

## INTRODUCTION: INTRUSIONS OF GRACE

EVERYTHING THOMAS DOES, he does for love of a God who delights to make strangers, and even enemies, friends. This book is about how Thomas welcomes outsiders and their virtues as an expression of that love. For Thomas, Aristotle is the preeminent outsider. There is, however, no greater insider for Thomas than Augustine of Hippo. As an act of Augustinian love, Thomas unites and transforms Aristotle and Augustine alike to teach charity toward outsiders and their virtues. In each of thousands of interactions with Aristotle, he shows us what charity for a particular outsider looks like. To see how Thomas does this, how he makes ethics itself a work of charity, we must begin where he had to—with Augustine.

### Augustine and the Challenge of Pagan Virtue

Writing at the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire, Augustine confronted a problem. It was not hard to critique the declining, decadently bloated empire, but the lives of men like Scipio, Cato, and, especially, Marcus Regulus seemed, to almost anyone, truly praiseworthy. Yet these Romans were obviously not Christians and did not in any straightforward way appear animated by Christ's charity. Their notions of the human end, the ideas that gave their lives an ostensibly virtuous and particularly Roman shape, were not only alien but often contrary to the vision articulated by the church. How then to understand their seemingly virtuous characters? For Augustine, at least as he is commonly read, idolatry and the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*) finally swallowed up any apparent excellence. What mattered most was what these men and their seeming virtues were *not*: ordered to the Triune God. All, therefore, that flowed from lives so misdirected, including the apparent excellences so tempting to

praise, was simply one or another variety of sin—the gleaming but poisonous fruit of a wicked heart in pursuit of evil ends.

Perhaps it could not have been otherwise. Augustine was committed, as most Christians are, to the notion that a person's beliefs about the sacred and the holy matter for the life she leads. As well, he held to the essential Christian claim that, more than anything, humans need grace—grace without which it is impossible to please God. And, perhaps most importantly, he lived, as he saw it, in dangerous times. Were he to acknowledge the virtue of Regulus, would that not tempt Christians to paganism? Would that not minimize the reality of sin, the danger of idolatry, and the difference charity makes? Would that not, finally, betray the gospel and, worse, its crucified author?

We live in different times. But we need not share Augustine's history—or his faith—to find ourselves echoing his questions. We confront friends and neighbors whose ideas of what makes for the best sort of human life differ from and sometimes even oppose our own. And, when these people seem morally praiseworthy, we have to figure out how we should understand their ostensible excellence. Do we regard their virtue as somehow independent of their misguided or false beliefs about whether there is a God, what the body is for, which politics are just, or what, if anything, is sacred? Do we, instead, reduce our—and their—deepest convictions to an empty common denominator, downplaying the deep difference or draping it in the suffocating blanket of nonjudgmental niceness, lifestyle liberalism, or the latest ideological kitsch? Or do we swallow our own version of the hard Augustinian pill and regard them with a suspicion ever ready to find its confirmation? Of course, in one sense, all these strategies eventually lead to the same unhappy outcome—if not always hostility and violence, at least distance, closure, and alienation.

That is easy to see when it comes to suspicion—Augustinian or otherwise—for we can hardly be a friend to those we regard as objects for endless unmasking. But it is no less true of the other strategies. What genuine fellowship can come from reducing our fundamental convictions about the most important things to bland sameness? Or, worse, from the outright denial and suppression of such loves and their distinctive shape? Augustine himself—along with countless others—would remind us that what we care about helps make us who we are. Even as we fail to live as we long to, the objects of our love at least ensure that we stumble in a particular direction. Pretending those objects are the same or unimportant buys a semblance of peace at

the price of justice, truth, and, most of all, love. Can anything worthy of the name friendship follow from denying the outsider the reality, particularity, or importance of her loves? From performing the same cover-up or amputation on oneself?

In confronting difference, we can seem caught between its denial and the hostile apprehension it tends to generate. The problem of “pagan virtue”—which, whatever our religious commitments or lack thereof, is what we can call this nest of issues—threatens to put us at odds with one another and ourselves, to ensure that we hold either our neighbor or our deepest convictions at a distance. Goods of politics, friendship, and faith hang in the balance. This book turns to Thomas Aquinas to seek a better way.

## From Thomas to Us

Thomas Aquinas’s neighbors and colleagues were not—like ours—religiously diverse outsiders but members of religious orders, priests, and lay Christians. Jews were the most exotic non-Christians Thomas encountered. In all likelihood, he never so much as met a Muslim. He can just imagine an atheist. Perhaps this very absence of pressure, this lack of impinging, pervasive pluralism, freed him to think through the challenge of pagan virtue with the kind of patient, exhaustive care its complexity and importance demand. Yet, notwithstanding the relative uniformity of the world he inhabited, he held as dear friend and treasured conversation partner a long-dead but, to him, very present Greek pagan, a religious outsider in a very deep sense indeed. He defended the Philosopher, as he affectionately called him, against charges of irrationality brought even by fellow friars, cited him more frequently than any figure save Augustine, and offered more commentary on his work than on any one or any thing but the Bible. And, whatever else it is, his magnum opus represents an extended and embodied effort to welcome that outsider and his virtue in a way that simultaneously honors and imitates the Triune God. In Thomas Aquinas, we have to do with a welcome of pagan virtue that is as generous and deep as it is faithful and true. That, at least, is my claim.

At its core, then, this book attempts to elucidate Thomas Aquinas’s complex conception of pagan virtue—to explain just what that vision is and how it relates to both the substance of his ethics and his very way of doing moral theology. Driving this investigation is not only the effort to get Thomas right, but to find in him guidance for our own endeavors—theological or not—to address the

challenge of outsider virtue. To the church first is Thomas's insight most useful and relevant; however, his way of addressing pagan virtue and doing ethics by drawing not only on the best of his tradition but the insights of outsiders themselves offers a model for all of us, religious or not. Given my normative interests and constructive aims, at certain points, I offer rational reconstruction—using Thomas's texts and concepts to supply answers in his spirit where he has not. It is a way Thomas himself proceeded in relation to his own interlocutors so the effort is, in a sense, doubly Thomistic—following after him both in the substance of my answers and the path that leads there.

This book is also an interpretation of Thomas's moral theology—or at least central aspects of it—in view of pagan virtue. Looking at his ethics in this light reveals a Triune trajectory we might otherwise miss. As we will see, there are reasons for this dual focus intrinsic to his thought. Pagan virtue represents a real but imperfect conformity to the Logos of God whereby men and women are implicitly caught up in the Father's work of bringing all things to himself through the Son in the Spirit. Thomas's accounts of goodness, habit, action, and virtue alike bear the stamp of this Divine movement, calling God's people to anticipate and welcome it in the lives of those who do not yet know Jesus—even as they also proclaim the Gospel's necessity and splendor.

## Outsiders and Particularity

When the “outsider” gets talked about in philosophy or theology, it is often in a language of abstraction, far removed from any actual community, place, or time. In real life, however, the outsider speaks and acts strangely. Her dress is transgressive. Her worship makes us uneasy and tempts scorn. And she directs this devotion to something alien, even troubling. Any of these differences can cause us to suspect that behind apparent goodness lurks something sinister. Few are blind to what can follow when outsiders are thought incapable of virtue—or the good attainable when they are seen as trustworthy partners in pursuing justice. Can consideration of an “outsider” whose very otherness remains an abstraction help us grapple with the real challenges religious outsiders pose? Can it prepare us to respond with justice?

In turning to a particular tradition and an especially deep and apparently intractable kind of otherness, I hope to refuse an abstraction that, at its worst, amounts to just another evasion of difference. And while the way one community navigates the challenge will necessarily be its own, this book advances

under the conviction that when it comes to pagans, their virtue, and the task of ethics, Thomas not only has something to teach his church but something to teach us all.

### “Hyper-Augustinian” and “Public Reason” Thomism

Given his preeminence both within his tradition and as one of most important interpreters of Augustine, Aristotle, and their legacies, it is unsurprising that Thomas plays a central role in Christian thinking about pagans and their virtues.<sup>1</sup> Within many theological quarters, something like a default interpretation of Thomas’s position has emerged—one wherein he regards pagans as incapable of virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, declares that for Thomas, “justice cannot flourish, cannot . . . even exist as a natural virtue, unless and insofar as it is informed by . . . *caritas*” (*WJ*, 205). Stanley Hauerwas claims that for Thomas, “no true virtue is possible without charity.”<sup>2</sup> For John Milbank’s Thomas, “there are only two categories of people . . . the fallen wicked and the engraced good” and the “fallen wicked [are] incapable of obeying the natural law [and] cannot do any genuinely ‘natural’ good,” much less attain virtue (*TA*, 124, 39).<sup>3</sup>

Others protest, declaring Thomas altogether friendly to pagan virtue. Thus, Brian Shanley contends that MacIntyre’s “Augustinian leanings skew his interpretation of Aquinas,” and Bonnie Kent likewise objects to his “Augustinianism,” charging that he transforms Thomas into a “moral provincialist” whose denial of pagan virtue is on intellectual and moral par with sexism.<sup>4</sup>

Both sides frame the contest as one between Thomas’s Augustinian and his Aristotelian commitments. Pagan virtue, the story goes, reveals Thomas’s deepest loyalties: Augustine *or* Aristotle, theology *or* philosophy, faith *or* reason. It certainly reveals interpretive commitments: not only the ubiquitous either/or paradigm, but the assumption that Thomas either welcomes pagan virtue by betraying Christian commitments and following Aristotle or rejects it thanks to his abandonment of Greek philosophy and fidelity to Augustine, Scripture, and Christ. Such readings, moreover, move beyond interpretation and help fund rival “Augustinian” or, better, “*hyper*-Augustinian” and “Aristotelian” or, rather, “public reason” proposals for contemporary ethics and politics.<sup>5</sup>

The “hyper-Augustinian” interpreters have been especially influential. On one reading, they regard non-Christians incapable of virtue and seek to sway the church to this view. Faithfulness, they seem to suggest, requires rejecting pagan virtue. Consider a few examples.

Favorably presenting Milbank's and Hauerwas's views, James K. A. Smith raises the question of "whether non-Christians can be good or moral" and, citing Thomas, explains:

I am inclined toward [the] conclusion [that non-Christians are *not* truly good and moral]: Morality or authentic virtue is possible only for the community of the redeemed. . . . What appear to be instances of mercy or compassion or justice outside the body of Christ are merely semblances of virtue. . . . This is just another way of trying to think through the logic of Aquinas's claim that all the virtues are ordered by charity. . . . Love—and hence true virtue—is possible only within and for the ecclesial community.<sup>6</sup>

Not only the non-Christian's apparent virtue, but even specific acts that appear to be merciful, just, or compassionate, are mere semblances, actually evil. For Milbank, non-Christian thought, practice, and "virtue" are birthed in violence, sustained by conflict, and ultimately directed toward nihilism and death (*TST*, 5).<sup>7</sup> As he has it, "the main gist of [Augustine's] great book [*City of God*] is that [pagan] virtues were hopelessly contaminated by a *celebration* of violence." And, in one sense, the main gist of Milbank's own great book, *Theology and Social Theory*, is that Augustine's claim is a "fundamental truth" (289).<sup>8</sup> Pagan "virtue" is, finally, merely the "worship of violence" in disguise (262). For MacIntyre, contemporary society can produce no moral virtue, only fragmentation and interminable moral conflict.<sup>9</sup> In making charity virtue's presupposition, MacIntyre forsakes Augustinian hope for the good to be sought with Babylon's citizens and abandons his own "tradition of the virtues"—wherein contemporary heirs of Emerson, Hume, and Hegel might, with followers of Abraham's God and others still, find a home (*WJ*, 10–11, 210–25, 401–3). Hauerwas insists that Greek virtue has "no telos other than conflict" and emphasizes that he does "not credit the natural virtues" even to the degree that Thomas is sometimes supposed to have.<sup>10</sup> "It is far from obvious" he says, "that those Christians . . . who have argued so adamantly that pagan virtue is nothing less than sin . . . are so far off track."<sup>11</sup> These criticisms are directed at the virtues of the ancients. What, then, of that which is birthed in the lives of those inhabiting a "world of moral fragments . . . always on the edge of violence . . . [that] lacks the means to [produce] any habits or institutions sufficient to sustain [even] an ethos of honor?"<sup>12</sup>

These and others do not merely cite Thomas as rejecting pagan virtue; they deny the possibility themselves. The declarations even seem to rise from the

core of their intellectual agendas: for MacIntyre, late-Western democracies cannot produce people of virtue; for Hauerwas, the church alone can form lives oriented away from violence and consumption toward peace and self-giving love; for Milbank, outside the Christian ontology of peace and metanarrative of love, all is war and death.

Matters, of course, are far more complicated than such slogans suggest. Grant that these readings are distortions, neglecting claims that suggest hospitality, betraying their authors' deepest commitments.<sup>13</sup> Still, the negative remarks remain, often invested with such rhetorical power that they would linger in the imagination even if they did not figure so prominently in the argumentative structure. And these readings are commonplace, forming numerous Christian scholars, pastors, and laypeople who would rather forsake pagan virtue than Scripture's Christ.

If the hyper-Augustinians have a rival when it comes to giving Thomas a voice in contemporary religion, ethics, and politics, it is the "public reason" Thomists.<sup>14</sup> They have had little to no interest in the details of Thomas's account of pagan virtue—perhaps because they regard it simply obvious that outsiders can attain virtue, or perhaps because their vision of ethics has so little to do with virtue to begin with.<sup>15</sup> What Thomas bequeaths us, they say, is a way of safely and justly navigating our pluralistic world and democratic politics by the deliverances of reason alone. Principles sufficiently determinate and clear to guide lives and politics are self-evident to any reflective person, pagan or Christian.<sup>16</sup> And should our eyes be blurry, our minds slow, Thomas adumbrates a list for us in his treatise on law, the meaning of which they will happily explain.

Whatever our theological commitments or lack thereof, we are all governed by natural law, ordered to basic goods. Provided we submit to that governance and choose not against those goods, our lives and communities, Christian or not, will be just and good. Should we disagree, we have, at least, a way to characterize and adjudicate our difference in a neutral, "objective" language that, if not Nature's own, is nearly so. As for matters Christian, "there is," we are told, "no reason to labour the points [Thomas] makes about the evils which ineluctably afflict our present life, and our incapacity to satisfy our desires before the death we naturally abhor."<sup>17</sup> While Thomas himself may, admittedly, stress that friendship with God has preeminence, "fulfillment in some other, say, future, life" goes beyond reason, and so falls in for little or even no attention.<sup>18</sup> How could emphasizing *that* be of help or have a place in our pluralistic context? While these brushstrokes conceal complexity and diversity, this portrait finds

real roots in figures like John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and Robert George, and depicts faithfully their perspective, at least as it converts and shapes scholars, students, and citizens. Against the backdrop of broken politics, a hostile, secularized world, and ongoing battles over the sacred, a solution that bears the imprimatur of Nature, the promise of Neutrality, and the unassailability of Reason—cost what it may in terms of particularly Christian identity or participation—has its allure.

Such, in rough form, are the dominant choices when it comes to Thomas on pagan virtue and in contemporary ethics and politics. Yet which Christians really want to maintain fidelity at the price of hospitality—or welcome pagan virtue by abandoning their identity as a particular people and forsaking the necessity of God's generosity and love for human flourishing?

## Our Argument

As Thomas's synthesis is usually understood, he chooses, at each step, between Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions. At best, it's a synthesis of averages, of alternating either/or's reaching a rough balance. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than when it comes to pagan virtue, where, on nearly every account, honoring Aristotle and reason, he welcomes it, or, keeping faith with Augustine and Christ, he rejects it. What he does not do—or even try to do—is honor insider and outsider, Bishop and Philosopher, alike.

On the dominant paradigms—for Thomas's stance on pagan virtue, his synthesis, and his contemporary significance—he and those who would follow must choose: Augustine or Aristotle, truth or welcome, particularity or public reason. These paradigms of competition, I argue, not only misunderstand Thomas but miss the ethos he would bequeath us. Thomas welcomes pagan virtue *for charity's sake*, not against but because of his Christian convictions, construing pagan virtue itself as the outworking of God's gift—and its recognition as one more instance of giving God the glory he is due. That commitment to charity shapes not just his conclusions but his way of doing moral theology, and more his very life.

Charity's scholarly mode is the multiplication of distinctions in order to preserve truth and honor its inevitably broken seekers—among whom, for Thomas at least, Aristotle ranks near the top. Just where choice between traditions appears inevitable, he finds a way to honor the Philosopher's insights without compromising Christian fidelity. When theological commitments



seem to condemn Aristotle, Thomas seeks, in and for charity, redemption. And where Christian or pagan falls short of truth or justice, and charity would be betrayed by his doing otherwise, he offers fraternal correction. Impelled by commitment to Christ, Thomas strives to be Aristotelian by being Augustinian and vice versa, his very engagement with Aristotle performing the capacious stance he commends, his theologizing enacting the welcome he prescribes.<sup>19</sup>

For all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike, Thomas offers a way to grapple with the challenge of difference without betraying our deepest convictions. And for Christians, at least, he models a particular way of doing ethics and being in the world that is at once generous and faithful, hopeful and committed, patterned after God's way with us. Call this stance prophetic Thomism.<sup>20</sup> It sees distinction-drawing, precision, and fidelity as linked arm-in-arm with resistance to domination, critique of empire, and pursuit of the common good. For prophetic Thomism, multiplying distinctions is no rival to the work of justice but a face thereof, enabling the recognition and condemnation of evil and the construction of justice-oriented alliances across lines of difference. Where there is ambiguity in Thomas's work, it opts for a justice in keeping with the best of his thought, and where he falls into error, it corrects, following Thomas's own way with what he found wanting.

If Christian ethics frequently takes tradition and liberation, conceptual analysis and prophetic concern, orthodoxy and inclusion as either/or alternatives—even competing scholarly identities—prophetic Thomism seeks to unite and transform. In both the substance of Thomas's welcome and his way of doing ethics, we glimpse prophetic Thomism at work.

## An Ethics for the Church

Suppose there are at least three tasks necessary for articulating an ethics for the church. First, there is the matter of taking sin seriously and giving grace and the grace-giving Christ priority in all things, ethics and spiritual formation included. One has to envision what it means for ethics—as science and practice—to do justice to the ceaseless, prevenient activity of God who, working in, through, and beyond all that humans do, liberates a people, forming them into the image of his Son. A second task focuses on the church's duty to be a primary locus for her people's formation into holiness and virtue. It seeks to articulate a vision and practical regimen of discipleship into God's new humanity, to imagine and enact the practices whereby the regeneration that grace effects will work itself out in

active love of neighbor and God. The third task addresses the church's way with what it is not. It asks one to decipher what understanding and conduct most faithfully answer God's call in relation to each of the institutional and cultural orders that are not the church, and, more, who and what even count as "outside." Settling questions about the church's relation to some polity hardly settles questions concerning its duties to the natural world or how it should understand pagan virtue. Arguably, much contemporary political theology has focused almost exclusively on just one or two of the most obviously political dimensions of this task. Certainly it has not usually devoted much energy to the matter of pagan virtue, notwithstanding either its immediate or more indirect political significance. Finally, a complete ethics for the church must not only pursue each of these tasks (and more) but the still more difficult work of coordinating them.

My aim, in contrast, is modest. In forwarding Thomas's vision, I seek to contribute to the third task—primarily that aspect concerned with the church's relation to and assessment of individuals. While this is an inherently political matter, I am not trying to articulate a comprehensive political theology, even as Thomas's way of welcoming pagan virtue and doing ethics models a salutary stance for moral and political theology more broadly, especially ruling out positions rooted in suspicion, competition, or relentless unmasking. In regard to the second task, I believe Thomas contributes profoundly to the church's work of moral formation, and the book's first part especially offers some suggestion of how. In relation to the first matter, the priority of grace, I at least mean to show that Thomas's welcome of pagan virtue does not veer into Pelagianism but honors, expresses, and builds upon the primacy of Jesus Christ and a real grasp of sin's destructive power.

In short, when it comes to an ethics for the church, I seek to address one dimension of one task, the question of pagan virtue, while suggesting the richness and profundity of Thomas's way with the second and the compatibility of both with the priority of grace. Thomas, I argue, gives us an Augustinian welcome of pagan virtue that coheres with, enriches, and depends on Augustinian ways of honoring grace and envisioning the church's pedagogical tasks.

### Thomas's Pagans and Ours

Thomas himself never used the term "pagan virtue." And for him *gentilis* or *paganus*, the words we translate as "pagan," refer exclusively to non-Jewish unbelievers, usually ancients like Aristotle but also other less familiar unbe-

lievers.<sup>21</sup> But when we and others treat pagan virtue, we are considering *all* non-Christians—Jews (and Muslims) included. More precisely, we are asking about human capacities for virtue after the fall and apart from redemptive grace—capacities which are common to each of the groups that Thomas’s various Latin terms pick out and which do not vary in relation to their referents. In short, the “pagan” in our “pagan virtue” refers to all those without charity.

I use “charity” in two distinct ways in this book. First, as here, to refer to the theological virtue, that God-given habit of grace whereby alone humans are justified, perfectly ordered to, and united in loving friendship with the God revealed in Jesus Christ (II.II 23.2–5). Secondly, and more generally, to name a particular way of being in the world—one marked by generosity, welcome, and love for neighbors near and far; a readiness to find beauty, truth, and goodness even when it is difficult, even in those who would be enemies. This way of being, suggested by the book’s title, may or may not be animated by theological virtue, by charity in the other sense. Throughout, context makes clear which sense I intend. In a certain way, that there are these two senses—a recognizably charitable way of life not informed by charity itself—is one of my central claims.

Thanks to his conception of “implicit faith” (*fides implicita*), Thomas may believe that some who do not explicitly follow Christ, who appear to be pagans, are nonetheless, in some way, possessed of charity.<sup>22</sup> The presence of charity would positively affect the sorts of virtue such people could attain and thereby distinguish them from “genuine” pagans. But again, such charity-possessed “pagans” are not the pagans we are considering when it comes to pagan virtue.<sup>23</sup> Our focus, rather, is on pagans considered as those *without* charity—those who appear not to be Christians *and* are not. And this is fitting, for, in the view of Thomas and others, these seem the most distant and so most difficult outsiders. Not those finally like us, but those who do not share our vision of the human good.<sup>24</sup> For, in one sense, implicit faith makes of outsiders insiders: the outsider can be virtuous, one might argue, but only because she is not *really* an outsider. Thus, in considering Thomas’s conception of pagan virtue, we attend to what Thomas says non-Christian, fallen humans can attain without charity.<sup>25</sup>

For this reason, the transition from Thomas’s pagans to ours is not so difficult, at least for those who share Thomas’s faith. Since the question that Thomas poses has to do with human capacities apart from charity, there is at least no *prima facie* reason to think that what he says about pagan virtue is somehow peculiar to ancient Greeks or Romans—to the exclusion of contemporary non-Christians, say. Arguments to follow bear this point out, but an initial remark is important.

For Thomas, all share in both sin's brokenness and a desire for the good. Most basically, a common capacity for virtue is part of what it means to be human at all. Thomas would regard it mistaken or worse to imagine this varied across cultures or epochs. As we will see, individuals experience this capacity differently, and these differences matter for their prospects of cultivating virtue. More importantly, though, it matters what individuals and communities believe and love. It matters how people conduct themselves and what practices cultures inculcate. Certain beliefs and ways of life are obstacles to or even incompatible with virtue's cultivation. Almost everyone, Christian or not, believes that much.

Some might be tempted to think that those formed primarily by contemporary liberal democracies are incapable of virtue. For these, Thomas's affirmation of pagan virtue is without contemporary bearing. Even if Thomas thought ancient pagans could attain virtue—indeed even if he were right—we should not think contemporary Westerners can. The world of difference between ancient and contemporary pagans is simply too great. Pagan virtue is lost in the translation—so the argument runs.

There are at least two paths to this conclusion. The first misunderstands Thomas, mistaking a mere application of his overarching vision—his recognition of ancient pagan virtue—for that vision itself. In stressing that Thomas's concern with pagan virtue is with human capacities without charity, I meant to put that confusion to rest. Thomas sought to elucidate how and why virtue is possible for unredeemed humans, and, in this respect, his vision is no less relevant for our pagans than for his.

Another path recognizes this but assumes societies like ours cannot sustain virtuous pagans. But surely there is as much to recoil from in Athenian or Roman society as in our own. Given the horrendous injustices endemic to ancient life, directed especially at women, slaves, and children, it is hard to see why those skeptical about the capacity of Western societies to sustain virtue should not extend that skepticism to ancient societies too. And, if Thomas found virtue in the ancients—whom he knew exposed their infants, enslaved their foes, and often worshiped idols—why would we think he and those following after him could not find virtue in our own societies, notwithstanding their militarism, greed, and wickedness? For Thomas questions of pagan virtue are not settled by sweeping narratives about liberalism, democracy, or modernity but patient, just, and charitable attention to the concrete neighbor.<sup>26</sup> This work, we will see, is demanding. Thomas's account of pagan virtue gives us good theological reason to believe it is not in vain.

For those who do not share Thomas's theological commitments, their "outsiders" likely have little in common with Thomas's or even the contemporary church's. Indeed, they themselves likely number among those Thomas and his heirs consider outsiders—and vice versa. Yet the salient commonality between the Christian's pagans and the pagan's outsiders is their divergence in conduct, practices, and/or conceptions of the best life. The shared reality and challenge of such differences—whatever the particularities—make Thomas a potential teacher for pagans and Christians alike.<sup>27</sup>

Obviously, the claim awaits testing and vindication by non-Christians. But it also offers the pagan a chance to practice—toward Thomas—the kind of expectant hospitality, anticipation of virtue, and spirit of generosity I believe he himself commends and would have his fellow Christians extend to them. Non-Christian readers are thus invited to conduct themselves in relation to Thomas as Thomas did with Aristotle and his other pagans. The first chapter does some of the ground-clearing work to make that imaginable.

## Inviting Intrusions

The challenge of pagan virtue impinges on our lives as we navigate questions of politics and friendship, work and play, love and justice. Can I trust this politician to pursue the common good or will she merely enshrine her religious convictions in law? Will a spouse who does not regard marriage a sacrament persevere in sickness and in health? Will this teacher try to debunk my child's faith or help form her into virtue?

Each of us faces versions of these questions. We must make judgments and draw distinctions to navigate our worlds. Encountering those whose convictions are not ours, we have to make some sense of those commitments and the praiseworthy lives they sometimes sustain. For Christians, these questions get asked in a theological register—in the shadow of Augustine's supposed answer and the ongoing temptation to downplay or even deny the centrality and necessity of the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ for living the best sort of human life. Most Christians, I suspect, would prefer to deny neither their faith nor the outsider's virtue. They want to hold to the supremacy and salience of the incarnate Son and to embrace the goodness in the lives of those who seem to know him not. Thomas, I believe, can help.

It may be that "our age . . . does not have a very sharp eye for the almost imperceptible intrusions of grace," that images of brokenness and banality or

our own self-preoccupation blind us to all else.<sup>28</sup> Yet, atheist or theist, call it sacred value or grace, our failure to see it does not mean it is not there. This book is written in the expectation and trust that one locus of that grace and one place that, too often, we do not look, or look and do not see, is the lives of those neighbors whose faith and loves differ from our own. Might not there be some grace for us in that very strange, very distant outsider, Thomas Aquinas? Beginning—but by no means stopping—with him, this book is an invitation to look and see.<sup>29</sup>