae ad res cuius est species.”; *Summa de Creaturis* I, tr. IV q. 60 a. 2 ad 5 (Borgnet ed., 34:637): “Signum enim non addit supra formam sive speciem sub qua intelligit angelus, nisi rationem prolationis ad alterum.” Tacitly, Albert adds the words ‘*vel cogitationi*’ to Augustine’s definition of a sign in order to include intelligible signs: cf. *Summa Theologiae* II, q. 35 m. 2 ob 5 (Borgnet ed., 32:380): “Adhuc, Augustinus dicit, quod signum est, quod praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus vel cogitationi, aliud facit in notitiam venire.” Albert also notes that ‘sign’ is said equivocally: “Signum enim praedicatur aequivoce de signo ad placitum, et naturali, et verbo quod est intellectus rei” (*Summa Theologiae* II, q. 35 m. 2: Borgnet ed., 32:381). The relevance of this equivocality lies in the questions whether angelic signs are general and whether they are idiomatic (cf. *Summa de Creaturis* I, tr. IV q. 60 a. 2 ad 9 and *ad quaest.*: Borgnet ed., 34:637–38).

53. See, for example, *ST* I, q. 13 a. 1 : “... voces sunt signa intellectuum, et intellectus sunt rerum similitudines.” The only other text I know of in which Aquinas suggests that the concept is a sign, is *In I Sent* d. 2 q. 1 a. 3: “... in re extra animam est aliquid quod respondet conceptioni animae, sicut significatum signo.” As of around 1250, some scholastics began to replace ‘similitudo’ by ‘sign’ in the definition of the concept: see Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens. Das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1997), 77–86. This tendency continued in the fourteenth century, especially in the works of William Ockham.

54. I, q. 107 a. 1 ad 1: “... clauditur mens hominis ab alio homine per grossitiam corporis. Unde cum etiam voluntas ordinat conceptum mentis ad manifestandum alteri, non statim cognoscitur ab alio, sed oportet aliquid signum sensibile adhibere ... Hoc autem obstaculum non habet angelus. Et ideo quam cito vult manifestare suum conceptum, statim alius cognoscit.” I disagree with what Claude Panaccio calls the “duality thesis about language and thought.” He states that Aquinas

My argument that, in the view on angelic speech as presented in the *Summa Theologiae*, signs are uncalled-for, is not merely *ex silentio*. In Aquinas's mature view on thinking as 'speaking to oneself' and on the inner word as 'that which is understood as such,' there is no more place for signs. A sign is what, when it is known, leads to the understanding of something else. Yet the inner word is exactly what is understood (*quod primo et per se intelligitur*), and, hence, cannot itself be a sign. The concept does not lead to knowledge of the extramental thing, it is the knowledge of the extramental thing. Only the human intellect, because of its connection to the body, cannot reach immediately the intelligible and needs the mediation of sensible signs.

I must admit that, on one point, the generally accepted chronology of Aquinas's works poses a problem for my interpretation of the changing role of signs in Aquinas's view on angelic speech. Although the dating of the Pauline commentaries has been a much debated topic, all scholars agree that they were written in Italy after 1259.<sup>55</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell concludes that the *reportatio* from 1 Cor. 11 to the Epistle to the Hebrews "could be the fruit of Thomas's teaching from the years 1265 to 1268 in Rome."<sup>56</sup> While Gilles de Grandpré does not exclude this, he believes it was written before the *Summa Theologiae*. He suggests that it might have been composed in Naples between 1259 and 1261.<sup>57</sup>

I have argued that Aquinas's theory on signs in angelic communication as it is found in the commentary on the *Sentences* corresponds to the one in the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:1, while there is a significant change in the *De Veritate*, and again in the *Summa Theologiae*. However, it seems unlikely that Aquinas would first alter his view in the *De Veritate*, and then, in the *reportatio* on 1 Cor. 13:1, revert to the old theory of the commentary on the *Sentences*. Awaiting the final findings of the Leonine commission, one tentative explanation for this might be that, in commenting on the Pauline text, Aquinas wants to stay close to Peter Lombard's gloss, which states that angels talk "by signs and nods."<sup>58</sup>

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keeps language (words as signs) and thought separate, even in angels, and that "communication for him [i.e., Aquinas], even between angels, always requires at some point a deliberate putting of thought into some sort of language" (Panaccio, "Angel's talk," 326). Panaccio is right as far as Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences* is concerned; however, his thesis will not hold for Aquinas's mature works where the notion of 'sign' no longer plays a role.

55. For a survey on the debate, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 1: *The Person and His Work*, trans. R. Royal (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 250–57.

56. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, I:255, emphasis in original.

57. Private e-mail message, June 2, 2001.

58. This explanation was suggested to me by Fr. de Grandpré. He also mentioned the fact that Aquinas probably composed the *lectura* on the Letters to the Corinthians concurrently with his revision of the commentary on the *Sentences*, as a possible explanation.

## VII. SUMMARY

There is a gradual development in Aquinas's view on the nature of angelic speech. In the commentary on the *Sentences*, he uses an Augustinian model for human thought and communication to explain angelic speech, but reinterprets this model in an Aristotelian fashion. Consequently, he cannot understand 'inner word' save in the sense of external communication with someone else, and he has to introduce the category of intelligible signs. In the *De Veritate*, the Augustinian scheme is replaced by an Aristotelian one, and the role of the will is emphasized. However, Aquinas is reluctant to use the notions of 'inner word' and 'inner speech.' Neither of them plays a significant role. Separate intelligible signs, that signify the concept, have disappeared, but Aquinas now characterizes the concept itself as a sign. Finally, in the *Summa Theologiae*, both the Augustinian and the Aristotelian approaches are integrated: to understand is to speak internally to oneself by conceiving an inner word. The inner word is 'that which is understood' as such. For an angel, to speak to another angel, is to speak internally (to think) and to direct his inner word (the concept) to the other one. There is no need for signs and angelic speech does not have a semiotic structure. Signification is merely accidental to the intellectual operations of speech and communication: it belongs only to human beings because of their corporality.