1. AT THE ORIGINS OF NEO-THOMISM IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The sum of research on Thomas Aquinas, especially in the wake of Kristeller's work on Thomism and the Italian Renaissance, shows quite clearly that the Dominican's life and teaching were continuously celebrated in literature and iconography, and in various contexts (hagiographic, liturgical, and academic), from the mid-fourteenth century to the end of the fifteenth.1

1.1. The Literary Encomium and the Iconographic “Triumph” of St. Thomas Aquinas in the Dominican Tradition

The encomium of Aquinas has its origins in the “canonization literature” mentioned by Fra Giovanni di Napoli during the official celebrations in his city (July, 1323) for Thomas's canonization by Pope John XXII. Fra Giovanni was the most renowned master of theology and promoter of Thomism in the Neapolitan Studio, and his sermons for the canonization initiated the liturgical tradition of panegyric surrounding Aquinas's teaching. At the same time they took up the defense of that teaching, a defense which Giovanni had begun in Paris in 1316, when he was “dismissed” for his disputation on “whether it is permitted to teach the full doctrine and all the conclusions of brother Thomas in Paris” – an obvious polemic on the condemnation of 1277.2

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2 Innocenzo Taurisano, *Discepoli e biografi di S. Tommaso. Note storico-critiche* (Roma: Società Tipografica A. Manuzio, 1924), 45: “licteratura canonizationis”; an extract of Fra
The literary encomium has an equivalent in the iconographic “triumph.” This is especially the case in panegyric and apologetic painting, whose themes and subjects were almost always chosen with an eye to increasing the greater glory of the Dominican Order. Thus the symmetric correspondence between the encomium and the “triumph” turns out to be historically indissoluble, fully illustrative and indicative of the strict parallelisms and convergences that exist between sermons and frescoes whose theme is the exaltation of Thomas. One thinks of the multiple historical and doctrinal references repeated in literary texts and pictorial works; of the comparisons and combinations, variously arranged, of Aquinas with the Greek and Latin patristic tradition; and of the complex and rich symbology of Thomist teaching as a synthesis and transcendence of Hellenic speculation, and as a definitive refutation of philosophical error (Averroes) and theological heresy (Arian).

Beyond hagiographic and apologetic motives, the literary encomium and the pictorial triumph served an immediate and incisive purpose: they commemorated Aquinas’s works, which were read and commented in the Dominican schools before a learned and devout audience (that could be either favorable or averse to the Order’s doctrinal tradition). The Order of Preachers had nourished itself on Thomas’s corpus to the point of its becoming an integral part, and eventually the dominant part, of the Dominicans’ own cultural history. Aquinas’s “solar splendor” had been assumed into the personal identity and glory of the Preachers, such that Thomas and the Dominican Order would ultimately converge in an indissoluble nexus. Such was the case not only in more solemn and official moments like an ecumenical council – the Council of Florence and above all the Council of Trent come to mind – but also in seemingly marginal or peripheral places and occasions that would end up being defining and, to say the least, extremely significant for the construction and reaffirmation of its tradition.