



Pleading *Nolo Contendere*? Aquinas vs. Bonaventure on Poetry¹

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Abstract

While the story of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio engaging in a friendly contest, at the behest of Pope Urban IV, to compose the Mass and Office of Corpus Christi is likely a pious fiction, one can still ponder the fascinating hypothetical scenario: had such a contest taken place, who might have won? To consider that question, this paper embarks on a close reading of Bonaventure's hymns in his Office of the Passion, comparing his poetic approaches to those of Aquinas in the hymns for Corpus Christi. After an introductory historical examination into the supposed involvement of both friars in the composition of the Corpus Christi liturgy, this article proceeds in three sections. First, a look into select excerpts from Bonaventure's Office of the Passion will establish his general poetic technique. In the transitional second section, a direct comparison between Bonaventure and Aquinas on the composition of the final doxological verses of their respective hymns will place their different poetic styles into greater relief. Third, a broader reading of Aquinas's Eucharistic hymns will highlight the unique qualities of his versified praises. Finally, in light of the foregoing analyses, a prospective winner of the hypothetical contest will be suggested.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Poetry, Corpus Christi, Office of the Passion, Contest, Hymns

Introduction

The story is well-known and diffused to this day in many popular books, websites, and personal blogs: Pope Urban IV, having decided to establish a universal feast in honor of the Eucharistic Christ, commissioned the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, Lector of the Sacred Palace, and the Franciscan Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Minister General, each to compose an Office and Mass for the new solemnity, reserving to his pontifical judgment the right of selecting the new liturgical texts. The two mendicants, bound by filial piety, obliged the pontiff's wish. On the day appointed for examination—with Thomas presenting first—the now-beloved hymns in praise of the Blessed Sacrament were heard for the first time by Urban, the curial cardinals, and the Seraphic Doctor, all of whom were visibly moved by the stunning poetic achievement placed before them. Bonaventure, compelled by humility, silently tore the manuscript still hidden beneath his habit. Upon finishing his exposition, Thomas yielded the floor to Bonaventure; Bonaventure, in turn, ceded the contest to Thomas. The chief of the Friars Minor fell at the pope's feet and, revealing the shredded papers, confessed the secret deed carried out while the Angelic Doctor held the attention of all:

Holy Father, while listening to Brother Thomas, I felt as if I heard the Holy Ghost speak, for only He could inspire such sublime thoughts; I am sure that those words came from the Most High, revealed by a special grace to my Brother Thomas. Dare I confess this, O Holy Father? I would have considered it sacrilege if I were to have allowed my poor work to stand beside such marvelous beauty (*Avrei creduto di commettere un sacrilegio se avessi lasciato esistere la mia debole opera vicino a quelle meravigliose bellezze*). See, Holy Father, what remains of my work.²

Unfortunately, this lovely account—which reads more like a medieval *exemplum* than an historical chronicle—is probably legendary. We cannot, however, dismiss it as easily as did one recent liturgical commentator, who suggested the story's impossibility since, at the time of Corpus Christi's composition, Bonaventure would have been in Paris

¹ Special thanks are due to Mr. Fletcher Erskine (University of Cambridge) and Mr. Urban Hannon (Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas) for their invaluable comments on previous drafts of this paper.

² Taken from Giovanni Codemo, ed., *L'Istituto. Giornale pedagogico per le scuole infantili, elementari e tecniche e per le famiglie* (Venice: Antonelli, 1855), pp. 157-8 (translated by me from Italian). Codemo's retelling is by no means a particularly important vector for the diffusion of the story, but rather represents one of many popular or non-academic works—too numerous to cite here—which have repeated the pious legend through the centuries. For an important seventeenth century Franciscan reproduction of the legend in this form, see Bonaventura Theuli, *Apparitato Minoritico della Provincia di Roma*, Book 3 (Velletri: Carlo Bilancioni, 1648), p. 87 and following. This and all subsequent English translations are mine.

while Thomas resided in Orvieto near the Roman Curia.³ *Sed contra*: Bonaventure was in fact in Italy for most of 1264, even writing his Eucharistic sermon *De corpore Christi*⁴ in Italy during the spring of that year—the very period in which Thomas would have been working on the Mass and Office.⁵ Bonaventure is furthermore known to be at Orvieto by 31 August⁶—less than three weeks after Urban IV promulgated the new feast from that same city through the bull *Transiturus*.⁷ In sum, the possibility of direct contact between the two mendicants in the presence of the curia in the spring and summer of 1264 cannot be rejected as out of hand, and indeed it seems more probable, as Minister General of an Order under the protection of the Apostolic See, that Bonaventure had ample reason to visit Orvieto often during his travels through Italy in that year. Disproving the legend thus requires historical evidence beyond the presumption of a static Parisian residency on Bonaventure's part. To that end, Francesco Petrangeli Papini's small article 'San Tommaso, San Bonaventura, e l'Ufficio del SS. Sacramento'⁸ is of invaluable assistance.

Although Papini focuses on the emergence of artworks depicting or referencing the presumed contest (or, in some cases, the collaboration) between Aquinas and Bonaventure on the Corpus Christi liturgy, his rather simple yet lucid historical presentation points to the improbability of the legendary accounts which link both Doctors to the composition of the Mass and Office. Papini notes that many important works connecting both Thomas and Bonaventure with Urban IV and the Feast, specifically in those places associated with the three figures (especially Lyon, Orvieto, and Bagnoregio), date only from the seventeenth century onward. Meanwhile, in Orvieto itself—and as emphasized by Papini himself in a more expansive monograph⁹—the earliest depictions of the Feast of Corpus Christi, as well as the earliest historical narratives of the Feast's origins, show Urban IV and Thomas only; presentations of Bonaventure are conspicuously absent in paintings in

³ Gregory DiPippo, 'St Thomas Aquinas and the Feast of Corpus Christi', *Veterum Sapientia Institute*, 17 June 2022, <https://veterumsapientia.org/st-thomas-aquinas-and-the-feast-of-corpus-christi>.

⁴ *Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1887), pp. 554-66.

⁵ J.G. Bougerol, *Introduction a l'étude de Saint Bonaventure* (Tournai: Desclée, 1961), pp. 242-3.

⁶ *Ibid.* Bonaventure's arrival in Orvieto no later than 31 August 1264, the 12th Sunday after Pentecost, is certain because he preached the sermon to the general consistory held in the papal palace on that date; see Palémon Glorieux, 'Essai sur la chronologie de Saint Bonaventure', *Archivium Franciscanum Historicum* 19 (1926), pp. 145-68.

⁷ See text in Denzinger 846.

⁸ Francesco Petrangeli Papini, 'San Tommaso, San Bonaventura, e l'Ufficio del SS. Sacramento', *Doctor Seraphicus* 11 (1964), pp. 79-84.

⁹ *Idem*, *San Bonaventura Da Bagnoregio. Vita, glorificazione, e culto* (Viterbo: Agnesotti, 1962), pp. 115-6.

the Cathedral of Orvieto (executed between 1338 and 1357) and in two early chronicles, *Sacra rappresentazione* and *Historia Bolsenese* (1325–1330 and 1323–1344, respectively).¹⁰ That the city of Orvieto, jealously proud of its historical connection to the solemnity since its inception, should adorn its first depictions of the Feast with images of Urban and Thomas—without Bonaventure—strongly indicates the later origin of the ‘contest’ story.

Without presenting a clear smoking gun, however, Papini lends further credible weight to the lateness of stories linking Bonaventure to Corpus Christi by producing two extracts from the canonization process of Bonaventure, which concluded only in 1482. These records antedate the artworks depicting both Thomas and Bonaventure but postdate the aforementioned Orvieto paintings. In one deposition from 1480, a lawyer named Antonio Pisi

testified that he was once present in Paris during a sermon on Saint Thomas Aquinas given by some public preacher, and he heard that while Saint Thomas was in his study, dictating the Office of Corpus Christi, the lord Bonaventure arrived with other scholars to pose some questions to Saint Thomas. And ascending alone to the door of the study, [Bonaventure] saw the aforementioned Saint Thomas writing, and the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove holding a scroll in its mouth, as if suggesting to Saint Thomas what to write. And turning to the others, Bonaventure said, ‘Let us depart from here, for where the Holy Ghost labors, there do we work in vain’, revealing to his companions what he saw. And holding in his hands a certain folio on which [Bonaventure] had written some of the aforementioned things, he tore it in the presence of his companions (*tenens in manibus certam papirum in qua scripserat aliquid de materia predicta incontinenti presentibus sociis illam fregit*), saying that what he had written should never be seen, for the Holy Ghost had placed its hands on the dictation of Saint Thomas.¹¹

While this version varies from the ‘contest’ narrative reported by Theuli, it contains the motif of Bonaventure destroying his works, commonly represented in the later seventeenth century artworks mentioned by Papini. A reference to a more collaborative account is given by a Dominican friar in the same canonization proceedings.

William Turini, doctor of sacred theology, of the Order of Friars Preachers in the convent of Lyon... attested that... when he was in Paris, he heard it commonly said that the aforementioned lord Bonaventure was a contemporary of Saint Thomas Aquinas; and when the pope charged the same Saint Thomas to write the Office of Corpus Christi as well as answers to certain questions on the Body of Christ, the lord Bonaventure

¹⁰ Papini, ‘San Tommaso, San Bonaventura, e l’Ufficio’, p. 84.

¹¹ Cited by Papini in ‘San Tommaso, San Bonaventura, e l’Ufficio’, p. 80, taken from Bonaventura Marinangeli, ‘La canonizzazione di S. Bonaventura e il processo di Lione’, *Miscellanea Francescana* 17 (1916), p. 130 (translated by me from the Latin).

was asked by not a few great doctors of Paris to do the same, that is, to compose an office of Corpus Christi and answers to the same questions (*idem facere scilicet officium de corpore christi et conclusionem earundem questionum facere*); which [Bonaventure] did and communicated these things to Saint Thomas afterward.¹²

This might be the earliest known written source for a collaboration between the Saints, which is depicted or referenced in several later artistic pieces, such as a 1622 cover image for an edition of Bonaventure's *Opera Omnia*,¹³ and in a notable seventeenth century oil painting of Thomas and Bonaventure before the Sacrament, found in the old Franciscan convent of Spirito Santo in Ferrara.¹⁴ In any case Turini's testimony still postdates the works in Orvieto Cathedral which seem to definitively exclude Bonaventure from the Corpus Christi origin story. In light of both these citations from the Bonaventurian *processus*, both of which involve persons hearing these stories *said* in the open, perhaps the passing suggestion offered at the beginning of this paper—that the stories involving both friars in the redaction of the Corpus Christi liturgy might be medieval *exempla* used for popular preaching—could have some truth behind it.

Since Papini, to my knowledge no other early texts attesting to Bonaventure's participation in the composition of Corpus Christi—whether as Thomas's competitor or collaborator—have been found. Meanwhile, the twentieth century labors of many prominent Thomistic scholars, especially Jean-Pierre Torrell and Pierre-Marie Gy, have affirmed the sole authorship of Thomas.¹⁵ We need not wonder, therefore, whether Bonaventure even had an opportunity to plead 'no contest' in favor of the Thomistic Mass and Office, since the story, too late in provenance, is not referenced in the earlier accounts. However, perhaps we can imagine what such a contest would have really been like: not a sweet, simple, and easily resolved confrontation like those found

¹² Cited by Papini in 'San Tommaso, San Bonaventura, e l'Ufficio', p. 82, taken from Marinangeli, 'La canonizzazione', p. 131 (translated by me from the Latin). This friar is also listed in the *Registrum Facultatis Theologiae. Ordo licentiarum 1373-1694* (BNF MS Lat. 5657A) as earning the licentiate (January 1478) and doctorate (June 1478) at Paris; cited in Thomas Sullivan, *Parisian Licentiatees in Theology, AD 1373-1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 352.

¹³ See the image in Jeanne Picault, 'Iconographie de Saint Bonaventure', in *Cahier des Cordeliers n. 1: Saint Bonaventure, 1243-1943* (Paris: Editions Franciscaines, 1943), p. 78.

¹⁴ Papini, 'San Tommaso, San Bonaventura, e l'Ufficio', p. 82.

¹⁵ Pierre-Marie Gy, 'Office du Corpus Christi et s. Thomas d'Aquin: etat d'une recherche', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques* 64 (1980), pp. 491-507; idem, 'L'Office du Corpus Christi et la theologie des accidents eucharistique', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques* 66 (1982), p. 81-6; idem, 'Office liegeois et office romain de la Fête-Dieu', in *Actes du Colloque de Liège: Fête-Dieu, vol. 1 (1246-1996)*, ed. Andrew Haquin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institute d'Etudes Medievales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1999), 117-26; Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 1: The Person and his Work* (Washington: CUA Press, 1996), pp. 131-2.

in so many *exempla*, but one which takes into consideration the real differences between the philosophical, theological, and poetic approaches of the two Doctors. In doing so, we might better intuit whether—had a *contentio carminum* truly taken place—one friar might have really conceded victory to the other.

This paper proposes a small contribution to comparative studies on Aquinas and Bonaventure through an examination of their *poetics*, with a view to suggesting a possible ‘victor’ of a hypothetical challenge. While the literature investigating their respective philosophical and theological doctrines has expanded greatly over the last century, the literature on their poetics pales in comparison. And while important work on the Corpus Christi liturgy has been produced by Thomistic scholars in recent decades,¹⁶ this increased interest in Aquinas’s poetry has not been matched by a corresponding scholarly curiosity about the Seraphic Doctor’s poetry; in fact, Bonaventure’s poetic output remains largely obscured by his better-known academic and mystical treatises. One of the secondary aims of this paper, therefore, is to (re-)introduce Bonaventure the Poet to a larger audience, that this neglected area of Bonaventurian studies might be considered by scholars in light of his wider *opera*.

Following this historical introduction, the essay will proceed in three main sections followed by a synthetic conclusion. First, I will consider Bonaventure’s hymns from his *Officium de Passione Domini*, now generally counted among his authentic works.¹⁷ This text, on account of its *liturgical nature* (unlike Bonaventure’s devotional poetry like the one in the programmatic prologue of *Lignum Vitae*¹⁸ or the longer poem *Laudismus de Sancta Cruce*¹⁹) will allow for a closer comparison with Aquinas’s hymns for the Office of Corpus Christi, which will be examined in the third section. The second section, linking the two, will consider a direct contrast between Aquinas and Bonaventure on their mode of composing the final doxological verses of their respective hymns. This work will accordingly involve close textual criticism of the poems, with special attention to the compositional technique of each

¹⁶ Jan-Heiner Tück, *A Gift of Presence: Theology and Poetry of the Eucharist in Thomas Aquinas*, tr. Scott Hefelfinger (Washington: CUA Press, 2018); Paul Murray, *Aquinas at Prayer: The Bible, Mysticism, and Poetry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

¹⁷ Balduinus Distelbrink, *Bonaventurae Scripta: authentica dubia vel spuria critica recensita* (Rome: Istituto Storico Cappuccini, 1975), pp. 27–8; Aleksander Horowski, ‘Opere autentiche e spurie, edite, inedite e mal edite di San Bonaventura da Bagnoregio: bilancio e prospettive’, *Collectanea Franciscana* 86 (2016), pp. 461–544, at p. 480; Pietro Maranesi, ‘The *Opera Omnia* of Saint Bonaventure: History and Present Situation’, in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, ed. Jay Hammond, et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 61–80, at p. 78. See the text of the Office in *Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, vol. 8 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1898), pp. 152–8.

¹⁸ *Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, vol. 8, pp. 68–87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 667–9.

Doctor and their respective uses of prosodic devices such as rhyme, meter, assonance, and the like. For the sake of space, only excerpts of the poems can be considered here, but the selected extracts will be sufficient to sketch the distinctive nature of each author's poetic works. After this summary examination of both poet-theologians, I will conclude by suggesting an answer to the question: *had there been a poetic contest between the two, who might have won?*

Bonaventure: *Officium de Passione Domini*

The *Officium de Passione*, found in Volume 8 of the Quaracchi edition of Bonaventure's *Opera Omnia*, includes antiphons, readings, and orations for the various hours, in addition to hymns for each hour. Thus, as compared to the Office of Corpus Christi (which only features hymns for Matins, Lauds, and Vespers), Bonaventure's poetic production is significantly longer than that of Thomas. King Louis IX of France personally requested Bonaventure to compose this Office of the Lord's Passion, a task which the Seraphic Doctor completed in March 1263.²⁰ It is thus separated only by about a year from the composition of Thomas's Office, and this near-contemporaneity further disposes both Offices to a direct comparative analysis.

This Office proceeds on the basis of eight-syllable lines grouped into stanzas of four lines. For Matins and the minor hours, the rhyme scheme moves in couplets (AABB, etc.), while for Lauds and Vespers, a more complex scheme involving rhymes alternating by line (ABAB, etc.) with the addition of internal rhymes in the first and third lines of each stanza. Lauds and Vespers also feature a device common in high medieval Latin hymns: the final line of each stanza is a taken from the incipit of an older Latin hymn.²¹

We begin with a verse from None whose simplicity shines through the use of rhyme and meter.

Beata Christi passio	May Christ's blessed Passion
Sit nostra liberatio	be our liberation,
Ut per hanc nobis gaudia	that through this joy
Parata sint coelestia.	heavenly things might be prepared for us.

²⁰ Bougerol, *Introduction*, pp. 242-3.

²¹ For another example of this device, see the hymn *Decus morum, dux Minorum* attributed to Cardinal Thomas of Capua (died 1239) for Second Vespers from Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, in *Analecta Franciscana* vol. 10, p. 386; English translation in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, eds. Regis Armstrong, et al., (New York: New City Press, 1999), pp. 342-3.

Here we find the straightforward, hortatory tone which often marks Bonaventure's poetry. This particular stanza is notable for its succinct completeness, expressing in versified form the features of petitionary prayer, such as the use of the subjunctive to indicate a desired future result. The use of iambic dimeter is stable, producing a memorable and pleasantly rhythmic flow (although 'Ut hanc per nobis gaudia' would sound smoother). However, this metrical regularity is not consistently present across the Office. At Vespers, we find the following.

Qui pressura mortis dura Solvisti nexus criminum, Nos ad pacem duc veracem Iesu, corona virginum.	You who, hard-pressed by death untied the knot of sin, lead us to true peace, Jesus, crown of virgins.
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Beginning with an accented syllable, the first line accordingly ends with an unaccented syllable; however, this produces an awkward rhythmic transition to the second line, which itself begins with an unaccented syllable, in turn creating a kind of interruption in its enunciation. Meanwhile, because Bonaventure holds himself to citing the titles of older hymns in the final lines of each stanza (choosing 'Iesu, corona virginum' in this instance), its particular deployment here seems rather out of place, since the line's original liturgical context (Vespers for the Common of Virgins, that is, a liturgy with a more festal character), has little direct connection with the themes of suffering of death. Later in the same vespertine hymn, the stanza cited below also breaks the iambic dimeter by presenting two unaccented syllables between the first and second lines; this then leads to the second line ending without accent. In turn this moves more comfortably into the accented 'Fac' of the third line, which however leads to a repetition of the same double unaccented transition between lines three and four.

Sanguis Christi, qui fuisti Peremptor hostis invidi, Fac secure nos venire Ad coenam Agni providi.	Blood of Christ, you who were the destroyer of the jealous foe, let us arrive safely to the supper of the provident Lamb.
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As noted before, Bonaventure in this poem strictly follows a quatrain format marked by eight-syllable lines with a complex rhyme scheme; however, his inconsistent attention to (or disregard for) metrical *feet* produce unpredictable rhythmic disturbances in the poem's enunciation. It is possible, however, to suggest a charitable interpretation of

these metrical irregularities by reading these sudden shifts in tempo as mirroring the chaotic, stuttering, and tedious procession to Calvary undertaken by Christ; nevertheless, definitively proving this authorial intent is simply impossible. Bonaventure here in any case demonstrates the grave risk undertaken by poets who from the outset insist on rigid adherence to a specific prosodic format (i.e., rhymed quatrains of eight-syllable lines), for when the author arrives at a compositional difficulty and simply cannot find the *mot juste*, a break from the format becomes all the more evident, appearing less as a deliberate choice for the sake of a certain rhetorical-poetic effect, and more as a poetic *failure*. We glimpse this same sense of failure when, in the third line, an internal rhyme to parallel the first line's *Christi-fuisti* is conspicuously absent.

Moving to Lauds, we find the following verse:

Poena fortis tuae mortis	May the harsh punishment of death
Et sanguinis effusio	and your shedding of blood
Corda terant, ut te quaerant,	purge hearts, that they might seek you,
Iesu, nostra redemptio.	Jesus, our redemption.

Without repeating the same issues regarding meter and feet, the lexical selection shown above leaves much to be desired. The formulation 'Poena fortis tuae mortis' resounds awkwardly, for 'fortis'—a generally positive adjective in Latin—is used here to modify 'poena'. Constrained to find a rhyme for 'mortis', the author clumsily settles for an unfitting modifier, and the poetic expression suffers for the sake of extrinsic structure. At Terce, the issue of strange yet unimaginative diction also arises:

Hora qui ductus tertia	You who in the third hour were led
Fuisti ad supplicia,	to stand for punishment,

where use of 'fuisti' once again appears as an ungrammatical poetic choice bound strictly to the predetermined syllabic scheme. The correct Latin usage of the present or imperfect forms of the verb *sum-esse* ('es' or 'eras', respectively) as auxiliary to the participle 'ductus' would clearly not suffice for Bonaventure's format. To resolve this challenge, here he utilizes what is obviously a retrojection of a Romance construction (i.e., the perfect of 'to be' as auxiliary to the fourth principal part) into Latin, with less than satisfactory results.

Crucem pro nobis subiit
 Et stans in illa sitiit
 Iesus, sacratis manibus
 Clavis fossus et pedibus.

Jesus, enduring the cross for us
 and thirsting upon it,
 with his sacred hands and feet
 burrowed by nails.

By now, the metrical weaknesses of Bonaventure's Office are apparent, as seen again in this verse from Sext. At the words 'Crucem pro', the doubled unaccented syllables generate the same rhythmic problems as before, but which could have been easily avoided by rewording the line as 'Pro nobis crucem subiit'. The next phrase, 'Et stans in illa sitiit', is marked by a particular verbosity, almost devoid of poetic force, whose main purpose is simply to fill the requisite syllables. The thirst of Christ and anguish linked to it could have been illustrated with a host of other adjectives or adverbs; meanwhile, the choice of 'stans' to describe Christ's position on the cross feels far too weak, wholly inadequate to the monstrous terror of Calvary.

At Matins, the Office exhorts its participants to remember the details of the Passion:

Portemus in memoria
 Dolores et opprobria,
 Christi coronam spineam,
 Crucem, clavos et lanceam,
 Et plagas sacratissimas,

 Omni laude dignissimas,
 Acetum, fel, arundinem
 Et mortis amaritudinem.

Let us carry in memory
 the pain and the hatred,
 Christ's thorny crown,
 the cross, nails, and lance,
 and most sacred wounds

 most worthy of all praise,
 vinegar, wormwood, reed,
 and bitterness of death.

Likewise at Lauds, the individual sufferings endured by Christ are recalled:

Per felices cicatrices
 Sputa, flagella, verbera,
 Nobis grata sunt collata
 Aeterna Christi munera.

By the blessed bruises,
 spittle, whips, scourges,
 graciously conferred to us are
 the eternal gifts of Christ.

This manner of listing a set of objects in close succession without recourse to several modifiers brings to mind Catherine Pickstock's critique of modern language and syntax given in *After Writing*. The *list*, which she associates with an imperious Cartesian gaze upon a mass of *res extensae* immediately 'available' to the sovereign

thinking subject,²² is also linked to the near-exclusive use of asyndeton (the absence of coordinating conjunctions)²³ at the expense of more complex syntactical forms such as parataxis (the use of coordinating conjunctions to link clauses) and hypotaxis (employment of subordinate clauses).²⁴ Note the lists of objects to be memorialized without a coordinating ‘et’: ‘thorny crown, | cross, nails, lance’; ‘vinegar, wormwood, reed’; ‘bruises, | spittle, whips, scourges’. All these things are simply compiled together, without further explanation, in a facile asyntactic mode of composition. Even when the conjunction is present (‘Crucem, clavos, et lanceam’), its usage remains bound to the completion of the syllabic line, while in the following stanza, the line ‘Et mortis amaritudinem’ provides an extra syllable, breaking Bonaventure’s chosen format more egregiously. I need not launch the full weight of Pickstock’s position upon the Seraphic Doctor’s hymnody, but we might at least consider how the lack of hypotaxis and parataxis shown here, taken with the asyndetic and list-like presentation of objects, might suggest a rather superficial and immanent use of language which tends toward the purely indicative and fragmented vision more characteristic of secular modernity than the integrated doxological ethos represented by the language of the Roman Rite and (as we hope to show later) the poetics of Thomas Aquinas.

Transition: The Doxological Verses of Bonaventure and Aquinas

As a specific point of comparison with Aquinas’s Office worth anticipating here, whereas the Angelic Doctor’s hymns each end with a unique Trinitarian doxology, the hymns for each hour in Bonaventure’s *Officium* conclude with the same doxological quatrain focused on Christ alone.

Laus, honor Christo vendito
Et sine causa prodito,
Mortem passo pro populo
In aspero patibulo.

Praise and honor to Christ who was sold
and taken away without cause,
who suffered death for the people
upon the bitter scaffold.

We can set aside the accentual inconsistency once again evident in the transition from the second to third line, concerning ourselves instead with the recurrence of this verse through the Office. The notion of identically repeating the same ending at each hour—despite the fact

²² Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), pp. 97.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–100.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 205–8.

that, at Lauds and Vespers, this requires breaking the rhyme scheme—perhaps points to a degraded sense of creativity in Bonaventure’s poetics, a judgment made clearer in light of the closing doxological stanzas composed by Thomas. Before proceeding, it is helpful to recall that Aquinas’s hymns for Corpus Christi are contrafactions of older hymns, which is to say, he takes the structure and melody of hymns from the venerable repertoire of the Roman Rite and models his own Eucharistic hymns upon them. *Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium* for Vespers is a contrafaction of Venantius Fortunatus’s *Pange lingua gloriosi proelium certaminis* for the Feast of the Holy Cross; *Sacris solemniiis* for Matins is a contrafaction of *Sanctorum meritis* for the Feast of the Ascension; and *Verbum supernum prodiens* for Lauds is a contrafaction of *Aeterne rex altissime*.²⁵ Examining the Thomistic doxologies in light of their more ancient precedents will further place into relief the relative quality of Bonaventure’s poetry as expressed in his use of a repeated closing stanza.

*Pange Lingua (Fortunatus)*²⁶

Sola digna tu fuisti ferre pretium saeculi
atque portum praeparare nauta mundo
naufrago,
quem sacer cruor perunxit fusus agni
corpore.

Only you were worthy to bear the price of the ages
and to prepare a harbor for a shipwrecked world,
whom sacred blood from the Lamb’s body anointed.
To the begotten and begotten be praise and rejoicing,

Pange lingua (Aquinas)

Genitori genitoque laus et iubilatio,
salus, honor, virtus quoque sit et
benedictio,
procedenti ab utroque compar sit laudatio.

strength, honor, power, and blessing,
and to the one proceeding from both be equal
praising.

Fortunatus’s hymn is notable in that it originally has no concluding doxology, so the final verse is reproduced above simply to give the reader a sense of its style. Thomas, resolving to end all his hymns with an explicit cry to the Triune God, must therefore compose a doxology which holds to Fortunatus’s format and to the general characteristics of Trinitarian praise while employing his own lexical ingenuity. It seems that he indeed found success in that enterprise. ‘Genitori genitoque’ rings as a clever alliterative phrase expressing both the close similarity and distinct difference between Father and Son, while

²⁵ The manuscript sources for the Corpus Christi liturgy are Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF) Latin MSS 1143 and 755 and are the base texts for modern critical editions of Corpus Christi. The contrafacted hymns are listed in the rubrics.

²⁶ *Graduale Sacrosanctae Romanae Ecclesiae de tempore et de sanctis* (Rome: Typis Vaticanis, 1908), p. 187-91.

nomination of the Spirit as *procedens* hearkens back to the language of the Creed.²⁷

***Sanctorum meritis* (anon.)²⁸**

Te summa Deitas unaque poscimus
ut culpas abluas, noxia subtrahas
des pacem famulis, nos quoque
gloriam
per cuncta tibi saecula.

We ask you, supreme single Godhead,
to wash away our faults, to remove our guilt,
to give peace to your household and glory to us too
through all the ages.

***Sacris solemniiis* (Aquinas)**

Te, trina Deitas unaque, poscimus,
sicut nos visitas, sicut te colimus,
per tuas semitas duc nos, quo
tendimus,
ad lucem quam inhabitas.

To you, Godhead three and one, we ask
that as you visit us and as we worship you,
lead us on your path, by which we tend
toward that light which you inhabit.

Aquinas's Trinitarian shift is obvious as he changes 'summa' to 'trina'. The parallelism in *Sanctorum meritis* at 'culpas abluas, noxia subtrahas' is matched by Aquinas's 'sicut nos visitas, sicut te colimus'. However, the relatively vague reference to a desire for peace and glory in the older hymn finds a clearer sacramental and soteriological counterpart in *Sacris solemniiis*, where the 'path' leading to the eschatological light where God dwells references the Eucharist.

***Aeterne rex altissime* (anon.)²⁹**

Gloria tibi, Domine
qui scandis super sidera
cum Patre et Sancto Spiritu
in sempiterna saecula.

Glory to you, O Lord
who rise above the stars
with the Father and Holy Ghost
forever and ever.

***Verbum supernum prodiens* (Aquinas)**

Uni trinoque Domino
sit sempiterna gloria
qui vitam sine termino
nobis donet in patria.

To the Lord Three-in-One
be eternal glory,
who shall grant us in our heavenly home
life without end.

While the formula 'cum Patre et Sancto Spiritu | in sempiterna saecula' is a stock phrase concluding many Latin Christian hymns,³⁰

²⁷ See Tück, *Gift of Presence*, 190-1.

²⁸ *Liber antiphonarius* (Paris: Societas S. Ioannis Evangelistae, 1949), pp. 36-8 (*Commune Sanctorum*).

²⁹ *Graduale 1908*, pp. 127-8 (*Ordinarium Missae*)

³⁰ *Memento salutis Auctor* and *A solis ortus cardine* are but a few notable examples.

Aquinas takes a different approach by invoking the Trinity first, and concluding once more with a specific reference to the eschatological *terminus* of participation in Christ's Body and Blood, which is everlasting life in heaven.

In these three hymnic conclusions from Thomas, and in light of the previous reflections on Bonaventure's Office, we can already sense the rather wide difference between the respective poetic capabilities of the Angelic and Seraphic Doctors. Aquinas, by binding himself to older hymns as his structural models, paradoxically appears to be at greater liberty in his compositional enterprise; even when he closely follows the lexical patterns of his precedents, such as in the conclusion to *Sacris solemnibus*, he nevertheless places his own characteristic stamp on the contrafaction. 'Sicut nos visitas, sicut te colimus', for example, is not only a parallelism which structurally mirrors the corresponding line in *Sanctorum meritis*, as noted before; here, Aquinas deftly describes the upward motion of doxology and the downward motion of divine emanation in a single breath. The Neoplatonic notion of *exitus-reditus*—itself a sign of the high medieval Dionysian reception which Thomas helped to advance³¹—is brought to bear succinctly and elegantly in this Trinitarian doxology. Non-identically repeating himself, Thomas carries the trace of the older hymns while supplementing them with his own doctrinal-poetic insights, thereby producing true *cantica nova* which nevertheless resound with the timeless echo of their Christ-rooted origin. The use of rhyme in Aquinas, moreover, does not seem to burden the poetry, and avoids the tedium or strain evident in Bonaventure.

The *Seraphicus*, on the other hand, opts for an identical repetition of his doxological verse. This is a curious choice, since the very structure of the Hours, each one associated with a specific stage of the Passion (i.e., Christ prayed in Gethsemane at Compline, was condemned at Prime, scourged at Terce, crucified at Sext, died at None, and was taken down at Vespers),³² would allow him to extend the unique focus

³¹ Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: CUA Press, 2016).

³² This division of the Passion among the Hours listed in the early fifteenth century treatise *The Mirror of our Lady*, cited in *The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (London: Baronius Press, 2019), pp. 191-3; see another mnemonic device at p. 196, attributed to Durandus and translated by John Mason Neale:

'At Matins bound, at Prime reviled, condemned to death at Tierce,
Nailed to the Cross at Sext, at Nones his Blessed Side they pierce;
They take him down at Vesper-tide, in grave at Compline lay,
Who thenceforth bids his Church observe her sevenfold Hours alway'.

See also Pierre Batiffol, *History of the Roman Breviary*, tr. Atwell Baylay (London: Longwells Green, 1898), pp. 1-38 for a broad treatment (if somewhat dated in some particulars) of the genesis of the canonical hours and their association with stages of the Passion.

of that hour into the doxology. In the main stanzas of the hymns, he already clearly references this traditional mode of dividing the events of the Passion across the Hours, for example, in the already cited lines of Terce ('Hora qui ductus tertia | fuisti ad supplicia') and None ('Clamans emisit spiritum'). The selection of readings for each hour also would have also provided ample thematic and lexical content for Bonaventure to integrate into unique versified conclusions, but he seems not to have relished that particular challenge.

Thomas Aquinas: *Officium Corporis Christi*

Aquinas's creativity, by contrast, lies not in a simple ability to refashion venerable hymns in the manner of superficial parody; rather he adapts the received forms for the specifically new purpose of deepening his praise for Christ's Eucharistic presence. Since these hymns are far better known and have been the subject of much scholarly attention over the past several decades, I will only examine a narrower set of excerpts which nevertheless highlight Aquinas's poetic technique.

Verbum supernum prodiens
nec Patris linquens dexteram
ad opus suum exiens
venit ad vitae vesperam.

The Word descending from above
without leaving the Father's right hand
goes out to accomplish his task
arriving at life's twilight.

Because Aquinas is held to a narrower focus in his Office (i.e., the Last Supper and the Eucharist), as opposed to Bonaventure's wider concern for the whole Passion story, he need not draw the same kind of narrative progression traced by the *Officium de Passione*. Nevertheless, because the Feast thematically refers to both Maundy Thursday and the Church's continued celebration of the Eucharist, Aquinas can still recall the notion of the Last Supper as a *sacrificium vespertinum* as seen in the fourth line above, while also metaphorically linking the evening of Maundy Thursday to the twilight of Christ's earthly sojourn.

Sic sacrificium istud instituit,
cuius officium committi voluit
solis presbyteris, quibus sic congruit,
ut sumant et dent ceteris.

Thus he instituted this sacrifice,
whose task he wished to entrust
only to priests, to whom it pertains
to consume and to give to others.

Panis angelicus fit panis hominum,
dat panis caelicus figuris terminum;
O res mirabilis! Manducat Dominum
servus pauper et humilis.

Angelic bread is made bread for men,
heavenly bread gives an end to figures;
O what wondrous thing! The poor
and humble servant eats dines on the Lord.

On the level of prosody alone, we find an impressive structure. These two verses of *Sacris solemnibus* manifest the *zagialesca* format which became widely diffused in high medieval Latin poetry through the *opera* of Adam of Saint-Victor (and which also structures the sequence *Lauda Sion*).³³ Each verse in a pair is comprised of a series of consecutive rhyming lines ('institut', 'voluit', 'congruit'; 'hominum', 'terminum', 'Dominum') which is broken by a final line; however, the respective final lines in each pair rhyme with each other ('ceteris' and 'humilis'), such that the pair as a whole is encompassed by this sense of sonic completion. What is unique in Aquinas's execution here, however, is the complex interplay of internal rhymes. In the first two lines of each verse, 'sacrificium' and 'officium' rhyme, as do 'angelicus' and 'caelicus'. One might expect that third line of each verse would display a corresponding internal rhyme, but the pattern is seemingly broken. This rupture is only apparent, however, since 'presbyteris' in reality anticipates 'ceteris' in the fourth line, which thereby also matches with the corresponding 'mirabilis' and 'humilis' in the following stanza.

Despite adhering to this format, Thomas does not appear impeded in his expression, perhaps because of the dense theological and philosophical valence of his subject matter. Consider, for example, that the verse beginning 'Sic sacrificium' references what today forms part of standard Catholic doctrine on Holy Orders; that the priesthood of the New Covenant was established at the Last Supper is proposed in verse here by Thomas, a position which placed him at odds with some of his contemporaries, including Bonaventure.³⁴ In fact, the exact moment of the priesthood's institution remained an open question until the

³³ Aurelio Roncaglia, 'Sequenza adamiana e strofa zagialesca', *La Sequenza Medievale: Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Milano, 7-8 Aprile 1984*, ed. Agostino Ziino (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1992), pp. 141-54.

³⁴ Bonaventure never names a single moment at which the Apostles were made priests. J.A.W. Hellman, 'Bonaventure on Sacraments: Trinitarian Institution and Trinitarian Structure', in *Deus Summe Cognoscibilis: The current theological relevance of Saint Bonaventure*, eds. Amaury Begasse de Dhaem, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), pp. 497-511, at 501-2, interprets Bonaventure's *In IV Sent.*, d. 8, p. 1, a. 2, q. 2, and d. 24, p. 1, a. 2, q. 3 as meaning that Christ instituted the priesthood *per se ipsum*, that is, by the very fact of his Incarnation, not by a subsequent formal act. In *Breviloquium* VI, c. 5, Bonaventure shifts slightly: Christ 'instituted the sacrament of Orders first by giving the power to bind and loose the sins of men, then the power to offer the sacrifice of the altar'. While Aquinas also lists binding and loosing as sacerdotal functions, he labels 'the keys' as a 'judiciary power' (*SCG* IV, c. 72) subordinated to the celebration and distribution of the Eucharist (*SCG* IV, c. 74): 'since the power of order is directed to the dispensing of the sacraments, and of all the sacraments the Eucharist is the most sublime and perfect... it follows that we must consider the power of order principally in its relation to that sacrament... Since the power of order extends to the confection of Christ's body and its distribution to the faithful, it follows that the same power should extend to the preparation of the faithful so that they be made apt and worthy to receive this sacrament... Thus, the power of order must extend to the forgiveness of sins, by the dispensation of those sacraments ordered to remission of sin, like baptism and penance'.

sixteenth century, when the Tridentine Fathers confirmed Thomas's position.³⁵ Following the theme of the transition from Old Israel to the Church marked by Christ, the verse 'Panis angelicus', known for its many famous musical settings by later composers, is also noteworthy on account of a brilliant double entendre. At first glance, 'figuris terminum' might appear to be a statement which, like the line 'et antiquum documentum novo cedit ritui' in *Pange lingua*, simply references the New Covenant's inauguration as such, and while this meaning is certainly true, there also lies an underappreciated philosophical and sacramental angle. In Thomas's metaphysical account of transubstantiation, the Body and Blood of Christ are said to be the *terminus* of the conversion, while the *figurae* of bread and wine remain.³⁶ The dual meaning of *terminus* (as both historical end of the Old Law and as metaphysical final cause) is thereby paralleled by the dual meaning of *figura* (as the signs of the Old Law and as the species of bread and wine), and their joint usage in this verse is but another testament to the synthetic metaphysical-theological-poetic insight of the Angelic Doctor, which is perhaps most brilliantly expressed in the following verse from *Pange lingua*.

Verbum caro panem verum
 verbo carnem efficit,
 fitque sanguis Christi merum,
 et si sensus deficit,
 ad firmandum cor sincerum
 sola fides sufficit.

The Word made flesh, by a word, effects
 flesh from true bread
 and blood from mere wine, and if
 sense perception fails,
 only faith suffices to strengthen the
 sincere heart.

Faced with the unfathomable triplex mystery of Creation-Incarnation-Transubstantiation wrought by the Eternal Word, Thomas, adhering to Fortunatus's trochaic septenarius, boldly sings the limits of Aristotle's recourse to the certainty of sense knowledge. Other authors, in words more apt than our own, have already singled out for special praise the witty combination of assonance, alliteration, pun, and paradox which animates this famous stanza,³⁷ but perhaps few so have so accurately placed their finger on Thomas's pulse as the Jesuit philosopher Walter Ong.

Priesthood thus consists first in offering sacrifice, and then consequently to forgiveness; for Aquinas, then, the priesthood is established definitively in *supremae nocte coenae*.

³⁵ Trent, Session XXII, *De Sacrificio Missae*, Canon 2.

³⁶ Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1, ad q̄la. 4; d. 10, a. 1, ad 4; *ST III*, q. 75, a. 7, *respondeo*; q. 78, a. 2, *respondeo*; et alia. I have found no commentator who recognizes the duplex meaning of *terminus* proposed here; for example, both Tück (*Gift of Presence*, p. 196) and Murray (*Aquinas at Prayer*, p. 211) miss the double entendre.

³⁷ Tück, *Gift of Presence*, pp. 188-9; Murray, *Aquinas at Prayer*, pp. 198-202.

Thomas is here concerned with the fact that it was not God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit, but the Second Person, God the Word, Who became flesh, and that this same Word, when He wishes to convert bread into His flesh uses words as the instruments for His action. This is a coincidence startling enough and too good to be missed, the more so because the use of words in connection with its sacramental ritual was plainly distinctive of the New Law inaugurated after the Word had entered the material world as man: the Paschal Lamb which in the Old Law prefigured the Eucharistic sacrifice, had, like most other 'sacraments' of the Old Law, no special verbal formula connected with it. It is difficult to regard all this as mere coincidence.³⁸

Conclusion

In the preceding pages I have traced the salient features of Bonaventure's *Officium de Passione Domini* and Thomas's *Officium Corporis Christi*; now I arrive at a general judgment of the two poetic *opera*. For all the heartfelt devotion and unquestionably Franciscan character of the Bonaventuran Office, nevertheless, the frequent breaks from stable meter, moments of strange diction, and repetitive doxological endings show a relative superficiality as compared to the wit and wordplay of Thomas. As Ong fittingly comments, 'anguish and plangency, dealing as they do in elemental and, so long as they last, quite enthralling emotions, are always popular enough responses'.³⁹ Unfortunately, the popular, pious, and even compelling nature of such thematic elements are not enough to mask the poetic *lacunae* of the Seraphic Doctor. In this early Franciscan poetic tradition there seems to be no need 'for striking juxtapositions, for the stimulus of insights freshly arrived at, establishing intricate connections between realities apprehended in all sorts of ways and at all sorts of levels simultaneously—no need for wit in any form'.⁴⁰

Ong's judgment against the poets of the so-called 'Franciscan school' may sound harsh, but perhaps linking the poetics of the two Doctors to their respective approaches to philosophy and theology might vindicate his verdict from another perspective. Bonaventure, for example, displays an almost obsessive concern for extrinsic structure in his later works. From 1257 onward (that is, from his election as Minister General to his death), Bonaventure writes no more treatises in the form of scholastic *quaestiones*, instead using other devices to arrange his doctrinal expositions. Whether the six-winged seraphim as a programmatic model for mystical ascent (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*), the

³⁸ Walter Ong, 'Wit & Mystery: A Revaluation in Mediaeval Latin Hymnody', *Speculum* 22 (1947), pp. 310–41, at p. 317.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

six days of creation as the basis of a theology of history (*Collationes in Hexaemeron*), the ninefold angelic hierarchy as a model for the human soul (*Breviloquium; Itinerarium*), or the application of triplex sub-patterns throughout his corpus, the Seraphic Doctor often attempts to organize his doctrine according to such numerical schemata. This does not always lead to the delineation of clearly distinct or helpful classifications, but because Bonaventure has committed himself to the predetermined pattern, he is thereby compelled at times to introduce more tedious schematic divisions in order to complete his selected numerical plan.⁴¹ Threefold, sixfold, sevenfold, and ninefold patterns are not *arrived at*, but *presumed* and *imposed*, while the data of observation are forced to fit the system.

Thomas's approach, meanwhile, allows the mysteries of sacred doctrine to unfold organically in his theological work. Certainly, there exists a structural element in the Thomistic method, in that the ascent from sense knowledge of particulars to immaterial knowledge of universals presumes the hylomorphic composition of all reality, while cognition of the mysteries of faith still requires conversion to phantasms and a hylomorphic descent from formality to materiality. Nevertheless, this underlying structure—a true *metaphysical* structure—need not involve the meticulous and tiresome formal imposition of threes, sixes, sevens, or nines onto the objects of investigation; rather, Thomas examines these realities in themselves, allowing his explanations to proceed not by overdetermined extrinsic schemata but through fundamental metaphysical principles, whether according to the order of reality (e.g., the *Summa Theologiae*) or the order of discovery (e.g., the Aristotelian commentaries). Extrinsic structure, for Aquinas, should never impede but foster contemplative penetration into the mysteries.

Does not Bonaventure's predetermined insistence on apparently clean formulaic structures in his theological reflections mirror his attempted rigid adherence to prosodic forms in his hymns, and do not his obvious failures to observe his chosen rhyme and meter parallel his somewhat strange or tedious divisional classifications in his later treatises? By contrast, does not Thomas's employment of wit and wordplay, in conjunction with the use of contrafaction as a nod to tradition, suggest a more profound engagement with dogmatic mysteries and their broader implications? As Ong observes, for a true poet-theologian,

⁴¹ See, for example, the soul's middle functions in the descent of grace corresponding to the Powers and Virtues, respectively. At the former level, the soul operates 'the nobility of triumph against impediments' (*nobilitas triumphi propter impedimenta*), while at the latter lies 'strength of exercising the commands' proposed through the Dominions (*virilitas propositi exercitati*). Bonaventure's passing explanation of these functions in *Hexaemeron* XXII, n. 32 (Quaracchi 5:442) reads less like helpful analytic distinctions and more like synonymous expositions of the same spiritual perfection.

word-play and witty conceit go hand-in-hand with preoccupation with genuinely distinctive ‘mysteries’ of Christianity. Moreover, the juncture is not accidental: here conceits are simply a normal means of dealing with the mysteries of Christianity, the distinctively Christian teachings, as well as a means of achieving a successful poetic texture.⁴²

The technical mastery required for a successfully ‘witty’ composition, more consistently displayed in Thomas’s hymns than in Bonaventure’s, appear more impressive in the Angelic Doctor’s work because their almost seamless integration with fixed rhyme and meter, combined with depth of theological reflection, have the effect of *supporting* rather than *hindering* the power of the message. The integration of all these prosodic devices in the Thomistic Office produces a remarkably memorable poetic density wherein the mysteries communicated are really apprehended as true on account of, not in spite of, the resonant sonic harmonies expressed in Eucharistic hymns.

A final observation: in ancient Rome, an intensive, almost overbearing recourse to rhyme and other prosodic devices was often considered to be bad poetry *simpliciter* and brutally condemned by more refined critics.⁴³ By the Middle Ages, when the old interplay of long and short syllables had transformed into syllabic accents, the emergence of rhyme might have been welcomed as a new remedy (however inadequate) for the loss of the ancient meters in the evolution of prosody. Today we can sympathize with the classical sensibility; how often are cheap rhymes employed in contemporary verse and popular music simply to bestow the barest veneer of poetic character upon an otherwise insufferably unremarkable work! But one need not look only to our time; Bonaventuran verse, if taken as archetypical medieval poetry, would prove the classical position on the whole a correct one! On the other hand, mere recourse to dactylic hexameter or trochaic septenarius would ignore the development of a distinctly Latin liturgical language—an idiom with its own towering monuments and heroic figures—for the sake of purely pagan conventions. Perhaps between

⁴² Ong, ‘Wit and Mystery’, p. 323.

⁴³ See the line of Ennius, ‘sparsis hastis longis campus splendet et horret’, cited in Macrobius on *Aeneid* 11.601-2 and famously satirized by Lucilius, Servius, Horace, and Macrobius himself. Benjamin Hall Kennedy’s *Revised Latin Primer* (Harlow: Longman, 1962), p. 204, n. 476, comments that this line, with its consecutive rhyming words, ‘in which every foot coincides with the end of a word, sounded uncouth to Roman ears and was rigorously avoided by poets of the classical ages’. Kirk Freudenburg, *The Walking Muse: Horace on the Theory of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 91, writes: ‘when Horace is urged by Trebatius to compose a panegyric epic for Octavian, he does more in refusing than just call to mind the tedium of such an enterprise, or the overdone character of panegyric generally... By bringing in that “bristling with spears” metaphor famously lampooned by Lucilius, Horace shows that his refusal to write panegyric epic is not just a matter of flagging strength, the standard Callimachean dodge. He gives an actual, remembered sample of just how thankless and unforgiving such enterprises could be’.

these two poles—between the mere exorcism of rhyme, on one hand, and the exclusive use of classical meter on the other—a uniquely Christian balance might be struck.

Indeed, it is Angelic Doctor who synthetically resolves the polarity not by appealing to the spirit of *aut...aut* but by invoking the Catholic *et...et*. In Thomas, the last wisps of classical air breathed by Fortunatus and the sonorous high medieval rhymes of Adam of Saint-Victor meet not as ‘a clashing gong or clanging cymbal’⁴⁴ but ring harmoniously, ‘*tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota*’⁴⁵ in praise of the true ‘*gloriosa rota*’⁴⁶—the Eucharistic host—by which the love of God enters most intimately into human hearts.

Ergo quaeritur: If a contest of verses between Thomas and Bonaventure had really taken place, who might have won the poet’s laurel crown? In light of the foregoing, I propose a metrical answer from a Vespertine antiphon written after the deaths of the two friars:

Felix Thomas, Doctor Ecclesiae,
lumen mundi, splendor Italiae,
candens virgo flore munditiae,
bina gaudet corona gloriae.

Or, we could simply and prosaically affirm that there is absolutely ‘no contest’.

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⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:1

⁴⁵ *Paradiso* 10.143.

⁴⁶ *Paradiso* 10.145.