

THE THEOLOGY OF MIRACLES *

III. THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF SIGNS.

Signs play an important part in the acquisition of knowledge. This most complicated function, by which a person while remaining what he is, « becomes », at the same time something else, has engaged the best minds ever since man began to think. « *Anima est quodammodo omnia* » says St. Thomas, echoing Aristotle²⁷⁰. Man becomes in a sense everything he knows. Objects outside man are stripped of their materiality and acquire a new and higher form of existence. Man is set apart from other intellectual creatures by his reason. Unlike the angels, he cannot exhaust the virtualities of any principle at one glance; owing to the weakness of the participation which he enjoys in the intellectual light, he must return again and again and analyse any object from many different angles before he can be said to know it²⁷¹. This process, proper to man alone, enables him to come to new knowledge and satisfy himself as to the truth of this knowledge.

It is important to understand what St. Thomas intended by his use of the word « sign ». At present much is being written regarding signs and symbols. This is a natural consequence of the preoccupation of philosophers, be they phenomenologists or existentialists, with the study of man in his entirety, man as a whole. These authors have evolved the notion of sign in such wise that, while undoubtedly not without merit, may not, and probably does not, coincide with that of St. Thomas. The latter can be said to have been an essential philosopher rather than an existential one²⁷². St. Thomas admitted that a complete study of anything could only be made by examining the object under all its aspects or, as the philosophers of the schools would say, a complete knowledge of anything results from a study of the four causes. While not neglecting the efficient and final causes,

* Cf. *Eph. Carm.* XX (1969) 1-51 for the first part of this article.

²⁷⁰ *ST* I, 14, 1; 80, 1 etc.

²⁷¹ Cf. *ST* I, 58, 3 and 4.

²⁷² This classification of philosophers is always inadequate; at best, it can serve to indicate a predominant tendency in someone's philosophy.

St. Thomas directed his attention mainly to the essence of beings; the existentialist is concerned with a more contingent object. Owing to this different outlook we can understand that St. Thomas will emphasize a different aspect of being from that which attracts present day writers, and the lack of a formal treatise on signs and symbols from his pen need not surprise us. However, if we are to understand what he intended to convey by his frequent use of « sign » for miracles, and if we are to avoid confusion with some modern ideas, we must go into some detail to clarify this notion.

1. *The thomistic notion of sign.*

In acquiring knowledge the sign is the first thing known. The process of knowledge starts, for man, with the senses: a material object is presented to these, creating and leaving behind sense impressions²⁷³. These impressions are processed by the interior senses and by the active intellect in such a way as to be stripped of all individuating factors; in this state only can they activate the passive intellect and cause the object to be known. Man is dependent on the senses for everything that comes to him: « nihil in intellectu nisi prius in sensu ». Yet in his very being he has proof that all is not material. He knows the thoughts and desires conceived within himself, the spirituality he carries about in him. By his nature he is a social being and thus this spirituality must be manifested; the hidden, the non-sensible, within man demands that it be made palpable and in this way communicable. When man observes similar sensible expressions by others he realizes that not all that is presented to him is sensible; beyond and above the sensible physical objects there is an existence which is hidden from him. The objective world is both physical and spiritual; man himself is composed of body and soul.

From this duality, both interior and exterior, from the interaction of matter on spirit and *vice versa*, signs came into being. They are instruments in the complex process of know-

²⁷³ For the entire question of signs we have utilized the magisterial tract of JOANNES A S. THOMA in *Logica* II, qq. 21 and 22. We have consulted with profit some works of the modern thomists dealing with the same question esp. A. M. ROGUET, *Les Sacrements traduction français de la Somme Théologique*, édition de la « Revue des Jeunes » Paris 1945, pp. 269-301, and J. MARITAIN, *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle*, Paris 1956.

ledge²⁷⁴. They help to cause knowledge; they help man to bridge the abyss between sense and spirit. With their aid man can affirm the presence of a hidden object from the perception of another: the mere gait of a friend is sufficient to affirm his presence; the sounds reaching the ear are sufficient to convey a spiritual message. The sign is what is known first; from it the intellect moves to the unknown²⁷⁵. Of necessity thus the sign must be more evident and more able to move the intellect than the object signified and, granted that the passage from the sign to the object signified is of the order of cognition, a certain discursive process is implied. Man thus succeeds in projecting his duality both on the actions he performs and on the object he perceives; he is enabled to deduce the greater from the less, and express the spiritual through the material.

a) St. Thomas' use of the word sign.

St. Thomas' use of the word sign is so varied that at first sight it is liable to leave one perplexed. Its range of meaning stretches from heavenly bodies to philosophical principles. It includes fixed designated objects or places; letters, figures, words and concepts; again, and this even more remotely, a certain fitness or becomingness between two objects makes one the sign of the other: thus the clothes God made for Adam and Eve in the garden were a sign of their mortality; a property characteristic of an essence is a sign of that essence; the figure of a body is a sign of the substance; principles from which conclusions can be deduced, even with the aid of other principles, are signs; an observed fact can be a sign proving something; the observance of a recurring natural event can give us a sign of a general principle²⁷⁶. The example of Christ is a sign for his disciples and the resurrection of others before Christ was a sign that He would arise from the dead. Signs are made for man:

²⁷⁴ Signs are not instruments in the strict thomistic sense of the word instrument; cf. *infra*.

²⁷⁵ The priority implied is one of cognition and not of being. Cf. *infra*.

²⁷⁶ Cf. *ST* III, 36, 5; I, 75, 6; 103, 1 ad 3; I, II, 16, 1; II, II, 96, 3 ad 2; *De Ver* 12, 13; *Quodl* IV, q. 9, a. 2; *ST* II, II, 164, 2; I, 57, 3 *sed contra*; III, 74, 3 arg. 2; I, 108, 7 ad 2; *SCG* 3, 104; *ST* I, 76, 8. This latter is the commonest type of sign; it is used mainly of effects which show their cause as, for example, the hymen proving virginity — II, II, 154, 6 ad 1; or tears indicating sorrow — I, 113, 7 *obp* 1.

they are adapted to his nature both individual and social. Man's interior devotion to God is expressed in exterior gestures; the devotion of the people is expressed in sacrifice. A king expresses his wishes with a sign and, between men, there exist those signs of friendship which are part of every social environment²⁷⁷.

The above are only a few of the meanings which St. Thomas gives to the word sign: the examples however, are more than sufficient to show the variety of senses in which the term is used. Ignoring bodies, targets, letters, places etc., in which the word has an equivocal meaning and, for the present, ignoring the free interchange between the two words 'sign' and 'miracle', a quick check of the other examples shows us one common trait: they are all *means* of bringing a person to a knowledge of *something else*. As St. Thomas writes:

« Communitur possumus dicere signum quodcumque notum in quo aliquid cognoscatur »²⁷⁸.

This property is evidently essential to a sign; it can, apparently, be applied with greater or less appropriateness, with greater or lesser accuracy, to many things which, as a result, are classified as signs. We must endeavour therefore, to establish the formal notion of a sign in its strictest sense and then see to what degree this notion is preserved in fact by St. Thomas in the various examples given and especially in its application to miracles.

b) Elements for a definition.

Drawing on what we have seen in the examples quoted, we can, as a basis for our study, define a sign as « that which manifests something other than itself to a knowing faculty »²⁷⁹. There are two elements involved here:

²⁷⁷ Cf. *ST* III, 48, 3 ad 2; 53, 3; *De Pot* 6, 2 ad 9; *ST* II, II, 84, 1 ad 1; III, 84, 2; 8, 7 ad 2; II, II, 25, 9.

²⁷⁸ *De Ver* 9, 4 ad 4. This is a very generic notion of sign. St. Thomas is answering the objection that since all speech is carried out by way of signs the angels cannot speak among themselves. After explaining what the exact notion of sign is (*aliquid ex quo...* cf. *infra*) he concedes that there is a wider use which includes even the intelligible species — *in quo*; this is a sign since it is a means inducing the knowledge of something else.

²⁷⁹ Cf. *ST* II, II, 110, 1; III, 60, 4.

i. The thing itself (the material object) which manifests or represents something other than itself, together with the consequent relation to the faculty = *res significans*.

ii. the object that it manifests (the signification) together with the relation of dependence between it and the sign = the *res significata*.

These two elements are really distinct. The notion of manifestation in itself does not *necessarily* include dependence on anything else: objects manifest themselves to the mind (objectively); principles represent conclusions and in neither case is there dependence. Thus the sign, considered materially as something which manifests, is independent of the signification²⁸⁰.

c) The sign and its relation to the knowing faculty.

« Signum proprie loquendo non potest dici nisi aliquid ex quo devenitur in cognitionem alterius quasi discurrendo²⁸¹. The object which leads the knowing faculty to another object can be considered under two aspects: it can be considered simply as an object which is presented to the intellect and which, objectively, causes the person to know (an objective cause); or it can be considered as a means leading to something else (instrumental cause)²⁸².

Signs considered materially:

In the first case the object is certainly not a sign; if it were there would be no criterion to distinguish signs from other objective causes of knowledge. Undoubtedly the object which is a sign, considered materially (that is, considered as a means

²⁸⁰ Even at this early stage we may ask where we can expect to find what formally constitutes a sign. Since the notion to *signify* is more limited than the notion to *manifest*, we need not expect the formality of 'sign' to be found in its representative capacity. An object can manifest itself; it can only signify something else. A more generic notion cannot contain the specifying element of a more restricted one. Any object which is known has a relation to the knowing faculty and so this also may be excluded as the specifying element of sign. Hence, by a process of elimination, we may suspect that it will consist in a relation between the object which signifies and the object signified or the signification.

²⁸¹ *De Ver* 9, 4 ad 4.

²⁸² In scholastic terminology this would correspond to the material and the formal consideration of a sign. A parallel case is that of images. « Duplex est motus animae in imaginem: unus quidem in imaginem ipsam secundum quod est res quaedam; alio modo in imaginem in quantum est imago alterius » ST III, 25, 3.

of acquiring knowledge and not precisely as a sign), *manifests* and, as we shall see, much confusion is caused by not distinguishing clearly between the essence of a sign and its function; the simple fact of manifesting, however, does not make it a sign. The fundamental aspect in the object which is a sign is its capacity to lead to something *else*. It is an intermediary, a means which manifests, which helps man to know. In so far as it is a sign (and not an object simply) the mind does not stop to consider it and rest there. The sign is a substitute and, *as such*, it does not make itself known; its *raison d'être* is the signification, is that for which it acts as a stand-in²⁸³.

Signs considered formally:

This function of the sign, this leading to another object, does not involve efficient causality: as we have seen St. Thomas says « proximum effectivum scientiae non sunt signa »²⁸⁴. The sign functions by the mere fact of presenting an object, of manifesting it, of making an object present to the knowing mind, an object which, but for the sign, would remain hidden²⁸⁵.

A sign belongs to the order of knowledge and it demands a priority in this order alone²⁸⁶; it is indifferent to the priority in the order of being which naturally belongs to a cause. This priority is not of importance since the sign is always a substitute, a measured secondary being, which exists as such only to bring the mind to the signification; this is the final cause of a sign. The priority required for a sign is chronological and psy-

²⁸³ « Tant que nous sommes dans notre condition terrestre, nous ne pouvons parvenir aux réalités spirituelles que par des signes terrestres; mais ce signe sensible *n'est pas fait pour qu'on s'y arrête et qu'on s'y complaise*. Il n'est que le moyen d'acquérir la connaissance du signifié et en tant qu'il y mène il a, tout corporel qu'il soit comme chose, une signification spirituelle ». ROGUET, o. c. p. 284.

²⁸⁴ *De Ver* 11, 1 ad 4; cf. *infra* where we deal with the division of signs in formal and instrumental.

²⁸⁵ The sign contains a certain likeness (be it natural or artificial) of that which is represented, since to manifest or to represent is to contain a likeness of what is represented. Cf. *De Ver* 7, 5 ad 2. Now, the mind can be said to represent in either of two ways: firstly, the creative artist has the likeness of his work of art in his mind, it is represented there; secondly, the viewer of this work of art has the likeness of it in his mind also. Cf. *ST* I, 44, 3. In the first case the cause represents the effect; in the second the effect, the cause. This is why St. Thomas so constantly states that signs and causes are not incompatible. Cf. 4 *Sent* d. 1, q. 1, a. 1 q.1a 1 ad 5; *De Ver* 9, 4 ad 5.

²⁸⁶ Cf. *De Ver* 9, 4 ad 5.

chological; metaphysically the signification is what comes first²⁸⁷.

The two aspects of the sign which we have noted — the sign materially considered and the sign formally considered — are of unequal value; however, both elements must be considered for an understanding of how a sign functions, of how it leads to knowledge. The sign is active because of the sensible qualities of the object in question even though these qualities, as we shall see, have nothing to do with the formality of the sign²⁸⁸.

As a substitute, the sign is of necessity dependent upon, and inferior to, the object which it signifies; it is measured by this and hence related to it. Again, as a substitute, the sign cannot be identical with the signification; it must be other than it, different from, yet similar to it. The objective reality which is to function as a sign can be, according to St. Thomas, anything that we can come to know *more easily* than the signification or, at least, that we can know *before* the signification²⁸⁹. Sense knowledge is primary in man: it is from this that he acquires all his knowledge; it is at the senses that the whole process begins. This is God's provident plan for man: to go from the material to the immaterial and, as we hope to show, to be led even to suspect something much higher than the merely natural. The notion of sign is thus most appositely applied to anything sensible which serves as a guide to some hidden unknown signification²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁷ St. Thomas returns to this repeatedly; the sacrifice of the Cross is a sign of the interior dispositions of Christ; the habit of a religious is a sign of his choice of the state of perfection; the external social etiquette is a sign of the interior dispositions which should rule our affections towards others. It is this principle which, in the final analysis, explains the gravity of untruthfulness. Cf. *ST* III, 82, 4; 48, 3; II, II, 187, 6; 25, 9; 111, 2 ad 3.

²⁸⁸ This important distinction will enable us to solve many of the difficulties involved in the correct understanding of the relation existing between sign and signification.

²⁸⁹ « De ratione signi proprie accepta non est quod sit prius vel posterius in natura sed solummodo quod sit nobis praecognitum » *De Ver* 9, 4 ad 5.

²⁹⁰ Cf. *ST* III, 60, 4; ad 1; 61, 1; 64, 7 ad 7; *De Ver* 11, 1 ad 3. From this primary application the notion was extended to include spiritual objects. Thus the facility and pleasure with which a person performs an act of virtue is a sign that the habit or virtue is possessed by him. Conclusions are said to be signs of principles, principles signs of conclusions, causes signs of effects, effects signs of their causes, depending on which is more evident and sooner known. However, if neither the sign nor the signification fall within the realm of sense then the notion of sign is applied in an analogical sense only: intelligible effects are signs of their causes only in so far as they are manifested by some sensible sign. Cf. 4 *Sent* d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, q. 2; *ST* III, 60, 4 ad 1.

d) The relation between sign and signification.

The relation existing between the sign and the signification was the second element which emerged from our temporary definition of a sign. As we have seen the sign is only the substitute, the means, the intermediary. It is of great importance and, even indispensable; yet, it must take second place to the object for which it acts. The sign depends of the signification, it is secondary in value; it takes its place and leads to it as what is primarily to be known. There is a strict relation between them.

A relation can be defined, in general, as the 'regard', the orientation of one thing towards another: *ordo unius ad aliud*. This 'regard' can be something which is part and parcel of the object itself; or, on the other hand, it can be something which is added to the completed essence — an accidental quality. In the first case we have an absolute being with an essential counterpart in nature; a being which of its very nature looks towards another, which includes the other in some way in its definition²⁹¹. These relations are real; they are essential relations but not essentially relations; they are called transcendental or denominative relations²⁹².

We have a second type of relation, essentially such, whose whole being is towards another. The relation consists wholly and entirely in the reference, in the 'looking towards' the other object. It arises as a result of some accidental quality added to the essence²⁹³. The main difference between these relations consists precisely in this: the former are relations consisting of absolute entities which, to be fairly explained, demand the related notion: the latter are ephemeral entities whose entire existence is played out looking towards another²⁹⁴.

²⁹¹ This type of relation is described by St. Thomas in *ST I*, 13, 7 ad 1.

²⁹² The relations between body and soul, between the knowing faculty and its object, between man and man, in so far as they are similar, are of this kind. This last example may cause some surprise. However, cf. J. GREY, *Elementa...* II, 744b.

²⁹³ Cf. *ST I*, 13, 7 ad 1.

²⁹⁴ The relation between father and son is of this latter type. The man who is father does not necessarily have a son; his being is complete and entire in itself and it does not demand any complement. On completing the act of generation he does not remain indifferent to its fruit; he is the father and, as such, regards his son. This regard, this *ordo* which was accidentally acquired is the relation of fatherhood.

These relations can be of two kinds: they can be creations of the mind, depending on the mind for their existence and ceasing to exist when the mind

In our definition of a sign we discovered two relations: that of the object which signifies to the mind and that of the object which signifies to the signification. The formal aspect of a sign must therefore be sought in either of these. To manifest or to represent is to make some object present intentionally; thus Caesar is manifested whether he himself or a statue of Caesar is presented to the senses. The relation to the senses (or to the mind) therefore, cannot be the specifying element of a sign²⁹⁵. We can legitimately conclude then that the formality of a sign, its essence, lies in the relation between the sign and the signification.

A question which automatically arises now is what type of relation exists between the sign and the signification. Is it a transcendental relation: does the object which acts as a sign, by its very being, demand the signification for its completion? Or is it some quality attached to, an accidental property of, an existing being, an accident which causes it to be orientated towards the signification? At first sight it would appear to be a relation of the former type, the *raison d'être* of the sign being the signification. St. Thomas appears to favour this when he states that a sign is something which leads to the knowledge of another, something which of its nature involves the other. He appears to put the formality of a sign not in the actual orientation towards another but in the foundation for this orientation. This capacity to lead to another, the formality of a sign if this view is correct, would thus be a restricted sense of the notion of representation — that of representing *another*; signification would thus be a species contained under the genus of representation and the sign would be an essential relation²⁹⁶.

ceases to consider them; or they can exist in reality independent of man's intellect. The relation between the 51 stars on the American flag and the 51 states of the Union is of the former kind; there is no reason why a star should represent a state and not a moon. The relation between smoke and fire, on the other hand, is a real one; it is independent of the mind.

²⁹⁵ In the first part of our study on the sign we have considered it, more or less, in its relation to the mind — as an entity which acts as a means to acquiring knowledge. Under this aspect, viewed, that is, as an object, there is a necessary relation between it and the mind; just as there is between any faculty and its proper object. It is a relation which is common to all objects as such; it is a transcendental relation which exists in reality only on the part of the mind; it is not a mutual relation since the object is unrelated to the mind and is unchanged by being considered by it.

²⁹⁶ Most modern authors make the relation between the sign and the signification a transcendental relation even though they do not use this term.

However, St. Thomas, treating of the character of the sacraments in the *Summa Theologiae*, teaches that a sign, of its very nature, implies a relation which is founded on something else²⁹⁷. This is already a proof that St. Thomas is dealing with a relation which is essentially such²⁹⁸. This latter type of relation demands a foundation distinct from itself, since it is essentially a relation — cuius *totum esse* est ad aliud; it is something added to a being complete in itself and already in existence. A transcendental relation, on the contrary, as we have seen, is an absolute being which essentially includes some reference to another being, to its correlative; therefore, it has no need for a foundation distinct from itself. Now the sign involved in the character of the sacrament requires some quality which is added to the soul to act as a support for this orientation towards another — in this case, towards God. It is therefore clear that St. Thomas is dealing with relations which are essentially such²⁹⁹.

2. Types of signs.

a) Instrumental and formal signs:

In his *De Veritate*³⁰⁰, St. Thomas distinguishes two kinds of signs which later philosophers have called instrumental and formal. This is not a very happy terminology. In thomistic philosophy the instrument belongs to the order of efficient cau-

²⁹⁷ Cf. *ST* III, 63, 2 ad 3.

²⁹⁸ Cf. 4 *Sent* d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, q.1a 1 ad 1, where he opposes absolute to relative beings and puts signs in the latter class.

²⁹⁹ This is the essence of the 'character' of the sacrament and so it is not primarily a sign; it is a quality and, as such, it is outside the category of relation. St. Thomas cannot be contrasting transcendental relations with quality; evidently he is not speaking of transcendental relations at all. These are not confined to any one of the categories and hence, if it were a question of these relations, St. Thomas would have had no difficulty in applying both notions of *relation* and of *quality* to the character of the sacraments. As it is evident he eliminated the notion of relation from character because this was a quality and so we must conclude that the relation involved in the notion of sign is not a transcendental relation but one « cuius *totum esse* est ad aliud se habere ». Cf. *ST* III, 63, 2 ad 4.

While this proof is convincing, it is undeniable that difficulties do exist which militate in favour of the opinion which holds that the relation involved in signs is a transcendental one. However, since some of these involve specific forms of signs, we shall treat of them after having dealt with the various types of signs.

³⁰⁰ Cf. 9, 4 ad 4.

sality. The instrument, as such, does not exist save when moved by the principle cause. On the other hand, anything 'formal' belongs to the order of knowledge. Thus we appear to have a distinction between signs which have a certain degree of efficient causality and signs with intentional causality; by using 'formal' as opposed to 'instrumental' signs, the impression is conveyed that these signs belong to different orders.

In actual fact this is not true. All signs, by their very nature, lead to knowledge; they belong to the intentional order; they are essentially 'formal' signs. They are also *means*, however — instruments. There is a certain similarity between the function of intermediaries no matter in what order they are found; each is a *movens motum* which exercises its causality only in dependence on the principle cause³⁰¹. In the order of knowledge this *movens motum* is the sign, which, formally, as such, only informs the intellect so as to lead it to the object signified. The function of both sign and instrument are parallel³⁰². A sign is not an efficient cause of knowledge³⁰³.

The role of the sign is to be a substitute, a representative of an object; its reality is exhausted by its being an object. The sign does not *move* the intellect by its presence: it informs it and measures it — it 'instructs' it; it presents the object by offering its similitude; but it does not produce anything³⁰⁴.

Undoubtedly we can consider the notion of instrument in a wider sense: we can consider it as synonymous with 'means'. Thus a good life is an instrument of eternal happiness and signs are likewise *instruments* of knowledge, whether they be *formal*

³⁰¹ The means to acquire some end attract man only in so far as the final cause attracts him: only in so far as the means participate in the goodness of the principle object can they move him. The instrument, as such, exists only when elevated by the principle cause.

³⁰² Cf. ROGUET *o. c.* pp. 331 sqq. for the development of this idea.

³⁰³ « Proximum enim scientiae effectivum non sunt signa sed ratio discurrens a principiis in conclusiones ». (*De Ver* 11, 1 ad 4). In the body of the article he says that one teaches another when he shows him the reasoning process by way of signs, « et sic ratio naturalis discipuli per huiusmodi sibi proposita sicut *per quaedam instrumenta*, pervenit in cognitionem ignotorum ». He evidently intends « instrumenta » to be taken in a very broad sense.

³⁰⁴ The exact notion of object does not involve that it produce or impress its form or species on a faculty of knowledge; impressions can occur without any object producing or impressing them, as for example, happens to the beatified soul when it receives infused species. Anything which can be represented and can be known, can be an object. That it actually is represented depends on some agent, depends, according to St. Thomas, on the faculty. The sign acts in the same way as any object of knowledge. It has an objective causality which it exercises on being presented to the mind.

or *instrumental*. It is therefore clear that while all signs belong to the formal order they are in a broad sense instruments of knowledge³⁰⁵.

b) Natural and conventional signs:

A sign is essentially a relation to what is signified: this relationship can either be natural or conventional. This is a second division of signs and is of more importance for our work³⁰⁶. Natural signs are distinguished from conventional signs since in the former there is a certain likeness between the sign and what is signified whereas the latter are qualified by *ex institutione*, by a certain arbitrariness. The relation between the sign and signification in one case really exists; in the other it depends on the mind. The most perfect natural 'sign' of this type is, of course, the formal 'sign' we have seen above. However, natural signs are not limited to those which have a likeness to the signified; an effect is a sign of its cause when it arises solely from it: a characteristic quality indicates the nature from which it flows; if a cause has more than one immediate effect then one effect can be the sign of the other³⁰⁷. Virginitv is thus indicated by bodily integrity; grief is shown by tears; laughter is a sign of man: in none of these cases is there any similarity between the sign and what is signified. There is a real connexion between them, however, existing in the ontological order; they are really related; the logical order is adapted to this reality. On

³⁰⁵ F. A. BLANCHE, in a review of J. MARITAIN's *Reflexions sur l'Intelligence* (Bull. Thom I, 363) followed by ROGUET (o. c. p. 286) prefers the terminology « discursive » and « image » signs to what traditionally have been called instrumental and formal signs. This terminology however, is not without its own inconvenience. We think that a certain discursiveness is essential to the proper notion of sign according to the mind of St. Thomas and so should not be the specifying element in a division of signs. Confusion can also be caused by the adoption of this new terminology.

J. MARITAIN in his *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle* (Paris 1956) defines symbols as « image-signs » (p. 65): « Nous pourrions définir le symbole comme un signe-image: quelque chose de sensible *signifiant* un objet en raison d'une relation présumée d'analogie ». We shall return to this later where we deal with symbols.

³⁰⁶ Cf. *Peri Hermeneias* 1. 1, lect. 2, n. 9.

³⁰⁷ In the first case we have the common example of smoke indicating fire; for the second St. Thomas gives us as a sign of the divine nature, God's prescience cf. *ST* I, 57, 3 *sed contra*; for the third cf. II. II. 95, 5 where he writes: « Omne enim corporale signum vel est effectus eius cuius est signum, sicut fumus significat ignem, a quo causatur; vel procedit *ab eadem causa*, et sic, dum significat causam, per consequens significat effectum sicut iris quandoque significat serenitatem, in quantum causa eius est causa serenitatis ».

seeing the sign the mind automatically, in the same act, sees the second term of the relation — the signification³⁰⁸. Arbitrary signs, on the other hand, can only exist between intellectual beings since conventions suppose free-will³⁰⁹.

Man, on seeing the gestures of his fellow men and knowing that the hidden, the spiritual, within himself is expressed with similar gestures, comes to know the hidden, comes to understand the spiritual in his companions. The limited number of natural expressions are insufficient to satisfy his innate desire to communicate. Invention is the logical result: where there is no natural relation, establish one to overcome the chasm between sense and spirit. This is how arbitrary signs originated. The arbitrary or conventional sign is one which has no connection, has no relation of itself to what is signified; by agreement, it is established as a means to lead the mind to some hidden meaning. This agreement can be explicit or tacit; completely arbitrary or having a certain fitness. If the reality which is used as a sign, while not having any real relation to the signification, has a certain aptness which makes its use very fitting, then we have what is usually considered as a special class of arbitrary signs called symbols.

It is important to realize that natural signs are always signs of things, signs of realities existing in the ontological order; whereas arbitrary signs are signs of man's thoughts. With arbitrary signs the sign in itself takes the place of some idea and recalls this idea to those who know the established convention. Arbitrary signs, while remaining such, are, in general, simultaneously natural signs that some other free intellectual being is manifesting himself, manifesting his thoughts. This property is not something fixed by convention: it results from the very

³⁰⁸ In the *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze, Sansoni, 1957) s. v. *Segno* it is stated that in all signs there is a certain arbitrariness: « In realtà il concetto di segno implica sempre un'assunzione arbitraria, almeno implicita, in ordine ad una finalità manifestativa, in forza della quale l'una cosa è assunta invece dell'altra e quella che di per sé poteva essere una connessione ontologica per cui passava dall'una cosa all'altra, è portata alla significazione, cioè alla trasparenza dell'una nell'altra » 4, 498; the example is given that while smoke is a sign of fire, flowers are not signs of trees. This is untrue. If a person is presented with apple-blossoms it is a natural sign (before any assumption of the part of an intellectual creature) that they have come from an apple tree: the relation between the blossoms and the tree exists in reality.

³⁰⁹ Exist formally; we do not deny that animals can use arbitrary signs as, for example the sound of a bell to signify that it is time for feeding. This use is only material and from the force of habit as is evident in the case of Pavlov's dog. Cf. IOANNES A S. THOMA *Logica* II, 21, 6.

nature of conventional signs³¹⁰. Conventional signs are thus, at the same time, both natural signs that a person is expressing his ideas and judgements and conventional signs to convey these ideas and judgements. They are not signs of things then but signs of thoughts; they say nothing of whether truth is conveyed in these thoughts or not³¹¹.

In the ontological order, natural and arbitrary signs, considered as objects, have nothing in common; they cannot even be grouped into one class of being since the relations involved fall into opposite classes: the ontological and the logical. However, considered formally as signs, or, considered as objects bringing the mind to knowledge of something else, this division is univocal: the notion of sign can be applied with equal propriety in both cases since both move the intellect and bring it to the signification in the same manner³¹².

3. *Some difficulties.*

We are now in a better position to answer some of the difficulties which militate against the theory that a sign is formally constituted by its being essentially a relation. As we have seen when treating of relations, when the term, the object of a relation ceases to exist, then the relation itself disappears: *cessante termino cessat relatio*. In the Capitoline Museum many statues of ancient Roman emperors are to be found, each capable of recalling a very definite historic personage to mind; these statues perform the work of signs perfectly. The object which is signified has since ceased to exist though, and thus also the real relation between them. Hence it would appear that a sign essentially consists of the foundation for the relation — the similitude that existed between the statue and the emperor — and not the relation itself. This is the case for real relations. In the case,

³¹⁰ For example, when a person receives a letter, the written words are conventional signs conveying a definite meaning to the person who understands how to read; naturally, however, they indicate that a rational being has expressed his ideas.

³¹¹ The importance of this remark will be seen below.

³¹² This would appear to be a logical deduction from St. Thomas' doctrine in *ST* III, 60, 6 ad 2. The 'ratio significandi' is found in a more perfect degree in words; these are the commonest example of conventional signs. All the signs discussed up to the present have been signs in the speculative order — signs which merely signify. There is another class of signs which leads to knowledge in the practical order — efficacious signs — which are treated of in sacramental theology; we need not delay over them.

however, of relations of the mind the difficulty is even greater. These relations cease when the mind ceases to think of them: the olive branch and peace have absolutely no connection outside the mind. When the mind ceases to consider the olive branch as related to peace, as signifying peace, it is no longer related, it no longer signifies. Thus all conventional signs are no longer formally such when no one considers them; the words in a closed book are not signs of the author's ideas. All this militates against what we have considered to be St. Thomas' doctrine, namely, that a sign, formally speaking, is a relation which is essentially such; it seems to argue in favour of the foundation for the relation.

To answer these objections it is important to distinguish between the essence and the function of a sign. The function of the sign is to manifest, to represent, to lead the mind to the signification. This depends on the foundation of the relation, on the existing similitude, on the free act of the will constituting it as a sign etc. We have already seen that this cannot be what distinguishes a sign from other objects presented to the mind, since all such objects represent. Hence we must conclude that the function of a sign differs from its essence. However, this *capacity of manifesting* another remains with the object which is materially a sign as long as the foundation remains; even though, if the object signified ceases to exist, the *relation* may no longer exist³¹³. Two things must therefore be considered in every sign: its capacity to manifest, and thus lead to the object signified (the sign materially considered) and its subjection, its dependence upon the object signified (the sign formally considered). The former depends on the foundation for the latter; the latter is, however, the essence of a sign³¹⁴.

This answers most of the objections from the point of view

³¹³ A somewhat similar case is that of the relation of father and his function of generation. The man generates not because he is father, not by means of the relation, but due to the foundation of that relation, due to the fact that he is a man. Cf. IOANNES A S. THOMA, *Logica* II, 21, 1, p. 651.

³¹⁴ There is an essential distinction between objects which manifest and objects which are signs. A sign is formally constituted by its relation to what it signifies, as something taking its place and being measured by it and leading the mind to it. This latter is brought about by representing it to the intellect; just as in man, the relation of paternity is founded on the fact of his having generated offspring. All the activity of a sign is due to this foundation; the sign, being only a relation, is consummated in that look towards its master. Cf. IOANNES A S. THOMA, *Logica* II, 21, 1 p. 654.

of the real relations. However, what are we to say about conventional signs? There is a very real difficulty here and many solutions have been offered; the most satisfactory is that which uses a parallel to natural signs. As we have seen, the functioning of a natural sign is independent of the formality of the sign³¹⁵. Likewise with artificial signs. The functioning of these signs depends on the foundation of the relation. This foundation is had by the very fact that the object is selected to be a sign of something else; from this free act of the will the sign and the signification are connected, are related and the sign can take the place of that which it is to signify. Just as the natural sign represents its signification to the intellect even when this latter is non-existent and the relation consequently non-existent also, the memory of the signification being all that remains; so likewise written words can represent ideas without the mind actually conceiving of the relation between the word and the idea, by recalling to memory the accepted use of these words. This application, this dedication, however, does not leave anything real in the object which is to act as a sign so as to orientate it, and the mind which knows it consequently, to the signification. Thus how can it excite the faculty and lead it to the signification; how can it act as a sign?

To reply to this difficulty we must consider again the dynamic aspect of signs — how they function. The sign considered materially, is something in the ontological order; it is a being which, by its nature or by agreement, is related to another being. Considered formally, this relation is the sign. The function of a sign is to lead to knowledge, to act as a means: this is something in the logical order. If a sign is to function the mind must know the material sign; its relation to the signification; and, in general, the signification itself. When a sign is presented to the mind it acts in the same capacity as any other object; it is presented materially as an object and direct knowledge terminates there. Hence something else must intervene for it to act formally as a sign. Most signs simply *recall* something to the mind, open the archives of the memory; as, for example, a photograph of a vacation centre recalls it to the mind of the person who was there, due to the image of it stored in his memory.

³¹⁵ « Agere sequitur esse »: the functioning depends on the foundation which gives the existence; the formality is in the relation which ceases when the term to which it is related ceases to exist.

There are, however, signs which lead us to something which, as an individual happening or as an individual being, is unknown; as, for example, smoke billowing from the windows of *this* certain house indicates that *this* house is on fire, a fact formerly unknown. This knowledge is based though, on the recollection of the general fact that smoke indicates fire; this is a relation stored in the memory. The words on this page convey the author's ideas, they are signs of the concepts he wishes to convey only for those who know the relation between each individual word and the concept conveyed by that word. For a person who had never seen fire, smoke would no more be a sign than the written word for the illiterate.

The memory has thus an important place in the use of signs whether they be natural or conventional. With natural signs the mind, seeing the concurrence of two related realities: smoke-fire; tears-grief; dancing-joy etc., stores them, as related realities, in its memory. On being presented with one (which, since the proper object of the mind is sensible individual beings, is usually the sensible element in the case of a sense-spiritual relation), the memory recalls the related and so the mind is brought to a knowledge of the signified. With conventional signs the material process is identical except that the memory does not draw on its direct experience of the material world but on some freely established convention which it recalls; thus the use of the memory is more marked in conventional than in natural signs. On being presented with the material sign e. g. a word, the memory recalls the related concept and so the sign brings the mind to the signification.

It is very true then that in every sign *aliquid rationis est*³¹⁶. For artificial signs the designation, the relation imposed by the mind does not change the material being, does not leave anything in the material sign; but it can nevertheless act as a sign due to the memory's capacity for recalling this designation. This, however, is how the arbitrary sign *functions*; the formality of this type of sign does not lie here but in its relation to the signified. After being designated as a sign it remains such « moraliter, et fundamentaliter et quasi metaphysice » even though it is not considered by the mind³¹⁷.

³¹⁶ IOANNES A S. THOMA o. c. II, 21, 1; p. 653.

³¹⁷ *Id.*, *ibid.*

4. *A thomistic definition of a sign.*

To conclude this long digression on the thomistic notion of a sign we may define it as follows: the sign is an evident object which takes the place of a less obvious one and, being its substitute, is measured by it and related to it; whose function is to manifest the substituted object to a faculty of knowledge.

Since the function of the sign is in the logical order (it leads the faculty to knowledge and it is for this that it exists), its nature must be adapted to the processes of that order; hence, in the present order, physical objects or events can most fittingly function as signs for men. They are means leading to a lesser known object and so they must be more evident, easier to come by, than this object. They function by representing themselves to the knowing faculty; this places them on a par with other objects of cognition which are not signs and enables them to act; it does not specify or differentiate them, though. The specification comes from the relation between the two objects: the measure and the measured. In this relation, the signification is what is directly considered; the knowing faculty is only included indirectly. They are distinct from this signification.

So far we have the exact formal sense of the word sign for St. Thomas but now we must ask ourselves whether he uses it constantly (beyond those cases where it is used clearly in a metaphorical sense) with this formal sense; what are we to say of his *use* of the word 'sign'? Reviewing the texts which we saw above, it appears that there are three diverse senses which he gives the word.

In the first case we have a very generic use, a use which involves analogy of proper proportion. Here, anything, spiritual or sensible, which is related in any way to something else, and which can help towards knowing this object, can be said to be a sign; more specifically, anything endowed with signification, anything which is potentially a sign, qualifies for this title. This use is generally introduced with phrases like « cuius signum est » etc. Thus St. Thomas shows that intellectual life is more perfect than the other lower forms using the 'sign' that in man the intellect moves and regulates these lower powers³¹⁸. The fact that the intellect moves these powers is related to

³¹⁸ Cf. *ST I*, 18, 3.

their relative perfection and it can be used as a proof; hence it qualifies, in a generic way, for the title « sign »³¹⁹.

The second use of the word sign is when it is used with the precise sense studied above — an evident sensible object essentially related to its signification and acting as its substitute. While this use is not as common as the first, it would be untrue to say that St. Thomas seldom considers the sign formally. Integrity is thus a sign of virginity, a sigh is a sign of pain, and the trumpet call is a sign of battle³¹⁹.

Finally there is a use of the word sign which cannot be included in the above divisions — there are signs which modern authors call symbols or symbolic signs. These are objects which, while not related naturally to the signification, have a certain similarity to it and so they can conveniently be used as signs³²⁰. Thus, for St. Thomas, the choice God made of the clothes for Adam and Eve had a certain natural aptitude to signify that they were mortal³²¹; the foundation of the Church in Rome — the capital of the Roman empire — was a convenient way of expressing the victory of the Church³²². The resurrection of Christ was presignified by the resurrection of others before him³²³; water flowing from Christ's wounds signi-

³¹⁹ An even remoter case is found where he deals with the cause of the sin of the angels. A 'sign' or proof that the sin of Lucifer was the cause inducing the other fallen angels to sin is that they are subject to him now; it is according to divine justice that those who follow someone's promptings to sin should be subject to them afterwards in their torments. Thus anything which can possibly be used to prove or to clarify a point can be called a sign. Cf. *ST I*, 63, 8; 24, 1; 57, 3; *II. II*, 81, 7 etc.

³¹⁹ Cf. *ST II. II*, 154, 6 ad 1; *I. II*, 31, 3 ad 3; *In Perihem I*, lect 2, n. 9; 4 Sent d. 4, q. 1, a. 1, *ST III*, 63, 2 ad 3 etc.

³²⁰ While the above will suffice as a working definition, it may be useful to add some definitions found in modern authors; L. CIAPPI, *Il valore del simbolo nella conoscenza di Dio*, in « Sapienza » I (1948) p. 49 writes: « Il simbolo! Cosa intendiamo con questo termine? Un segno-immagine; qualcosa di sensibile, avente una relazione di significato per rispetto ad un oggetto spirituale, in virtù d'una certa somiglianza messa in rilievo mediante un raffronto intellettuale ». In the *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Sansoni, Firenze, 1957) s. v. we find: « Un caso particolare del segno. Alla base del simbolo v'è, come in genere per il segno, un nesso che può essere qualunque, ontologico o per un'analogia di forma, anche lontana, del genere detto improprio, o un nesso puramente convenzionale: ma ciò che lo caratterizza è innanzitutto l'assunzione, che porta tale nesso al significato di una perfetta vicarietà, per cui il simbolo sta al posto di ciò che vi è simbolizzato e adempie alle sue funzioni » FAGGIN-COLOMBO, vol. 4, c. 625. We do not agree that this is the characteristic of the symbol.

³²¹ Cf. *ST II. II*, 164, 2; 187, 6.

³²² Cf. *ST III*, 35, 7.

³²³ Cf. *S₁ III*, 53, 3.

fied the people united to Christ and hence, indirectly, the water which is added to the wine at Mass³²⁴ or again it signified both baptism and the Eucharist³²⁵. This possibility of more than one signification belonging to a sign is expressly stated where he writes of baptism and of the many possible uses of water³²⁶.

The word sign used of symbolic signs, has a narrower application than in the first case seen above. For this latter *any* relation between sign and signified is sufficient in so far as this enables it to function as a sign; here the relation is one of fittingness (*convenientiae*; a certain aptitude). On the other hand, sign is used here in a broader sense than that which we studied in the second case above since it is not a relation of measure to that which is measured. Hence the symbolic « sign » has a meaning lying midway between the generic and the formal sense of sign.

In the actual symbol-sign the distinction between the symbol and the sign — since they are not equivalent notions — is a distinction between the whole and a part of that whole. The symbol exists of its own right; it has a concrete signification of its own before it points to something else. The sign exists of its own right also but it essentially measured by another, points to another. In the symbol, the sign is only one facet. Roguet makes the comparison with a pyramid and its point — the symbol is the pyramid; the sign is a consideration of the « aspect pointu » of the pyramid³²⁷.

A certain dependence is required for a sign formally considered, be it natural or arbitrary; for natural signs, the cause-effect relation or, more precisely, the relation of what is measured to its measure; for the arbitrary signs, the quasi-moral relation of dependence between the totally unrelated object which is to act as a sign and its signification, which arises as a result of a deliberate act of the will. Roguet maintains that symbols belong to the latter class; that the symbol, formally speaking, is an arbitrary sign since the relation between it and what it sym-

³²⁴ Cf. 4 *Sent* d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, q.1a 2 ad 3.

³²⁵ Cf. *ST* III, 62, 5.

³²⁶ Cf. *ST* III, 60, 6. Water, or more precisely, the use of water, can signify either washing or cooling, just to mention two of its possible significations — it is a symbol since there is a certain aptness between water and these significations. Note however, that St. Thomas never used the word symbol in this sense. For him it is always used for a collection of truths which must be believed. Cf. *Tabula Aurea* s. v. in *Opera Omnia*, Vivès 1880, v. 34, p. 229.

³²⁷ *O. c.*, p. 314.

bolizes is not founded on its nature but on some agreement made and perceived by the mind³²⁸. We are inclined to disagree and to think that the opposite is true. It is precisely the natural aptitude which acts as the foundation, not for a relation of dependence (or of quasi-dependence) as in formal signs, but for a relation of *convenientiae* which is essential to the symbol. For the symbol, considered precisely as symbol and not simply as sign, the *rapport institue* required for arbitrary signs is precisely what is lacking. The importance of this aptitude cannot be overemphasised, and it is well expressed in the following passage by two modern writers:

« Like « image », « symbol » continues to appear in widely different contexts and very different purposes. It appears as a term in logic, in mathematics, in semantics and semiotics and epistemology; it has also had a long history in the world of theology (« symbol » is one synonym for « creed »), of liturgy, of the fine arts, and of poetry. The shared element in all these current uses is probably that of something standing for, representing, something else. But the Greek verb, which means to throw together, to compare, suggests that the idea of analogy between sign and signified was originally present. It still survives in some of the modern uses of the term. Algebraic and logical « symbols » are conventional, agreed upon signs; but religious symbols are based on some intrinsic relation between « sign » and the thing « signified »³²⁹.

It may help to clarify this if we note that many symbols,

³²⁸ He writes: « ...le symbole est toujours un signe sensible, un signe discursif; il est essentiellement autre, étant lui-même une chose qui, avant de signifier, a une suffisante raison d'être; et c'est un *signe institutionnel*, car le rapport qui unit le symbole au symbolisé, à travers leur diversité, n'est donc pas un rapport fondé sur leur nature, mais un rapport institué et perçu par un esprit » o. c., p. 315. We must also note in passing that he requires a certain dependence for his notion of sign which he defines as: « Un substitut, un vicaire, regardant l'objet signifié, comme mesuré par lui, et le représentant, pour le manifester à une puissance rationnelle de connaître ». O. c., p. 301.

³²⁹ R. WELLEK and A. WARREN, *Theory of literature*, New York 1956, p. 178 sq. Cf. also BRUNSHVIG (quoted in ROGUET, o. c., p. 316, n. 1), « Le symbole s'oppose au signe artificiel en ce qu'il possède un pouvoir interne de représentation ». It may be that ROGUET was led to this theory by his desire to consider everything that is nowadays classed as a symbol; many of these, especially in the sphere of mathematics, are undoubtedly *signa ad placitum*. Another criticism which can be levelled at him is that he appears to make the distinction between the *signa ad placitum* which are not symbols and those which are, depend on existence — which is clearly contrary to thomistic principles. He writes; « ...le propre du symbole, nous l'avons dit, c'est de constituer, avant d'être signe, un être consistant et stable » o. c., p. 316 — Finally we might note that the word symbol comes from the greek *σύνβολον* which is a compound of *σύν* and *βάλλω* which means to put together. It was a sign of recognition constituted by two parts of a broken object; when these were rejoined their correspondence proved their original unity. Cf. *Enciclopedia Filosofica* s. v.

before becoming formally such, were arbitrary signs having a well-defined signification based on their natural aptitude to signify. This arbitrary sign is included in most symbols but it does not constitute it a symbol. The symbol is such as a result of its evocative possibilities; the original clear-cut signification can be one of a whole hierarchy of significations which are evoked or again, at times, it may not even be averted to. This is clearly the case for the fish-symbol which represents Christ the Saviour. Initially it was a simple arbitrary sign used to hide Christ from the eyes of the pagans. However, with time and meditation, it has acquired such a richness of symbolism as to be almost inexhaustible. With the example that St. Thomas gives, however, it is different. The water flowing from the side of Christ was not a sign of anything (beyond the fact that He was dead). It had a natural aptitude to signify however, which was quickly grasped by Christians and these read various meanings into it. Thus, it appears, the symbol, formally speaking, does not belong to the class of arbitrary signs — it must be placed in a class by itself.

The symbol acts as a sign because of its natural aptitude to evoke some other idea or because of its natural similarity with some object; as a result of this the symbol can act as a sign and bring the mind to a knowledge of the signification. The actual sign (symbol-sign) formally speaking is the rational relation seen by the mind between the symbol and what it symbolises but, and here is the essential difference between the formal consideration of signs and symbols, the symbol is only potentially a sign. It can truly be said that it is only analogically a sign just like the first class of signs we considered. Arbitrary signs remain such even when not considered by the mind since, morally speaking, the designation remains which was used to join sign and signification. The symbol however, since its capacity to signify depends to a great extent on the subjective capacity to see and use the fundamental natural aptitude, is only a sign when the mind sees or makes the connection³³⁰.

The symbol-sign and the sign differ essentially also in their

³³⁰ What E. MASURE writes of signs is truer of symbols. «(Le signification) celle-ci était déjà présente dans son symbole avant les opérations mentales du sujet: mais si celui-ci l'aperçoit, c'est parce qu'il en possédait déjà une semblable dans sa mémoire, ou plus exactement parce que ses souvenirs lui fournissaient l'idée du lien qui existe entre les deux termes à rapprocher et à unir». *Le passage du visible à l'invisible*, LE SIGNE, *Psychologie, Histoire, Mystère*, Lille 1953 p. 87.

make-up; the latter is, ideally something which is easily forgotten and which leads, by its very nature, immediately to the signified; this signification is definite and clear-cut. The former, the symbol-sign, halts the mind at itself; it is obscure and rather opaque as a sign; it is not measured by the signification; its signification, for that matter, is uncertain. In this way it is inferior to a formal precise sign. However, its evocative possibilities put it on a level far above a simple sign. Depending on the sensibility, education, culture, imagination, dispositions etc. of the person confronted with the symbol, what is evoked can vary greatly. What is seen will differ. One will see one object only while another will contemplate a whole series which can be quite diverse. One will stop at some superficial meaning while another will plunge to an unsuspected depth. The symbol is so rich then as to be practically susceptible of an indefinite number of significations. From this point of view we can define a symbol with Roguet as: a sign-potentiality (potency), « potentialité qui ne sera jamais complètement actualisée et ne le sera en tout cas que dans l'esprit du sujet connaissant »³³¹. Since the greater the natural aptitude to signify, the less need there is for an arbitrary decision, the symbol can require a greater or lesser knowledge of its institution as a sign so that it may act³³². Thus, the dead who arose before Christ can be seen, by anyone who knows Christ and his power, to have been a sign that He also would arise from the dead. For the fish to symbolise Christ, a certain knowledge of the history of this symbol is required; once this is attained, however, the richness of the fish-symbol is unlimited. For the miracle to be a sign (symbol) of the supernatural certain subjective dispositions are required, as we shall see.

Summing up then we can say that St. Thomas does not always use the word sign in its strict formal sense. In its widest use anything which can be used (because of its relation, be it

³³¹ O. c., p. 317. However, we can note with a modern author: « Le symbole qui veut transmettre une signification profondément vécue ne doit pas dire trop. Il doit suggérer plutôt qu'expliquer. Il ne doit pas fondre celui que le reçoit dans un moule, en lui imposant sa signification, en le chargeant de son contenu. Il doit plutôt *féconder* l'homme, afin que l'intelligence de sa signification naisse de l'activité propre de celui qui a reçu le signe ». P. SCHÖNENBERG, *Le Signe* in « *Lumen Vitae* » 14 (1959) p. 15.

³³² In all cases this institution is more of a *conditio sine qua non* than part of the essence of the symbol-sign.

natural or conventional) in the process of knowledge to lead to some signification can be called a sign. This potentiality is sufficient. Between these « potential » signs and signs which qualify for the title in its strictest sense, there is another group: symbols. These are potential signs, it is true, though less arbitrary than those of the first class. They act as signs as a result of a combination between their natural aptitude to signify something and some arbitrary institution. Because of their potentiality they qualify for the title of sign just as those of the first class do; yet not being naturally dependent on or measured by any specific signification, their action, while really based on the natural aptitude, depends also, to varying degrees, on arbitrary institution and on the mental equipment of the person who uses them³³³.

In passing, and this may help to shed some additional light on a concept which is not too easily grasped, we can note that the symbol is particularly well-suited to represent the transcendental realities of religion, and, as we hope to show, has a rather important part to play in God's provident plan. We can use both concepts and symbols to represent this order. Some of our concepts are more abstract than others: for example, « being » is more abstract than the notion « status ». The concept, in so far as it is spiritual and transcends matter, represents the transcendental spiritual reality, but only in an inadequate manner since the transcendental order is not only spiritual; it is concrete. In order to try to represent this « realness » a series of concepts concerning the same object must be joined together. Even then, all these concepts taken together fail to exhaust the reality adequately.

The symbol, on the contrary, is something concrete and retains some of its concreteness when used to represent the transcendental order. In so far as it retains its materiality it does not adequately express the spiritual aspect of the transcendent order; for example, the Paschal candle, while concrete, does not adequately represent participation in the light of Christ. However, since the symbol is based on intuition and gives an intuition, it can see beyond the purely material element, and thus its very materiality, in transcending itself, is an asset in

³³³ Cf. WELLEK and WARREN, *o. c.*, p. 179; A. VERGOTE, *Le symbole* in RPL 57 (1958) p. 203 sqq. The latter brings out the fact that the symbol does not always refer to one object only but can cover a whole range of things.

representing the « realness » of the spiritual. The symbol is not so articulate as the concept, but it says more *globaliter*. The supernatural world is not a conceptual system, but something very concrete and a symbol can reach this reality. At the same time the symbol supplies for its own deficiency — that is, of remaining material — by intuitively transcending the material element itself and going beyond it. The paradox is that this materiality of the symbol, while being opposed to the spirituality of the transcendental it is to represent, helps our understanding of the « realness » of this transcendental order. It is the imagination which is creative of the symbol. Conceptualism, if overemphasized, tends to sterilize the imagination, and leave man with these cold concepts alone. Symbols thus help to vivify man's contact with the supernatural and by vivifying it, help to deepen it ³³⁴.

5. *The sign as a proof.*

For St. Thomas there were two ways of arriving at certitude: one strictly scientific; the other non-scientific.

³³⁴ The main difference between St. Thomas' notion of sign and that of modern authors lies in the angle from which they view it. As is evident from our analysis, he generally considers signs objectively, without any actual relation to the mind: if two objects *can be* related in any way then a sign-signification relation is already present in embryo. The function of the sign, which corresponds with its finality, is 'soft-pedelled' in this formal consideration: the sign as a relation. Modern authors prefer to insist on the subjective elements which must come into play in the *use* of a sign. Their considerations centre more on the finality of the sign therefore and they tend to ignore the essence. This attitude limits the perspective to signs which are already actually such — either naturally or conventionally — and while admitting the possibility of St. Thomas' concept, they would not regard the 'potential' signs as signs until they had been actualized. Cf. L. MONDEN o. c., p. 41 where he demands that the relation be «préétablie» whereas, for St. Thomas this is not absolutely necessary.

The idea of the sign as a moment of intersubjective communication is not insisted upon by St. Thomas, though, in reality, it cannot be otherwise. However, we are poles apart from St. Thomas in seeing a sign formally as such only when it is actually playing a part in this relationship. Then again modern authors have a tendency to exaggerate in the emphasis placed on symbols, as though symbolic-signs were the only true signs. The old-fashioned notion of the sign as a sensible object leading to the knowledge of something else is, as we can see in the passage just quoted, decried.

We do not wish to give the impression though that the modern philosophy of signs is without its merits; indeed, its dynamic consideration tends to uncover some of the vital characteristics of signs often left in oblivion by the scholastics. But when St. Thomas speaks of miracles as signs we cannot presume that he is expressing the same idea as Fr. Monden with the title of his work: *Le miracle signe de salut*; this must be proved. It must be proved that the miracle is a sign of salvation for St. Thomas.

The strictly scientific proof involves the reasoning process known as the syllogism; this can take many forms. In a general way it can be defined as any rational procedure enabling man to arrive at true and certain conclusions — to arrive at certitude. One of the methods analysed by St. Thomas — induction — works from the observation of particular events to the cause or general principle which governs them. Induction is commonly used by the positive sciences in their efforts to uncover the laws of nature. In some cases one single observation is sufficient for induction. Thus when an observed phenomenon flows from the very nature of the object examined we can induce the general law which governs this phenomenon; the phenomenon in this case is a sign demonstrating the nature of the object in question³³⁵.

Even though induction, as a form of argumentation, is essentially different from the syllogism, it contains one within its very structure. Thus when dealing with induction (taken in its strict sense), as the data from which the intellect starts is evident and likewise the causal link with the proof, the mind has objective evidence for its assent. This objective certitude can give rise to the true *adaequatio intellectus cum re* because of intrinsic evidence.

Objective certitude, however, does not result from syllogisms alone. In many cases it can be caused by testimony. In this latter case the object is not presented to the intellect as evident (and hence there can be no strict immediate necessitating *adaequatio intellectus cum re*); however, due to the evident knowledge and probity of the person who testifies to the truth of the object, it is evidently credible. The intellect can assent confidently to this truth. This is another form of objective certitude and can give rise to a subjective state of mind free from all fear of error. In this case the intellect is not moved by its proper object — evident truth — but by the will and thus the proof is indirect.

The intellect can be set in motion in either of two ways. If some truth is presented in all its clarity to the intellect there is perfect intrinsic evidence and so the intellect must assent;

³³⁵ In certain crystalline minerals the amazing regularity of the geometric pattern observed could not be other than an essential property; however, even in this case, the single observation is, in fact, multiple: each element of the geometric pattern is a phenomenon in itself: the complexus of these is what is observed. In most cases it is not so simple and even after having examined numerous effects, the nature of the law is not clear.

there is no room left for doubt. This is the case with first principles and the conclusions which are logically drawn from them. When, however, the truth is lacking some of its lucidity, when there is a certain obscurity in its presentation or, even more, when it is completely obscure, then, since the intellect is moved directly only by what it clearly perceives as true, and in this case there is only imperfect evidence or no evidence at all, the will must intervene; the intellect is moved indirectly. In the case where there is imperfect evidence obscurity arises due to real difficulties and so the mind remains in a state of real doubt. The intervention of the will is essential if the intellect is to assent to one opinion rather than to another.

When the truth presented to the intellect is obscure, the intellect need not move at all. It requires the intervention of the will. This intervention depends to a large degree on the subjective dispositions of the subject. When the intellect consents because of the intrinsic evidence of something, then it is not free as regards its consent; it is free to consider the truth or not, but, if it considers it, it must consent. When the intellect consents under the influence of the will the consent or assent, as such, is absolutely free: there is no truth *compelling* it to assent. The assent given in this case is certain but not with metaphysical or physical certitude; the certitude is moral³³⁶. In this field of indirect proof signs have an important part to play. They authenticate doctrine so as to make it credible³³⁷. We must insist on the subjective element which is characteristic of this type of proof or demonstration. We do not wish to insinuate that the subject projects something, that he puts something in the object which is not there objectively already. What is discovered really exists; however, it is only discovered by those who are suitably disposed³³⁸. The symbol plays a great part in this type of proof; depending on the subjective dispositions it can lead one to « see », to arrive at moral certitude, while leaving another completely indifferent.

³³⁶ This moral certitude must not, however, be confused with that state of mind which, sufficient as a rule for moral acts when true certitude is unattainable, is called certitude by the moral theologians. In this state, the possibility of the opposite is not excluded but is considered as highly improbable. True moral certitude (which, of itself, is conditional) can be as strong as metaphysical or absolute certitude. Cf. L. BILLOT, *De Virtutibus infusis*, 3rd. ed., Rome 1921, pp. 200 sqq.

³³⁷ For an example of this indirect proof *ex signo* cf. ST I. II, 102, 5 ad 1; III, 4, 6 ad 3 etc.

³³⁸ Cf. E. MASURE, *o. c.* pp. 117-128.

IV. THE MIRACLE AS A SIGN.

The genius of St. Thomas is expressed in the synthesis he elaborated of the various facets of the history of salvation. He was essentially a theologian and viewed everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. By this we do not intend to deny that he treated miracles from a philosophical or from a metaphysical point of view³³⁹; but if we consider this aspect solely we do not get his complete doctrine. His metaphysics are completed by his theology. Most of his commentators are content to treat of the nature and of the various divisions of miracles; they add a few pages, a kind of post-script, dealing with their finality. This is an incomplete consideration of the miracle and does not do justice to the Angelic Doctor. For the theologian a study of the finality of the miracle is essential to a complete understanding of St. Thomas' theological synthesis.

The theology of the miracle stems from an appreciation of their place in God's provident plan for the created universe. As we know, St. Thomas presents the majestic plan of the *ordo naturae creatae* in its *exitus a Deo-reditus ad Deum*; everything in the created order has its being from the creator who also dignified it with a participation in his activity. God governs the universe employing, in an extensive way, the collaboration of his creatures; he governs them to lead them to himself. For rational creatures his plan is essentially a « supernatural » one — his providence directs them to an intimate knowledge of himself. The great harmony which exists under divine government — the *ordo naturae creatae* — is in no way disturbed by God's intervention in a way which is not normal, in an unusual way; these interventions are part of the *ordo universae* and in no way upset its harmony. However, the very fact that God acts outside the *ordo naturae creatae*, that he acts in an « unusual » manner, leads us to the question why: leads us, in other words, to the problem of the finality of miracles.

It is difficult to convey the wide range of meanings of the latin word 'finis' with one English equivalent. The words « end » and « finish », used in the sense of terminating, completing or consummating something, are about the nearest one can come to an accurate translation. In latin, *finis* signifies a ter-

³³⁹ V. BOUBLIK, *o. c.*

minus at which something has arrived and beyond which it need not go. In other words, when something is finished, perfected, completed or consummated it is at its 'finis'³⁴⁰.

The word *finis* is used in its most proper sense when referring to the motives which govern a man's actions. We can speak in this sense, for example, of a man being « finalized » by the vision of God. When a man intends to act, the fundamental moving or motive force in him — his will — must desire some end, must be terminated by something. What governs or terminates any action, any activity, of an intellectual being is precisely the notion of *finis* which we have to discuss.

This *finis* is generally defined as « id cuius gratia cetera fiunt ». For St. Thomas, who follows Aristotle, the *finis* with respect to actions, performs a service similar to that of the first principles in cognition. Man is moved by the desire to arrive at an end, and to reach this, he acts in a certain way; since this activity flows from the *finis* as its effect, the *finis* is a cause: the final cause³⁴¹.

From the point of view of the efficient cause, there is a division of the final cause which is of importance for a better understanding of the problem we are about to treat, namely, the *finis operis* and the *finis operantis*. The *finis operis* is that effect which is immediately brought about; the *finis operantis* is the motive which prompts this action³⁴². The *finis operis*, as such, is not a final cause in the strict sense: it is only a means and is not the ultimate reason for which all the other actions are performed. It can however, be a true final cause; this occurs when the *finis operis* coincides with the *finis operantis*.

³⁴⁰ Thus, where a line finishes is at the end of the line (*finis lineae*); when a motor-car is constructed or a suit of clothes is completed, it is finished (*finita*); when a meal is consumed we speak of the end of the meal (*finis prandii*); death is the end of man's life (*finis vitae*).

³⁴¹ In the order of execution, the final cause is the last of the four causes. However, since it is the cause which is conceived first and which moves all the other causes, it is the principle one. Cf. *ST* I. II, 1, 1 ad 1. The final cause attracts by its goodness and thus moves one to desire the means to attain the possession of this good. If the good is already possessed then its attractiveness moves the possessor to desire to share it with others — *bonum est diffusivum sui*.

³⁴² An example of the *finis operis* is fire produced by striking a match or a house by building according to plan. In the first case the *finis operantis* can be because the person is cold or because he wishes to cook something or again he may wish to send smoke signals. In the second example it can be so as to have a place in which to live or for some monetary gain.

When this is not the case the *finis operis*, of its very nature, must have an aptitude enabling the *finis operantis* to be achieved, the relation between them being that of a means towards an end. If someone really desires a certain goal and is moved to acquire it, he must use adequate means for his conquest³⁴³.

The necessary relation between the intrinsic finality of something and the finality sought by the efficient cause is of importance even when we enter into the realm of the divinity. God is not moved by any exterior final cause; he is absolutely free; he predetermines the immediate finality of his works. However, once he has selected a definite order, to attain this finality he must use apt means; the intrinsic finality of his works must be such as to enable the finality he established to be attained³⁴⁴.

St. Thomas tells us that the miracle is a divine testimony precisely because it is a « signum expressum et evidens veritatis divinae »³⁴⁵. The miracle is a sign because it manifests something. The miracle has its place in God's provident plan as a sign which manifests something supernatural, thus acting as a testimony³⁴⁶. From the function of the miracle, St. Thomas argues to the rightful application of the epithet 'sign'. We shall proceed in the opposite direction. From a consideration of the doctrine concerning the miracle, we shall establish, first of all, the aptness of this denomination — see whether the miracle is analogically or univocally a sign. Then, since the function of a sign is to manifest, we shall discuss what the miracle manifests or proves. Finally we shall examine how this manifestation is brought about: whether by strict scientific proof or by non-scientific demonstration.

³⁴³ Thus if a mechanic wishes to fly he must construct an aeroplane; a motor-car would not do since it is inadequate to attain the *finis operantis*. The aeroplane (*finis operis*) is only a means and, as such, it is not a final cause; however, it is an apt means.

This is not to say that the *finis operis* limits the action of the efficient cause so that he cannot use an object in the attainment of an end having absolutely no connection with the *finis operis*. Thus I can use a clock as a paper-weight to keep my documents from being scattered even though the *finis operis* of the clock is to show the time. However, and this may explain better what we have tried to express above, if I want a paper-weight, whatever object I use must, of its very nature, be an object apt to act as such; it must be something heavy, since otherwise the finality will not be achieved. Thus the clock can serve as a paper-weight precisely because it is heavy and not because it is a clock.

³⁴⁴ Cf. *ST* III, 44, 3.

³⁴⁵ *De Pot* 6, 5.

³⁴⁶ Cf. *Hebr.* 2, 1: 99; *ST* II, II, 178, 1 ad 3; 2 ad 3; *Joan* 9, 3: 1348; 5, 6: 817.

1. *The miracle — a natural sign.*

From the comparison which was instituted during the synthesis we made of St. Thomas' doctrine between the two series of texts, one concerning the proposed finality and the other the actual effects which were produced, it is clear that for the Angelic Doctor the miracle was effective as regard its demonstrative finality: the effects actually produced coincide with the proposed finality³⁴⁷. Thus the miracle is in fact a demonstration. As we saw, this is the function of a sign but it is not unique; it is not a distinguishing mark since many objects which are not signs demonstrate or manifest. However, St. Thomas justifies his almost synonymous use of the words signs and miracles precisely because of the miracle's demonstrative capacity. The function of a miracle is to demonstrate something and thus the miracle is a sign in some sense. We have seen that St. Thomas applies the denomination « sign » to three diverse classes of objects. Taken in its widest sense, a sign is anything knowable which has some relation to something less evident and therefore can lead to a knowledge of this object. The strict notion of sign requires that the relation be an essential one — being that of what measures to what is measured. In the third case both the former senses are found to a certain degree. What we have to examine now is to which of these categories does a miracle, considered formally as a sign, belong; and what is the unique relation which formally constitutes it as a sign.

We also noted above that a comparison of the same two series of texts made it evident that those which dealt with the end actually achieved by miracles showed a marked insistence on the fact that they were manifestations of the divinity or of divine power. The fundamental reason for the efficiency of the miracle as a proof is that it shows forth the divinity; the miracle achieves its results by being first and foremost a *testimonium Dei*, a sign of God's power³⁴⁸. The divinity of Christ or the divine origin of his teaching, considered as the effect produced by miracles, is a thread which flows constantly through St. Thomas' works from the *Sentences* to the *Summa*³⁴⁹. It is because of this that the miracle can be a testimony for some-

³⁴⁷ Cf. Eph. Carm. XX (1969) pp. 47-51.

³⁴⁸ Cf. *Hebr.* 2, 1: 99; *Joan* 9, 3: 1345.

³⁴⁹ Cf. 3 *Sent.* d. 16, q. 1, a. 3; *Gal* 3, 2: 138; *Hebr* 2, 1: 99; *De Pot* 6, 5; *Joan* 5, 6: 817; 9, 3: 1348; 11, 7: 1564; 14, 3: 1898; *ST* III, 43, 1 etc.

thing beyond the powers of human reason. This is the means used in attaining the ultimate end proposed for miracles: that of being a proof or a demonstration³⁵⁰. It is clear though that while the principle aim for which miracles are performed, the end for which they primarily exist, is to act as proof or demonstrations of the truth of the revealed doctrine, they achieve this end by being a clear sign of God's intervention. It is thus true that the *manifestatio divinitatis* was one of the reasons for which the miracle was performed by Christ; but because it is a means towards some further end rather than an end in itself, St. Thomas insists more on the aspect of means.

The primary effect actually produced by a miracle is thus a manifestation of divine power. The miracle is an exclusively divine prerogative. From the very nature of the miracle as something « *praeter ordinem totius naturae creatae* »³⁵¹, it is something exclusive, indicating by its very presence that God has intervened, acting outside his ordinary providence for creation, just as surely as the reasoning process indicates man, or smoke indicates fire. There is a real cause-effect relation between the divine power and the miracle which is independent of whether it is considered or not³⁵². The effect (the miracle) is in a certain sense measured by the divine power.

It is thus evident that the miracle is a natural sign of divine power or of God. The miracle is an evident sign of God's intervention and this independently of any institution or custom. It is thus not only a sign in a generic, but in the proper formal sense of the word. The formality of the sign is in the relation between God — the agent — and this exclusive and characteristic effect of his power. As something characteristic, the miracle correspond to the divine power as what is measured corresponds to its measure; as something exclusive, God alone is its cause.

The miracle is thus a natural sign of God. The function of any sign, as we saw, is to lead to a knowledge of its signification — to lead to the *res significata*. The sign is a substitute;

³⁵⁰ Since it is only a means, it is not surprising to find less attention given to it in the series of texts regarding the proposed finality. This is not to say, of course, that it is totally absent. In the question concerning Christ it is insisted upon (Cf. *ST* III, 43, 4; 44, 4 etc.). It is mentioned in *De Potentia* (6, 1 ad 4), in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (3, 154) and in the *Pars Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae* (111, 4).

³⁵¹ Cf. Eph. Carm. XX (1969) pp. 43-46.

³⁵² Cf. *ST* III, 43, 4 ad 3; *Joan* 5, 6: 817; 10, 6: 1465-66.

its only reason for existing is to lead to what it signifies. What is the precise aspect of the divinity which is attained? Does the miracle, as a natural sign, lead to God the creator or to God the author of the order of grace?

We must remember that the essence of a miracle does not consist in what is produced but in the way in which it is produced; the miracle is an *actio* which surpasses the powers of nature³⁵³. It is performed by an agent who is beyond nature, and is consequently called supernatural. St. Thomas says that the finality of the miracle is to lead to «aliquid supernaturale»³⁵⁴. The miracle, though it is known naturally, is something above the powers of the *ordo naturae creatae* — it is something supernatural. Is this supernatural, which can be known naturally, sufficient to lead us to the supernatural order? Can this supernatural action lead us to a knowledge of God as the author of the order of grace?

To answer these questions we must study the notion of supernatural and see in what sense it is applied to the miracle.

2. Natural and supernatural in the miracle.

Writing of the beatific vision, St. Thomas teaches that the knowledge of the essence of God attained to in this state is beyond the natural capacity of any created intellect; to know this essence a certain supernatural disposition must be added

³⁵³ There are numerous texts dealing with miracles where St. Thomas shows that the miracle is something dynamic and not static; the miracle is an *opus miraculosum* (I *Sent* d. 47, q. 1, a. 4; 3 *Sent* d. 2, q. 2, a. 2 ad 5; 4 *Sent* d. 17, q. 1, a. 5 ad 1; *ST* I, II, 113, 10 ad 1; ad 2) or, more precisely, an *operatio miraculosa* (*De Pot* 6, 5). God works miraculously (3 *Sent* d. 3, q. 2, a. 2 ad 5; *De Ver* 12, 3; ad 18; 25, 7; *ST* I, 12, 11 ad 2; 104, 4; II, II, 154, 2 ad 2; III, 28, 2 ad 3; 44, 3; *Joan* 20, 4: 2527; *Comp Theol* 219; *Boet de Trin* I, 2, 3 ad 1); it is a manner of producing effects; the effect is produced by way of the miracle (3 *Sent* d. 13, q. 3, a. 1, obj. 4; 4 *Sent* d. 17, q. 1, a. 5, q. la 1; *ST* III, 28, 1 ad 4; *Hebr* 2, 1: 99). When describing the miracle in itself, St. Thomas insists on the fact that it is a divine work, done in a divine way (*SCG* 4, 27; *Comp Theol* 136) or, what is equivalent, it is an *operatio divinae virtutis* (I *Sent* d. 47, q. 1, a. 4; 2 *Sent* d. 18, q. 1, a. 3; *De Ver* 12, 3; *Matt* 24, 3: 1945; *ST* II, II, 171, 1; III, 43, 2; *Comp Theol* 154 etc.), something God reserves to himself alone. Miracles are changes brought about by a supernatural agent (4 *Sent* d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, q. la 3; d. 33, q. 2, a. 2, q. la 1; *ST* III, 13, 2), who works in a supernatural way (3 *Sent* d. 3, q. 2, a. 2; *SCG* I, 6; I *Cor* 14, 1: 812-813; *Gal* 3, 2: 128; *De Pot* 5, 4; *De Anima* q. un, a. 21 ad 10; *ST* II, II, 178, 1 ad 1 etc.), namely, beyond the faculties or power of operation of all created being and without their help (*SCG* 3, 99; 102; *De Pot* 6, 1). The miracle is thus evidently something supernatural.

³⁵⁴ *ST* II, II, 178, 1 ad 3.

to the intellect³⁵⁵. Faith, which takes the place of the beatific vision here on earth, is « *de rebus invisibilibus quae rationem humanam excedunt* »³⁵⁶. The knowledge which is had in faith exceeds anything which can be acquired naturally; its object is not comprehended in the proper object of the intellect³⁵⁷. The formal object of faith is the *veritas prima* which exists « *super omnem naturalem cognitionem creaturae* »³⁵⁸. Vision, which is faith in full bloom, is the end towards which man strives; it is something which exceeds all his active capacities. Cognition is based on being; thus, as the knowledge acquired in the beatific vision is above man's natural powers, the objects of this cognition must also be above nature. Being above nature in themselves it is clear that their attainment is also above natural powers³⁵⁹.

The sense of the word supernatural in this latter case is evidently different from that which is involved when discussing miracles; there is a fundamental distinction of the « supernatural » in question. The truths of religion, the inner life of God etc. are objects which are outside the natural order; they are called « supernatural ». The miracle is an action of God exceeding the possibilities of created nature and it also is called « supernatural ». A legitimate question arises as regards the sense in which the word « supernatural » is used in these cases. The solution to this question is of importance for a proper understanding of the finality and the function of the miracle³⁶⁰.

Since « supernatural » is a correlative term it is necessary, first of all, to declare briefly the related term « natural »; to arrive at the sense of this adjective we must start from the noun « nature ».

³⁵⁵ Cf. *ST* I, 12, 4; II, II, 5, 1; I, II, 5, 5.

³⁵⁶ Cf. *ST* I, 32, 1.

³⁵⁷ Cf. *ST* II, II, 5, 1.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ This is clarified in St. Thomas' treatise on grace. Describing the difference between God's love and man's, he concludes that grace, which results from the special love of God for man by which man is lifted above his natural condition and made a participant of God's life, is something supernatural in man. This effect is something concrete; it is not simply a *motio* or a *cognitio*; it is an habitual gift infused by God into the soul (*ST* II, II, 23, 2 etc.).

³⁶⁰ This is very necessary in the case of miracles since the application of the notion of supernatural here is so confused by some writers that we have P. Rousselot (cf. *Les yeux de la foi* in « *Recherches de science religieuse* » 1 (1910) 241-259; 444-475) arguing to intrinsic supernaturality — an equivocal use of the word — and R. Verardo (*Naturale e Soprannaturale nel miracolo* in « *Sacra Doctrina* » 5 (1960) 397-448) asserting a complete independence from the supernatural order — an abusive or equivocal use of the word.

Nature is a term which has various meanings in the works of St. Thomas. It can be used to signify anything which really exists, be it created or uncreated; preferentially, though, it is used for created nature³⁶¹. When he sets out formally to clarify the notion, however, he follows Aristotle by giving its genesis³⁶². *Nature* derives from *nativitas* and so, first and foremost, it is used to signify the birth of living beings. Since the principle of birth is interior, the word nature soon came to acquire the general sense of an interior principle governing any kind of motion. These interior principles can be either material or formal and, since the essence of a being is perfected by its form, nature acquired a transferred sense meaning the essence of a thing. The nature of a being is its essence³⁶³; there is a distinction, however, between nature and essence. The nature of a being is this being considered from a dynamic point of view: the nature is the active principle of a being; the essence is the being considered more from a static point of view: the essence is the elements of which a being is composed. Nature is the most fundamental thing in a being. It is an intrinsic principle manifested by its mode of action. Thus, nature is the essence of a being considered as the first principle of all activity or passivity which rightly belongs to that being. Nature is the principle from which all the natural activity of a being flows and which, consequently, enables it to receive all the impressions adapted to its receptive powers³⁶⁴. As St. Thomas notes, though nature is the *principle* of the activity of a being, even when this being is perfect it cannot act without the intervention of God. Indeed all activity is from God as the prime mover who works interiorly, closer to the being than nature itself³⁶⁵.

That which flows from this interior principle or which is according to its inclinations, is called natural. St. Thomas defines « natural » as that which becomes a being according to its substance³⁶⁶. From these general indications it is evident that « natural » can be applied in quite a number of cases; e. g.

³⁶¹ Cf. *ST* I, 115, 1 ad 1; 63, 3.

³⁶² Cf. ARISTOTLE, 2 *Phy* 1, 192; 5 *Metaphy* 4, 1014.

³⁶³ Cf. *ST* I, 60, 1; III, 2, 1.

³⁶⁴ Cf. *ST* I, 39, 2 ad 3; 60, 2; 82, 1; I, II, 49, 2; 3 ad 3; III, 14, 2; I, 76, 1. « Principium motus et quietis in eo in quo est primo et per se et non secundum accidens » Aristotle, II *Phy* c. 1, 192. Cf. also 4 *Sent* d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, q. la 3.

³⁶⁵ Cf. *ST* I, II, 109, 1; 6, 1 ad 3; 68, 2.

³⁶⁶ Cf. *ST* I, 82, 1; I, II, 6, 1 ad 3; III, 2, 12; 4 *Sent* d. 17, q. 3, a. 1, q. la 2; d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, q. la 3 etc.; *ST* I, II, 10, 1.

1. The principles which constitute a being are called natural; thus matter and form for material bodies; essence and existence for the angels.

2. The faculties, which are rooted in a being, and their consequent activities are natural; the intellect is as natural to man as is mirth.

3. The reaction of a being under certain appropriate stimuli is natural. It is natural for the body to feel heat; for the eye to react to light³⁶⁷.

4. Certain requirements of a being are natural: — those without which a being cannot attain the end for which it was created. Thus, for any knowledge to take place, a certain *prae-motio* from God is needed³⁶⁸.

In one word nature is the principle of determination and of limitation; it is the principle of each individual order. We can sum this up in the latin tag: *naturale est quidquid convenit re constitutive, consecutive, vel exigitive*.

The notion of the natural order — *ordo naturalis* — is intimately connected with, and flows from, the notion of natural. St. Thomas defines order as: « *dispositio secundum prius et posterius relative ad aliquod principium* »³⁶⁹. Order results when various dependents or inferiors are arranged in their relative positions of importance with regard to the principle from which they depend. There is a certain order when objects are considered in relation to any principle whether this exists or not³⁷⁰. Thus the *ordo naturalis* is that harmony which results from the hierarchy established by God in nature. The scale of being, ranging between pure spirits and pure potency, depends on God and is created for his extrinsic glory. God pertains to

³⁶⁷ St. Thomas writes: « *naturale unicuique rei est quod ei a Deo inditum est* » (SCG 3, 100); np. whatever God decides to give a being is, in a certain sense, natural even though not everything worked in nature is natural. Cf. ST I. II, 10, 4 ad 2; 94, 5 ad 2; 113, 10; III, 44, 2 ad 1; I, 105, 6 ad 2.

³⁶⁸ Cf. ST I. II, 109, 1; 2 *Sent* d. 28, q. 1, a. 5; ST I. II, 111, 1 ad 2; I, 21, 1 ad 3.

³⁶⁹ ST II. II, 26, 1; cf. I, 105, 6; *Quodl* 5, 10, 1. Note that here we are dealing with the *ordo naturalis* and not with the *ordo naturae creatae* or *ordo universi* which we saw above. The two concepts are not independent; the *ordo naturalis* could be called the form of the *ordo naturae*.

³⁷⁰ Cf. ST II. II, 26, 6.

this order as an extrinsic cause. He is the creator and conservator and the end to which this harmonic whole tends³⁷¹.

This is a consideration of order in general. However, we can always look at it from the point of view of one of the members of the order and see what his relation to the other components implies. Order is a relative notion and we must now consider man's point of view in this order; this involves a consideration of his capacities and of his limits. St. Thomas repeats consistently that there are two possible perfections for man; one beyond his powers to which consequently he must be helped extrinsically; and one proportionate to his nature which he can attain by his own unaided activity. The faculty which distinguishes man from his fellow creatures is his intellect, the proper object of which is the essences of the sensible beings surrounding him³⁷². Man can reason to the possibility of non-material beings and can come to know of their existence (as, *de facto*, he does), from the material and sensible effects they produce; it is always an indirect knowledge — a knowledge by analogy. Thus God is known from creatures³⁷³. Using the principle of causality, man can come to know God analogically. God, known from his creation and loved as author of this work is the end to which man would be directed in a purely natural order. In this order thus, for man, we must include:

1. His faculties and their consequent activities by which he can come to know God from created nature.
2. His activity; always as a subordinate dependent cause who needs the continual activity of God's helping hand.
3. The efficient and the final cause of this order: God.
4. The means necessary to attain this end.

We must not conceive of nature as totally closed and indifferent to any other order, however: this is especially true when we know (as we do), that nature can be perfected by an extra-

³⁷¹ Cf. J. LEGRAND, *L'Univers et L'Homme dans la Philosophie de saint Thomas*, Bruxelles 1946 — 2 vols; J. H. WRIGHT, *The order of the Universe*, Rome 1957. For other studies on the notion of order cf. V. BOUBLIK, *o. c.* p. 18.

³⁷² Cf. *ST* I, II, 109, 1; *De Ver* 18, 2.

³⁷³ « per viam excellentiae et remotionis » *ST* I, 13, 1.

natural order and that grace, by which this order is participated, is nature's highest perfection. This is especially important when studying St. Thomas. His vision of the world, of creation, was essentially a supernatural one and God's providence aimed at bringing man back to the full enjoyment of God as he is in himself. This extra-natural order is called the supernatural. For the present it is sufficient to note that, being a perfection, it is false to present it as some kind of a superstructure added to nature and perfecting it extrinsically³⁷⁴. There is a specific potency in human nature for the supernatural, which must be included if we are to get a complete picture of the *ordo naturalis*³⁷⁵.

Etymologically the word « supernatural » signifies anything above and beyond the natural; hence, for a definite given being, that is supernatural which is realized in it but which exceeds what becomes it naturally. To return for a moment to our definition of natural, we recall that what belonged to the essence of a being, flowed from, or was required by it, was called natural. The supernatural is a surpassing of the natural on all these levels. Thus, for man, his essence is elevated by a new essence called grace; by this he becomes a partaker of the divine nature. His higher faculties acquire new powers of knowing and loving. In one word the *ordo naturae* is surpassed in all its elements.

As we have said, supernatural is what exceeds all the natural capacities which man of himself can actuate and all the requirements of a being; hence, it is in no way due to it³⁷⁶. This is not to say that the supernatural is not a perfection; the supernatural, even though it is extrinsic in so far as it does not pertain to the nature in which it is realized, is not contrary to it³⁷⁷.

³⁷⁴ The difficulty induced by this mode of thought is evident when we consider St. Thomas' doctrine on grace and on the beatific vision. « Gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam » (*ST I*, 1, 8 ad 2); « Proportionatur naturae ut perfectio perfectibile » (*De Ver* 27, 5); « naturaliter anima est capax gratiae » (*ST I*. II. 113, 10). The beatific vision in the « finis operationis ipsius naturae (per gratiam adiutae) » (*ST I*, 62, 3 ad 3). This naturalness is usually summed up in the term *potentia obedientialis naturae*; this *potentia*, however, must be explained correctly if we are to present a true picture of nature and if we are to avoid confusion as regards that potentiality which is in nature with respect to miracles.

³⁷⁵ The *potentia obedientialis*.

³⁷⁶ *De Ver* 14, 2.

³⁷⁷ St. Thomas explains this by using a comparison from the physical

Corresponding to the natural order seen above, we can express the supernatural order, in relation to man, schematically as follows:

1. His new quasi-essence and the elevated faculties by which he can know and love God as God reveals himself in his intimate life;

2. His activities: here again God's helping hand is needed; indeed if one can so express it, it is more necessary than in the order of nature.

3. The efficient and the final cause of this order is God; however, he is viewed under a different aspect than that of the natural order.

4. The means necessary to attain this end: revelation, sacraments etc.

An important division of the notion of supernatural is arrived at by a study of the four causes. An object can be called supernatural due to its efficient, final or formal causes³⁷⁸. When some natural effect is produced in a supernatural way, in a way beyond nature's capabilities, then this effect is said to be supernatural with respect to its efficient cause; an example is the immortality of Adam before the fall. When something natural is directed towards a supernatural end, this is said to be supernatural with respect to its final cause; the moral acquired virtues, working under the influence of charity to attain

order; namely, the nature of water. It is of the nature of water to flow from a higher level to a lower one; when the moon exerts its attraction on water, however, the opposite takes place; yet this «unnatural» motion cannot be said to be against the nature of water: it is of its very nature to respond to the attraction of the moon (cf. *ST* II. II. I, 105, 6 ad 1; *SCG* 3, 100). In a like manner it is natural for created nature to be perfected in whatever manner its creator decides. Moreover, it is St. Thomas' constant teaching that the whole supernatural «superstructure» which is donated to man is not alone a simple perfecting of his nature, but is, as it were, a second nature for him.

Human nature, speculatively considered, is immediately ordained to its natural end by which it is specified; however, it is ordainable to a supernatural end since there is an aptitude for this in human nature. The two *finis* are subordinate and not heterogeneous; the presence of the aptitude in human nature makes man perfectible by the beatific vision which is what happens in the actual order chosen by divine providence.

³⁷⁸ The material cause is the subject of the supernatural which is the *potentia obedientialis*; this is natural.

eternal life, are examples of this type of supernatural. In both of these cases we are dealing with what is entitatively natural — an object or an action — and this supernaturality is extrinsic: it is called a modal supernatural action or object.

The formal cause gives us the intrinsically or substantially supernatural. When the formality specifying the object is supernatural, when it refers to God considered in his intimate life, then it is supernatural due to its formal cause; it is intrinsically or entitatively supernatural³⁷⁹.

We can now return to the texts examined at the beginning of this section and to the difficulties there proposed. Studying the texts, it is evident that when dealing with grace, the beatific vision, faith etc., we are dealing with a range of entities whose very being is beyond the natural order: we are dealing with essentially supernatural beings³⁸⁰. In the case of miracles, on the other hand, we are dealing with an activity; an activity which lies beyond the power of created nature. The entity produced by a miracle is clearly natural³⁸¹, even though the activity leading to its production is not. These activities constitute an order apart; they do not belong strictly to the natural order since nature is not the active agent; they do not belong to the supernatural order in the same sense as grace etc., since they are not essentially supernatural and they can be known naturally. These activities are supernatural only *in so far* as they lie beyond the capacity of nature³⁸². The miraculous effect is in the natural order and thus the miracle of itself can only lead to a natural knowledge of God — to a knowledge of God as creator. The miracle in itself, considered as a natural sign of God's power, has absolutely no relation to the essentially supernatural order — it has no relation to the God of revelation³⁸³.

³⁷⁹ Cf. JOANNES A S. THOMA, *Cursus Theologicus*, Disp. XX, a. 1, Paris (Vivès) vol. 6, 1885, p. 764; SALMANTICENSIS, *Cursus Theologicus, De Gratia*, Disp. 3, dub. 3, 1, Paris (Palmé) vol. 9, 1878, p. 345. The division of the supernatural into substantial and modal is an analogical one; namely, the modally supernatural are so-called because they are causally linked with the essentially supernatural.

³⁸⁰ A natural consequence is that their efficient cause and the knowledge of them is beyond the natural order.

³⁸¹ Cf. *ST* III, 29, 1 ad 2.

³⁸² Cf. Eph. Carm. XX (1969) p. 42.

³⁸³ This is evidently what St. Thomas had in mind when he wrote: « Est autem duplex signum Christi. Unum est quod est dominus omnium... Aliud est quod est iustificator... Dedit eis ergo duo signa: unum est quod facerent miracula, per quod ostenderent quod missi sunt a Deo domino creaturae omnis... Aliud quod darent Spiritum Sanctum... ». (*Gal* 3, 2: 128). This knowledge

So far we have considered the miracle more or less from an abstract point of view; it has been separated from the very positive context wherein, in general, St. Thomas treats it. With the miracle as an unmistakable sign of God's intervention we have the foundation for St. Thomas' apologetics. However, the sign-function of the miracle does not end there and it is to this that we must now give our attention.

3. *The miracle a testimony.*

We saw in our analysis how St. Thomas calls the miracle a testimony which is always true and cannot be doubted. The exact form of the testimony is accurately expressed in the following text.

« Dum aliquis facit opera quae Deus solus facere potest, creduntur ea quae dicuntur esse a Deo, sicut cum aliquis defert litteras annulo regis signatas, creditur ex voluntate regis processisse quod in illis continetur »³⁸⁴.

A seal was a personal emblem chosen by a king and attached to, or imprinted upon, all official documents as a guarantee of their authenticity. In St. Thomas' mind the seal is such a personal belonging of the king that no one would dare use it without his approval. The seal has no intrinsic connection with the sealed contents of a letter but, by convention, it is known that the contents of a letter sealed with the king's seal have the king's consent and hence cannot be false. Thus, the seal is a sign that what is contained in a letter comes from the king. This in no way implies a knowledge of the contents of the letter but he who receives the letter is certain, even before reading it, that it is from the king.

The miracle acts in exactly the same way for the truths of

of God as creator can be stated more precisely as being God the creator of another possible order beyond the natural one known to us. On seeing a miracle man is automatically led to see the possibility, and indeed the probability, of an order of existence diverse from the one under his eyes. The miracle he sees cannot be accounted for by any natural law; it is outside the natural order and thus must belong to another 'order'. This order is known in a merely negative manner, i. e. as nonnatural or extra-natural. This clue to the existence of another order is one reason why St. Thomas considers the miracle as such a fitting proof for revealed religion. We shall see more of this later.

³⁸⁴ ST III, 43, 1; cf. I Cor 12, 2: 725; *Symbol Apost* Prol. n. 866 sqq.

revelation. In the actual circumstances considered by St. Thomas, miracles are connected with Christ's life and preaching: miracles like the resurrection of the dead or the great miracle of the conversion of the world to the faith. Christ confirmed the truth of his doctrine by miracles³⁸⁵. These act as the seal of God on Christ's preaching. They show that the message Christ delivered had God's approval; that it was from God³⁸⁶. The conviction however, which results from a miracle regarding the divine origin of revelation is much greater than that which one could have as a result of a sealed letter. Even though the seal is a personal possession, the king could lose it; it could be stolen and thus abused. With the miracle it is different. It is a manner of sealing so proper to God that no created being can imitate it. St. Thomas affirms this with the utmost certainty; it is a logical consequence of his consideration of the essence of the miracle. He asks time and time again whether the evil spirits could perform miracles; the answer is always the same: « Deus solus miracula facit per auctoritatem »³⁸⁷.

The miracle is thus a sign indicating that the revealed truths are from God; it is a divine testimony. A testimony is something produced in evidence or as a demonstration; it is an argument proving the truth of some point. St. Thomas does not stop to consider this point, however; he immediately bypasses the proof of the divine origin of revelation and draws the logical conclusion that, since God cannot mislead or be misled, the revealed doctrine must be true.

Time and time again we find him stating that the miracle is an argument or proof confirming the faith. The method of argumentation is clearly indicated in the *Summa Theologiae* and in his commentary on the gospel of St. John³⁸⁸. The doctrine preached by Christ belongs to the divine order; it is so elevated as to be unintelligible to reason alone. It is for this reason that one must go beyond the ordinary reasoning process to show that while this doctrine is not intelligible to man in his present state, an assent given to it, as being true, is not an irrational act. Miracles are neither necessary nor sufficient to induce a person to make an act of faith; they are, however, necessary to show that the truths of faith are acceptable.

³⁸⁵ Cf. *ST* III, 42, 1 ad 2.

³⁸⁶ Cf. *SCG* 3, 154.

³⁸⁷ Cf. *De Pot* 6, 4 resp. ad obj.

³⁸⁸ *ST* III, 43, 1; *Joan* 10, 6: 1465.

The miracle is thus a sign that revelation is true. It is clear, from many of the texts which we saw in our analysis, that St. Thomas makes the miracle a sign, not alone of the divine origin of revelation but principally of its truth. In his commentary on the second epistle to the Thessalonians he says that the miracle is « ad attestandum veritati fidei »³⁸⁹; if someone preaching a false doctrine were to perform a miracle in confirmation of this, then, since God alone can work a miracle, « Deus esset falsitatis testis »³⁹⁰. Again, in his commentary on the first epistle to the Corinthians, he explains that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is shown when a sinner produces a miracle « ad ostendendum quod fides Ecclesiae quam ipsa praedicat, sit vera »³⁹¹. This is what St. Thomas has in mind when he refers to the miracle as a testimony both of God's power and of his truth³⁹².

The miracle is an argument for the truth of revelation only as result of being, first and foremost, a demonstration of God's intervention³⁹³. As a result of the connection between this intervention and the revealed truths, the miracle demonstrates that what is revealed comes from God or, at least, that it is approved of by God. Since God cannot deceive nor be deceived the miracle proves that what is revealed is true³⁹⁴. St. Thomas clearly states that here we are dealing with a proof in which the intellect does not see the truth of what it accepts, namely there is no knowledge in the strict sense: there is no complete *adequatio intellectus cum re*. The intellect is moved by the will and not by objective evidence. Even though the intellect is moved by the will, the assent given to the doctrine proposed is certain; « non crederet nisi videret esse credenda »³⁹⁵. The

³⁸⁹ 2 *Thess* 2, 2: 49.

³⁹⁰ *Quodl* 2, 4, 1 ad 4; 2 *Thess* *ibid*.

³⁹¹ I *Cor* 12, 2: 725; cf. *ST* II, II, 178, 2.

³⁹² « ...cum operatio miraculosa sit quoddam divinum testimonium indicativum divinae virtutis et veritatis... » (*De Pot* 6, 5). St. Thomas can be said to be the first theologian who really appreciated the transcendence of the miracle and thus its value as an apologetic proof. DURANDUS, while admitting this transcendence, illogically denied the consequences; he held that the miracle could be abused — an idea alien and indeed impossible, to the mind of St. Thomas. Cf. F. DESIDERIO, *Il valore apologetico del miracolo*, Roma 1955, p. 53 sqq.; V. BOUBLIK, *o. c. passim*.

³⁹³ Cf. B. DURANDUS, *La Psychologie de la Foi chez S. Thomas d'Aquin*, Fribourg (S.) 1956 p. 39 sqq.

³⁹⁴ This proof, however, does not result *ex causis propriis* (cf. 3 *Sent* d. 24, q. 1, a. 2 q. la 3 ad 3 and ad 4; *ST* II, II, 2, 10, ad 2. The same thought is expressed in his tract on faith; he who comes to the faith has sufficient motive to believe but he does not know or see what he believes.

³⁹⁵ *ST* II, II, 1, 4 ad 2.

proof from miracles is thus indirect. The truths to which the assent is given are not evident; the person asserting them proves his authenticity with a divine work and so one can assent without any fear of error³⁹⁶. The miracle is a proof that that to which it is conjoined or for which it acts as a seal, can be accepted as true; it is evidently credible. The person who sees this proof, sees that whatever is proposed as true, can evidently be accepted as such. Thus, even though he does not see the truth nor comprehend what is proposed in all its fullness, he assents to it. He is certain that it is true. Hence the miracle is a sign of the truth of revelation and not of the truths of revelation³⁹⁷.

It is quite evident then that St. Thomas does not consider the miracle solely as a sign of divine power. In the actual circumstances in which Christ's miracles took place miracles were signs of the truth of some doctrine. What kind of a sign is a miracle in this case? It is certainly not a natural sign since the doctrine and the miracles are completely independent one of the other. On the other hand one of the conditions for a conventional sign seems to be absent. As we saw above, a conventional sign is a sign which expresses thoughts; they are signs of thoughts and not of things. St. Thomas presumed, in most cases, the convention setting up the miracle as a sign of the revealed truths. God wished to communicate his revelation to man and the miracle was the most fitting sign available to guarantee these truths, granted the nature of both the truths and the miracles. Formally speaking, the sign, in this case, consists of the established relation between the truth of Christ's

³⁹⁶ This proof from miracles, even though indirect, is infallible since, as we have seen, the miracle is such a personal action of God that it cannot be abused. In *De Potentia* 6, 5, St. Thomas asks if the devil can be permitted to work miracles. He has just proved the possibility of communicating certain powers, by means of *gratiae gratis datae*, to angels and to men for the production of miracles. For the demons the impossibility of this communication is absolute; even the use of their natural powers is at times restricted by God. He cannot give them the power to perform miracles since this would be taken as a sign of approval for their evil ways. This is the logical conclusion which flows from two fundamental principles in his theology: the transcendence of the miracle — a work of God alone; and the veracity of God — he cannot approve of evil.

³⁹⁷ F. DESIDERIO, *Il valore apologetico del miracolo* endeavours to prove that this certitude is not moral but metaphysical. (Cf. p. 42). He bases his affirmation on *ST* II. II, 1, 4 and 5, 2; however, it would appear that he forces the proof too much. The certitude, according to St. Thomas is moral but due to the special type of proof, it is of the highest grade; as we have seen, it can be said to be 'reductive' metaphysical.

assertions and the exclusive effect of divine power. God asserted that this (seemingly impossible) doctrine was true and to show that he was really speaking the truth, he worked a miracle.

Is this a relation between something essentially natural (though done in a supernatural way) and something essentially supernatural — the truth of revelation — under this precise aspect of supernatural? In other words, is there a parallel here with the case of the sacraments, where material objects are used to signify spiritual supernatural realities?

If we consider for a moment what Christ had in mind when he said: « Si autem facio (opera Patris mei) et si mihi non vultis credere, operibus credite ut cognoscatis et credatis, quia Pater in me est et ego in Patre »³⁹⁸ there is undoubtedly a connection. St. Thomas' commentary confirms this when he writes:

« (Secundo) dicit quod ex ipsis operibus convincuntur, dicens Si autem facio, scilicet eadem opera quae pater facit, et si mihi, qui filius hominis *appareo*, non vultis credere, operibus credite; idest, ipsa opera demonstrant quod ego sum Filius Dei... Nullum enim tam evidens indicium de natura alicuius rei esse potest quam illud quod accipitur ex operibus eius. Evidenter ergo cognosci potest de Christo et credi quod sit Deus, per hoc quod facit opera Dei. Et ideo dicit: *Ex ipsis operibus convincam*, ut cognoscatis, et credatis quod oculis vestris videre non potestis, scilicet quia Pater in me est, et ego in Patre... *Quod intelligendum est per unitatem essentiae. Et quasi idem est Pater in me est, et ego in Patre; et ego et Pater unum sumus* »³⁹⁹.

The truth of which the Jews were to be convinced by means of miracles is something strictly supernatural; the relation is between the miracle and a supernatural truth. Thus it appears that the miracle is a sign of the supernatural in the strict formal sense?

From a consideration of the actual circumstances of the case in question, however, the opposite conclusion would seem to follow. It is true that the truth of the consubstantiality of Christ with the Father is supernatural and hence cannot be assented to, as it should, without grace. In the circumstances, Christ proposed this truth: « Ego et Pater unum sumus »; the Jews *understood* what this implied and hence accused him of blasphemy. Given their dispositions there could be no question of grace in their understanding of this truth; they understood

³⁹⁸ Joan 10, 38.

³⁹⁹ Joan 10, 6: 1465.

that Christ was saying that he was consubstantial with the Father, that he was God and the son of God⁴⁰⁰. Christ intended to prove the truth of the assertion, *as understood by them*, with his miracles. For St. Thomas, as usual, the first step in this proof is to show that Christ was God. Then « *ex ipsis operibus convincam...* ». The miracles showed that what they understood naturally and found unbelievable was *true*; they were signs of the *truth* of the material assertion. Thus it would appear that the miracle is a sign of a supernatural truth understood materially or naturally⁴⁰¹.

When a person assents to a supernatural truth because of a miracle, his knowledge, even though it is of analogous concepts, is similar to the knowledge of a person illumined by grace; that is, the gnoseological content in both cases is identical.

⁴⁰⁰ This is clearly St. Thomas' mind, as can be seen from the following passage which occurs a few lines above the one just quoted: « *Sed unde Judaei habuerunt quod Christus esset Filius Dei? Non enim hoc Dominus expresse dixit. Ad quod dicendum est, quod licet Dominus hoc expresse non dixerit, nihilominus tamen ex verbis quae dixit, scilicet Ego et Pater unum sumus, et Quod dedit mihi Pater maius omnibus est, intellexerunt eum accipere naturam a Patre, et esse unum in natura cum eo. Hoc autem scilicet accipere eandem naturam ab aliquo et esse, habet rationem filiationis* » *ibid.* 1462.

⁴⁰¹ In other words, the ideas 'Person' and 'substance' can be understood naturally; the union of the two, as proposed by Christ in this case, is however, naturally inconceivable. The person who sees the miracle as a pledge in favour of the truth of this assertion can assert, without the help of any grace, that it is true that two persons have one identical substance. He understands all the terms (in an analogical sense). It is similar to the blind man who has a trusted friend. When his friend tells him that the sky is blue he knows that it is true; but, since all he knows is that the sky is above and that blue is some quality, he will be unable to understand fully what he has been told.

It may help to clarify the formality constituting the miracle a conventional sign if we pause for a moment to examine this last example. When a blind man assents to the truth that « today the sky is blue » because of the word of his friend, his knowledge, based on analogy (let us suppose), is different from that of his friend. First it is not direct, whereas, his friend's knowledge is. Then the analogical concepts he employs, while truly expressing some of the reality of the main analogue, are essentially diverse from these. The certainty of his assent is based on the knowledge of his friend who perceives the main analogues as they are in themselves and thus *his state of certitude* is ultimately based on the object in itself and not on his imperfect knowledge of it. The *actual knowledge* which he has is of the analogous concepts alone.

Comparing this now to the person illumined by grace who makes an act of faith in the consubstantiality of Christ with His Father; this person's knowledge is of the analogous concepts « person » and « substance » realizing though, that they are only analogous and cannot express the whole reality. His assent, however, under the influence of grace, is to the reality as known by Christ on whose word he assents; namely, it is to this truth in itself (*Deus ut est in se*) and since this assent is based on Christ's knowledge, it is certain with absolute certainty.

However, lacking grace, this person lacks the formal motive for the assent which is present in the case of him who assents with true supernatural faith; this person assents to the revealed truth, not because of Christ's knowledge, but as a result of the miracle he has seen. The assent in this case does not therefore, reach to the truth as it is in itself. It stops short at the limits to which the analogous concepts naturally possessed and known can be exhausted.

This is what St. Thomas expresses in his commentary on St. John where he writes that: « Deus testificatur alicui dupliciter, scilicet sensibiliter et intelligibiliter ». In the case of the rando in cordibus aliquorum quod credere debeant et tenere »⁴⁰³. With his grace God testifies to something *intelligibiliter* « inspirando in cordibus aliquorum quod credere debeant et tenere »⁴⁰⁵. Thus, just as a student philosopher understands the *examples* used to illustrate a strict metaphysical principle (which in reality only gives him a certain analogous knowledge), but often does not attain to the *principle* formally in its intrinsic necessity, so also, the person without grace understands the elements of the mystery without attaining to the mystery in itself.

This then, is the signification to which the miracle is related; the miracle is a sign of the truth of this certain statement which is comprehended in its material elements; it is formally constituted a sign by this relation. The foundation for this relation is the free choice made by God to use the miracle as a sign of the truth of this supernatural revelation; thus, irrespective of whether it is known or not, the miracle is a conventional sign for St. Thomas, since this designation remains *quasi* moraliter with the miracle as we explained above⁴⁰⁴.

The miracle is thus a conventional sign but with a difference; or, better, it is a conventional sign in a class all of its own. To return, for a moment, to the example of the royal seal: this must be chosen by the king and agreed upon before it can signify that a sealed letter is from the king. The relation establishing the seal as the seal of the king is completely arbitrary. In the case of the miracle the relation is natural; it arises because of the very nature of the miracle. The relation between the seal and the contents which are sealed is arbitrary

⁴⁰² Cf. *Joan* 5, 6: 820.

⁴⁰³ Cf. *I Cor* 2, 3: 112-115.

⁴⁰⁴ The function of the miracle, however, depends on the knowledge of this designation.

also; the relation between the miracle and revelation, even though arbitrary, cannot be more fitting⁴⁰⁵. The doctrine, being beyond human understanding, is such as to need a sign beyond the prowess of nature to act as its guarantee. Hence, while we must put it in the class of arbitrary or conventional signs, with St. Thomas we must remember its special characteristics and prerogatives which set it apart in this class⁴⁰⁶.

We have seen how the miracle is both a natural and a conventional sign. We saw, however, that there is a third use of the word « sign » having a sense lying somewhere in between these two: the symbol. Can the miracle be said to be a symbol?

4. *The miracle - symbol of salvation.*

We have seen that the miracle is first and foremost a supernatural action indicating that God has intervened outside his normal providence for created nature. Because of Christ's use of miracles, this intervention becomes a sign of the truth of his assertions understood in their analogical terms. Considered under these aspects the miracle has no immediate connection with the essentially supernatural order. We saw that to be supernatural in an analogical (and not simply in an equivocal) sense, the miracle must have either an efficient or a final cause that is intrinsically supernatural.

In an interesting article on the natural and the supernatural with regard to miracles, Fr. Verardo defends the theory that the term supernatural can be applied to miracles only improperly⁴⁰⁷. Discussing the necessity of a remote preparation on the purely natural level for the essentially supernatural act of faith, he asks whether God acts here as a natural or super-

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. 3 *Sent* d. 21, q. 2, a. 3; *SCG* I, 6; *Comp Theol* 136 etc.

⁴⁰⁶ As we have seen, the notion of the miracle is entirely independent of any sign-function in favour of the revealed truths; in the actual economy considered by St. Thomas, however, they are not independent — one supposes the other.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. R. VERARDO, *Naturale e soprannaturale nel miracolo* in « *Sacra Doctrina* » 5 (1960) pp. 397 sqq. After having clearly distinguished between what he calls intrinsically supernatural and intrinsically natural miracles, he goes on to show that, with regard to the latter, there are two tendencies among christian apologists: those who tend to « supernaturalize » this type of miracle and thus put it beyond the reach of reason; and those who insist on the capacity of reason, basing itself on these miracles, to arrive at a certain judgement of credibility. We need not delay over his criticism of the first school of thought with which we are substantially in agreement. It is in his defence of the second line of thought that he evolves his novel theory.

natural efficient cause. Since the immediate result of the miracle is, as we have seen, a proof of the truth of revelation deduced without the aid of grace and since the miracle itself is intrinsically natural, the conclusion is automatically that the efficient cause is God as the author of nature⁴⁰⁸. Hence neither the efficient nor the final cause of the miracle is intrinsically supernatural and consequently the term supernatural is applied here in an equivocal sense.

This theory would not appear to be correct if we consider the final cause of miracles. The effect produced by miracles is, of course, natural, but, and this is stated time and time again, the *motive* God had in producing miracles is a supernatural one⁴⁰⁹. Miracles undoubtedly take place outside the « *consuetus et communis ordo causandi* »⁴¹⁰ but they were foreseen and planned from eternity⁴¹¹. They were planned precisely with the gratuitous supernatural order in view. We must realize that for St. Thomas, viewing God's plan as a unity, there was no strict hermetic division between the natural and the supernatural orders. God created man and elevated him to the supernatural order giving him grace. Hence he does not simply aim at the revelation of himself as the mere creator of the natural order; in the present actual elevated order God's intervention aims at bringing man to a knowledge of himself as author of the supernatural order, or as saviour. Miracles are performed to manifest this order⁴¹² and thus to open men's eyes to salvation — man's ultimate end in the present order of the universe⁴¹³. Even from a purely natural point of view God's mode of action is very fitting. By acting in an unusual way he confronts man with certain fundamental facts: his absolute independence from his established laws⁴¹⁴; the possibility of life and order beyond that known to man.

While it is true that miracles, in themselves, can only bring one to a knowledge of God as author of nature, St. Thomas insists that this knowledge is a knowledge of his independence, his freedom, his absolute control of nature. This knowledge can

⁴⁰⁸ *O. c.* p. 442 sqq.

⁴⁰⁹ *Cf. o. c.* pp. 420, 437, 441 etc.

⁴¹⁰ *ST I, II, 113, 10*; *cf. 2 Sent d. 10, q. 1, a. 2.*

⁴¹¹ *Cf. SCG 3, 98.*

⁴¹² *Cf. ST I, 104, 4; 112, 2; II, II, 178, 1 ad 3.*

⁴¹³ *Cf. De Pot 6, 9 ad 7; ad 21; De Ver 9, 2; Eph. Carm. XX (1969) p. 38, note 178.*

⁴¹⁴ *Cf. ST I, 105, 6 ad 1; aa. 7 and 8 per tot.*

give man an insight into God's capacity to act outside the laws of nature and cause man to suspect that there may be other orders. A passage from the *Summa contra Gentes* is interesting in this regard. St. Thomas writes:

« Nec debet haec ratio frivola reputari, quod Deus aliquid facit in natura ad hoc quod se mentibus hominum manifestet; omnes creaturae corporales ad naturam intellectualem ordinatur sicut in finem; ipsius autem intellectualis naturae finis est divina cognitio. Non est mirum si ad cognitionem de Deo intellectuali naturae praebendum, fit aliqua immutatio in substantia corporali »⁴¹⁵.

From the context it is evident that man already knew and accepted the fact of God's nature and existence; the « mentibus hominum manifestet » clearly refers to a new type of knowledge — what we call supernatural knowledge of God.

It is true that the immediate end God had in view, according to St. Thomas, was to show that the act of faith was reasonable. However, this was only a subordinate end. God is the author of both orders. He is completely free in his activity⁴¹⁶. Anything which occurs in these orders is according to his all-embracing provident plan. From God's point of view there is never a question of acting against or outside his plan⁴¹⁷. He acts « secundum quod congruit ordini sapientiae eius »⁴¹⁸; he always respects the *ordo universi*⁴¹⁹, in which miracles have their place⁴²⁰.

The reason justifying the existence of the miracle is therefore clearly the order of grace. It is clear from our synthesis that, in the present economy at least, the finality of the miracle is supernatural. It is an accepted axiom of philosophy that *ordo finium est secundum ordinem agentium*⁴²¹, and hence if *de facto* God, in producing a miracle, acts for a supernatural end, he must act as the author of the supernatural order. Ontologically, then, the efficient cause of miracles is essentially supernatural and the term supernatural can be applied strictly to miracles by way of analogy of attribution. We can thus see

⁴¹⁵ SCG 3, 98.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.* 102.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. *De Pot* 6, 9 ad 19; *ST* III, 44, 4.

⁴¹⁸ *3 Sent.* d. 1, q. 1, a. 3 ad 4.

⁴¹⁹ *De Pot* 6, 1 ad 7; ad 21; ad 2.

⁴²⁰ Cf. *ST* I, 105, 6 ad 3; III, 77, 1 ad 1.

⁴²¹ Cf. *ST* I, II, 109, 6; *De Pot* 7, 2 ad 10 etc.

why the miracle is called a bridge between the natural and the supernatural ⁴²².

It is a different matter however, on the logical plane. The author of the « order » of miracles is no longer God the author of nature who can be known and loved from a study of nature. Neither is it, necessarily, God in his intimate life, known and loved with the help of grace. From a study of miracles man can reason to the possibility of the existence of an extra-natural « order » of which God is the author. Man can thus be led to expect the revelation of the nature of this order. Unaided reason can come to a knowledge of God who is the author of the actual revealed order confirmed by miracles without, however, attaining to the nature of this order as it is in itself. Reason can see God as the author of an order which is extra-natural; the nature of this order expressed in the revealed truths can only be grasped in its materiality by reason alone, as we have seen. It is as the efficient cause of this order, as man knows it and not as it is in reality, that God is known from miracles. Thus, even though miracles are supernatural in an analogical sense, we cannot conclude that on the cognitive level, unaided reason can, by means of miracles, come to the substantially supernatural order.

However, it is here that the miracle truly acts as a symbol; the miracle is truly a symbol of the supernatural. We saw that a symbol reveals and hides its signification at the same time; that it requires certain dispositions on the part of the subject to bring him to the signification. The miracle is a very appropriate symbol of a higher order in God's hands; that is, a conventional sign which has a certain natural aptitude to signify. St. Thomas insists very much on this. In all his texts dealing

⁴²² Schematically we can represent reality, composed of the natural order, the supernatural order and the 'order' of apologetic miracles as follows:

Order	Efficient cause	Effecting	Effect
Natural	Creator	According to natural order	natural
Supernatural	Triune God	According to supern. order	supernatural
Miracles	Triune God	Beyond any fixed order	natural

with the finality of miracles we find that they are ordained to bring man to the supernatural order. The miracle thus can be considered a fitting symbol of grace — of God's invitation to man.

It is under this precise aspect that St. Thomas considers the miracle in his theological works. The miracle is a divine work which shows the intervention of a free agent in created nature and which is used by this free agent to invite man to a higher order. Of itself it does not manifest that order; to the uninitiated it does not manifest that order. But it is capable of bringing the open-minded, the psychologically prepared, the initiated, to this order. Miracles thus occupy a very definite place in God's providential plan and their place is realistically seen by St. Thomas⁴²³. God's plan started with creation; it continues in the history of salvation and shall only be completed with the Church triumphant; in creating the world the Creator left his imprint; conservation, with its order, leads man to him; but as the history of salvation unfolds, the Creator inserts other signs, other tokens for the watchful which invite them to a higher knowledge and life. Thus miracles have a natural place in this wonderful plan; they are no longer to be considered as upsetting God's original plan, but as integral parts with a proper finality — that of leading man to God the author of salvation⁴²⁴. The *ordo universi* which includes both the *ordo naturalis* and the «*ordo*» *supernaturalis* is respected on every side by its author. When he acts *praeter ordinem naturalem* he is still acting *secundum ordinem universi* since his actual providence aims at bringing man to grace. For the well-disposed the miracle can truly lead to salvation. This is the aspect under which the miracle must be presented; it is truly the theology of the miracle.

LIAM S. O' BRÉARTÚIN *ocd.*

⁴²³ Cf. SCG 3, 98.

⁴²⁴ Cf. esp. *Comm. in S. Ioannis.*