

Why Angels And Aliens Do Not Receive The Sacraments

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Abstract

My ‘Would St. Thomas Aquinas baptize an Extraterrestrial?’ argued that intelligent extraterrestrial life with sufficiently different matter from human beings would not share a human nature and would therefore not be integrated into the Mystical Body of Christ in the same way as human beings, through Christ’s sacrifice and the sacraments. Marie George, in ‘Would St. Thomas Aquinas Baptize an Extraterrestrial? Revisited’, demonstrated that the angels are fully incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ in the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, and therefore posited that St. Thomas would not object to intelligent extraterrestrials of a different nature being baptized. This article revises my contentions about the Mystical Body and then shows that St. Thomas’s theology excludes angels from the sacraments on the grounds of lacking a shared nature and argues that, while both extraterrestrials and angels can be saved by Christ, the sacraments have been given only to those who share a human nature with Christ.

Keywords

Soteriology, Extraterrestrial Life, Philosophical Anthropology, St Thomas Aquinas, Angels, Sacramental Theology

In her response to my ‘Would St. Thomas Aquinas baptize an Extraterrestrial?’ Marie George points out a major flaw in my argument that non-human, intelligent, extraterrestrial beings should not be baptized according to the philosophical and theological principles of St Thomas Aquinas.¹ George claims that my argument is ‘categorically affirming the impossibility’² of extraterrestrials being incorporated into the Mystical Body because of their lack of a shared human nature with Christ.

¹ Edmund Michael Lazzari, ‘Would St. Thomas Aquinas baptize an Extraterrestrial?’, *New Blackfriars* 99 (2018), pp. 440-457; Marie George, ‘Would St. Thomas Aquinas Baptize an Extraterrestrial? Revisited’, *New Blackfriars* 102 (2021), pp. 352-367.

² George, ‘Revisited’, 356.

Correcting my inaccurate claims that angels are analogically incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, George shows in detail how a Thomistic account of the Mystical Body of Christ accommodates angels and thus extraterrestrials. George further argues, however, that, because it is not impossible for God to apply the merits of Christ to extraterrestrials through baptism and that Christ's merits are certainly sufficient for the salvation of extraterrestrials, Aquinas 'would maintain that the effects of Christ's death and resurrection could be applied to fallen ETIs, and he would not assume that it would be inappropriate to baptize them.'³

This paper will revisit my arguments on two points. First, it will show that my attempts to qualify my argument is equivalent to George's statement that the merits of Christ would not be 'automatically'⁴ transferred to extraterrestrials through the sacraments, but that my account of the Mystical Body of Christ must be corrected.

Secondly, this paper will argue further that my mistakes point to an aspect of soteriology not adequately treated by George: the means by which an individual is incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body. By an explication of Aquinas's reasons for baptism, this paper will argue that my analysis of the transmission of original sin and baptism's chief character of being a remedy for original sin constitute the strongest Thomistic argument (used by St Thomas himself to explain why angels do not administer the sacraments) against transferring baptism to extraterrestrials, though not one which concludes with theological necessity.

I

In the first section of the article, I produced from Thomistic philosophical anthropology an analysis of a hypothetical species of intelligent extraterrestrial life with a body radically different from human beings.⁵ With this hypothetical granted, I proceeded from Thomistic principles of philosophical necessity to produce the conclusion that, because these extraterrestrials would have different matter than human beings, they do not have the same philosophical nature as human beings. I also showed in a similar manner that, according to St Thomas, any creature with the capacity for intelligence must, by philosophical necessity, also be constituted of an immaterial (and therefore immortal) soul.

These Thomistic philosophical conclusions, if correct, would proceed with necessity and constitute a contribution to discussions of extraterrestrial soteriology by excluding an option where the Church

³ George, 'Revisited', 367.

⁴ George, 'Revisited', 352-353, 364.

⁵ Lazzari, 'Extraterrestrial', 445, 447, 456.

‘simply’⁶ or ‘automatically’⁷ incorporated intelligent extraterrestrial life into its sacramental life by considering it human, even if of a different biological species.⁸ As both George and I agree, while this would not necessarily exclude extraterrestrials from salvation, it at least establishes that the difference in philosophical natures between human beings and extraterrestrials is something that would call for a different theological account of salvation for extraterrestrials than for human beings, even if they are both saved by Christ and even if they are both ultimately a part of the sacramental life of the Church. In my original article, I explicitly restrict my additional claims to the question of what to do about intelligent extraterrestrial life ‘without further revelation’,⁹ which, along with my qualifications about pursuing an argument from fittingness,¹⁰ shows that my arguments are an attempt at a Thomistically-grounded theological argument about ‘whether fallen ETI salvation through Christ is in keeping with what we know about divine wisdom’,¹¹ as George suggests, rather than an argument that concludes with theological necessity.

Following these qualifications, my argument that intelligent extraterrestrials cannot be incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ by the same mode as human beings can perhaps be maintained.¹² First, however, it must be amended by the evidence brought by George on St Thomas’s teaching about angelic incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ.

My characterization of the incorporation of angels into the Mystical Body of Christ as analogical, George shows, is mistaken.¹³ The evidence presented by George shows very clearly that Christ, even in His human nature, is the head of the angels because He is the cause of an infusion of grace into them.¹⁴ The very same grace merited by Christ on the Cross, though not the end of the Incarnation, had the effect of incorporating the angels into the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁵

⁶ Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 451, 456.

⁷ George, ‘Revisited’, 352-353, 364.

⁸ While not treated at length by either my original article or George’s response, such a position is shown in Orson Scott Card’s Ender pentology in *Speaker for the Dead* (New York City: Tor, 1991), pp. 34, 95 and *Xenocide* (New York City: Tor, 1991), pp. 162-163. For three different approaches to extraterrestrial missions as portrayed in science fiction, see Lazzari, ‘Missions to Extraterrestrials’, in Richard Feist, ed., *Jesuits and Science Fiction* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, Forthcoming).

⁹ Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 456.

¹⁰ Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 445.

¹¹ George, ‘Revisited’, 366.

¹² Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 453, emphasis added. Additional statements about the necessity for a human nature to be incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ *by baptism* or as needed to receive the sacraments also occur on 451, 452, and 456.

¹³ Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 456.

¹⁴ See George, ‘Revisited’, 353-352.

¹⁵ George, ‘Revisited’, 359 n13.

My unqualified claim of ‘necessity of a human nature for incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ’¹⁶, then, clearly must be rejected on Thomistic grounds. Had such an unqualified claim been true, I would have indeed been contradictory in proposing that intelligent extraterrestrial life could ever have the possibility for incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ after having established that extraterrestrial life with bodies sufficiently different from human beings would not have a common philosophical nature.

II

If, however, we grant those appropriate corrections, a distinction arises from these mistakes which brings forth a new aspect of the problem not treated in detail by George. My hesitations and qualifications about the incorporation of angels into the Mystical Body of Christ were not only hesitations about the applicability of Christ’s human nature to angels, but they were also hesitations about angels being incorporated *by means of the sacraments*. While St Thomas held that angels were truly a part of the Mystical Body of Christ with Christ as their head, they are not incorporated into the Body by the same means as human beings are: i.e. baptism. One can be incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ and thus subsequently enjoy the beatific vision because of the merits of Christ, but this does not necessarily entail initiation into the seven sacraments of the new law established by Christ. That there is a distinction between membership in the Mystical Body of Christ and the means by which that membership takes place is clear from the case of the angels.

The important theological question must be raised, then, regarding the reason why there is a distinction in the means by which angels and human beings are incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ. One reason is obvious: angels lack the physical bodies necessary to be incorporated by baptism. This, however, touches on a deeper theology of the sacraments found in St Thomas. Speaking about the necessity of the sacraments in article 1 of Question 61 of the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, St Thomas states that it is in accord with divine wisdom to provide human beings corporal and spiritual signs of their sanctification.¹⁷ In the same article, St Thomas states that, since human activity is so focused on material things, it is fitting for material things to be

¹⁶ Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 440.

¹⁷ ST III Q. 61, art 1c ‘Quarum prima sumenda est ex conditione humanae naturae, cuius proprium est ut per corporalia et sensibilia in spiritualia et intelligibilia deducatur. Pertinet autem ad divinam providentiam ut unicuique rei provideat secundum modum suae conditionis. Et ideo convenienter divina sapientia homini auxilia salutis confert sub quibusdam corporalibus et sensibilibus signis, quae sacramenta dicuntur.’ All Latin texts of the *Summa*

the means which draw humanity toward the divine, lest the material draw humanity toward evil, such as the worship of demons.¹⁸ Neither the corporeal-spiritual constitution nor the draw toward material things are characteristics of angels, so it would not make sense for them to be incorporated into the Mystical Body by the sacraments.

Since, however, my hypothetical intelligent extraterrestrial life would also have physical bodies informed by an immortal soul, the first reason would not exclude them from the sacramental life of the Church, but would rather suggest their participation in physical means of the transmission of the graces of Christ. This, though, is far from the only, or even the principal reason for the sacraments as established by Christ.

The second reason for the sacraments, and of baptism in particular, is that they heal the wounds inflicted on human nature because of the human fall. In fact, the very same article states that the sacraments are corporeal signs because humanity fell from grace and first sinned through the love for corporeal things. It was fitting, therefore, that the medicine for such a disease should be accessible to the ill patient and so material means of sanctification were made to bring humanity, made captive to sin by corporeal things, to the spiritual goods of salvation.¹⁹ Because this second reason suggests that the human captivation with material things is a result of the fall, it also suggests that the previous reason of corporeal sacraments serving as a preventative from humanity being drawn to further evils is also a result of the fall.

If this is correct, then the sacraments in general would not be fit for non-humans, due to their lack of connection to the human fall, despite their corporeal-spiritual constitution. I showed that, because of their difference in philosophical nature, intelligent extraterrestrials, while they may have a fall themselves, would not be directly or morally affected by the fall of humanity based on the thought of St Thomas.²⁰ The sacraments, then, would not be established for the purposes of healing the spiritual ills of fallen intelligent extraterrestrials, but for those of humanity.²¹

Theologiae are taken from *Summa Theologiae*, Commissio Piana, eds. 5 vols. (Ottawa: Institutio Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis, 1953).

¹⁸ ST III Q. 61, art. 1c 'Tertia ratio sumenda est ex studio actionis humanae, quae praecipue circa corporalia versatur. Ne igitur esset homini durum si totaliter a corporalibus actibus abstraheretur, proposita sunt ei corporalia exercitia in sacramentis, quibus salubriter exerceretur, ad evitanda superstitiosa exercitia, quae consistunt in cultu Daemonum, vel qualitercumque noxia, quae consistunt in actibus peccatorum.'

¹⁹ ST III Q. 61 art. 1c 'Secunda ratio sumenda est ex statu hominis, qui peccando se subdidit per affectum corporalibus rebus. Ibi autem debet medicinale remedium homini adhiberi ubi patitur morbum. Et ideo conveniens fuit ut Deus per quaedam corporalia signa hominibus spiritualem medicinam adhiberet, nam, si spiritualia nuda ei proponerentur, eius animus applicari non posset, corporalibus deditus.'

²⁰ ST I, Q. 96, art. 1 ad 2. See also Lazzari, 'Extraterrestrial', 447-448.

²¹ See George, 'Revisited', 358-359, especially 359 n13.

When speaking of the sacraments in general and of baptism in particular, St Thomas almost always characterizes the sacraments as a spiritual remedy.²² This remedy is the remedy of both the guilt and the punishment of original sin, incurred on behalf of all humanity by Adam and Eve.²³ As stated above, since intelligent extraterrestrials do not share a human nature, they would not be a part of the fall of humanity. There is a deep connection between the original sin of humanity and the sacraments as remedies of that wounding of human nature which sets this characterization of the sacraments apart from the incorporation of the angels into the Mystical Body of Christ. The angels are in no need of healing from Christ when they are infused with grace. Their nature is not wounded and so they are not in need of the remedy of the sacraments. Had humanity not fallen, then the Lord would not have established the sacraments because humanity would not have stood in need of healing.²⁴ Moreover, in such a state, the instruction of humanity in divine things would not have taken place through the sensible sacraments, but rather from a direct ‘influx of divine light’, as the material sacraments would have been less fitting to communicate divine knowledge.²⁵

It is possible, as I showed, that intelligent extraterrestrial life would not have a fall similar to humanity’s but still stand in need of grace to unite them to the Lord.²⁶ In such a case, based on the Lord’s providential ordering of the angels, it seems most fitting that the extraterrestrial species would not have recourse to the sacraments, lacking a damage to their nature to be remedied. Since, as George pointed out, the Lord would most fittingly wish eternal life for these creatures who are capable of it, some direct act of the Lord would be likely to incorporate them into the Mystical Body of Christ without the sacraments.²⁷

Even in the case of a fall from grace or of individual sins on the side of the extraterrestrials, however, there would still be an obstacle of a difference of nature. The key passages occur in St Thomas’s commentary on the *Sentences* Book IV, Distinction 5, Question 2, Article 3, when commenting on whether angels or demons could perform valid baptisms. Responding to whether demons can baptize, St Thomas states:

²² See, for example, ST III, Q. 61, art. 1c; SCG Bk. IV, c. 56; *In Sent. IV* Distinction 1 q. 1 a. 2 qc. 2 ad 3.

²³ Aquinas, *De malo*, Q.4, art.1c. See 445-448.

²⁴ ST III, Q. 61, art. 2c.

²⁵ *In Sent. IV* Distinction 1, Q. 1, art. 2, Qc. 2 respondeo ‘ex influentia divini luminis’; ST III, Q. 61, art. 2 ad 2 states that human beings would be given grace, ‘non tamen ut eam consequeretur per aliqua sensibilia signa, sed spiritualiter et invisibiliter’. All Latin texts of the *Commentary on the Sentences* are taken from the Moos 1956 edition as found in *Commentary on the Sentences Book IV, Questions 1-13* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017).

²⁶ Lazzari, ‘Extraterrestrial’, 447-448, 454-456.

²⁷ See George, ‘Revisited’, 355n7.

the devil appearing in the figure of a priest can immerse someone in water, but he cannot confer the sacrament for two reasons. First, because administering the sacraments is only granted to men [*hominibus*], who share with the Incarnate Word, from whom the sacraments flowed, in the nature he assumed; and also with the sacraments, in which there is a spiritual power in physical elements, just as men are composed of a spiritual and physical nature. Second, if he pretended to baptize, it would always be feared that he did not act with the intention of baptizing, which is required for the sacrament, but with the intention of deceiving: for it would not be probable that he would procure so great a good for man as spiritual rebirth.²⁸

From this passage, it seems that the ministers of the sacraments, even if they are not baptized themselves, must share a human nature for the validity of the sacraments. This seems to be confirmed in the next quaestiuncula on angels, where St Thomas states:

To the second question, it should be said that the power of baptizing [*potestas baptizandi*] is not conferred [*non est collata*] on the good angels for two reasons. First, because they do not have the conformity mentioned above with the sacrament, and with Christ, who is the author of the sacrament.²⁹

This conformity with the sacrament is the sharing in a human nature, just as the demons lack. So it seems that the angels cannot confer the sacraments because they lack a shared human nature with Christ, even if they can be incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ through His merits. This, however, is not a clear a case as it seems, for St Thomas goes on to state in the same response:

But just as God did not bind [*alligavit*] his power [*potentiam suam*] in the sacraments [*sacramentis*], so neither did he restrict [*alligavit*] the power [*potestatem*] of consecrating the sacraments to certain ministers; hence he, who gave this power [*hanc potestatem*] to men [*hominibus*] could give [*posset dare*] it to angels as well. Nor would any good angel

²⁸ *In Sent. IV* Dist. 5, Q. 2, art. 3, qc. 1 responsio, trans. Beth Mortensen in *Commentary on the Sentences Book IV, Questions 1-13* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017). ‘Diabolus in figura sacerdotis apparens potest immergere, sed non sacramentum conferre, propter duas rationes. Primo, quia dispensatio sacramentorum non est concessa nisi hominibus, qui conveniunt cum verbo incarnato, a quo sacramenta fluxerunt in natura assumpta; et etiam cum sacramentis, in quibus est spiritualis virtus in corporeis elementis, sicut et homines ex natura spirituali et corporali compositi sunt. Secundo si baptizare se fingeret, semper esset timendum quod non faceret intentione baptizandi, quae ad sacramentum exigitur, sed intentione decipiendi; quia non esset probabile quod tantum bonum homini procuraret, sicut est spiritualis regeneratio’.

²⁹ *In Sent. IV* Dist. 5, Q. 2, art. 3, qc. 2 responsio, trans. Beth Mortensen in *Commentary* ‘Ad secundam quaestionem dicendum quod Angelis bonis non est collata potestas baptizandi, propter duas rationes. Primo, quia non habent praedictam convenientiam cum sacramento, et cum Christo, qui est auctor sacramenti’. The second reason is because angels, being invisible, cannot aid human beings, who cannot see them.

baptize anyone except by power divinely granted to him; hence, if he did baptize, one would not need to be rebaptized, as long as it was certain that he was a good angel ...³⁰

Taking these two passages together, it seems that St Thomas holds that, while it is fully within the scope of divine ability to confer the ability of performing the sacraments upon those beings who do not share a human nature, as a matter of fact, the Lord has not done so for the angels, and to do so for the demons would be problematic for the additional reason of doubt of intention.

Intelligent extraterrestrial beings would also lack a shared human nature. If they were not fallen, then they would have no need of the sacraments. If they were fallen, then their fall would not be the fall of humanity, *and* they would presumably be less reliable in carrying out the Lord's will than good angels, who are already confirmed in grace. Though the ability to confer the sacraments is not the same as the ability to receive the sacraments, it seems that the same principle of conformity to the human nature of Christ would apply because the sacraments are rooted in the Incarnate Word. Therefore, intelligent extraterrestrials of a different philosophical nature from human beings would not be included in the sacramental life of the Church because, on the strength of the angels' exclusion, they would not share the human nature the Lord deemed it fitting for those who participate in the sacraments to possess. It is important to remember that this does not exclude intelligent extraterrestrial life from salvation through Christ, or even from participation in the Mystical Body of Christ, as George showed. Nevertheless, the lack of a shared nature constitutes a significant obstacle to the sacramental life in the order established by Christ. The Lord has the power to change this order, but, at least according to St Thomas Aquinas, the Lord has as a matter of fact not given participation in the seven sacraments to non-humans.

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³⁰ *In Sent. IV* Dist. 5, Q. 2, art. 3, qc. 2 responsio, trans. Beth Mortensen in *Commentary* 'Sed sicut Deus potentiam suam sacramentis non alligavit, ita nec potestatem consecrandi sacramenta alligavit aliquibus ministris; unde qui dedit hanc potestatem hominibus, posset dare et Angelis. Nec Angelus bonus baptizaret nisi divinitus potestate sibi concessa; unde si baptizaret, non esset rebaptizandus, dummodo constaret quod bonus Angelus esset'.