



Thomas Aquinas on the Political Analogy and the Passions of Christ

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Abstract

In this paper I will address the question whether Aquinas' political analogy can be properly applied to Christ as having political or despotic rule over his passions. I will argue that a close reading of various texts of Aquinas, especially the more mature *Compendium of Theology*, leads to the conclusion that Jesus' reason exercised a despotic rule over his passions, not a political rule. His propassions were totally under the control of his reason and could not resist it; they did not retain "something of their own", which is the ability to resist reason. The case of Mary's passions in the writings of Aquinas make this point even more clear.

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Emotions are a crucial element of our moral life. They give unity to our experience of the world and humanize our decisions. But they can also be an obstacle to our flourishing when they push us against reason. After original sin, the relation between sense appetite and soul becomes warped. Human beings are affected by an internal disorder that at times makes the lower faculties be in plainly disagreement with reason. This is what Aquinas calls "*fomes*", the rebellion of our sense appetites, which inclines man to sin.¹

Thomas Aquinas borrows from Aristotle the metaphor of political and despotic rule to explain this relation between reason and the sense appetites. According to him, the body faculties are under a despotic rule by the soul, they obey its command without wavering, like a slave that strictly follows the utterances of his master. The sense appetites, instead, are under a political rule in relation to reason. Similarly to citizens of a republic, they need to be convinced by their leader in order

¹ *STh* III, q. 27 a. 3. Translation of the *Summa Theologiae* comes from 1st complete American ed. / Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province; with synoptical charts (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947).

to act according to its commands, they “have something of their own, by virtue whereof they can resist the commands of reason”.²

This relation between reason and emotions becomes trickier with Christ and Mary. Christ, who has the fullness of grace and was conceived without sin, does not have this *fomes*, in such a way that his passions are under total control of his reason. That’s why Aquinas explains that Christ has rather “propassions”, which are emotions that do not affect the higher part of the soul.³ So, at this point we should ask whether the relation of Christ’s reason and passions is one of despotic or political rule.

Aquinas himself does not expressly apply the political analogy to individual cases such as Christ or Mary. It seems that his interest in using the analogy serves the purpose of presenting the passions in a general way. However, scholars such Nicholas Lombardo and Giuseppe Butera do apply the analogy to particular models such as Jesus. Lombardo argues that “Aquinas must mean to apply to Christ his preferred metaphor of reason ruling the passions politically, implying that Christ’s passions enjoyed their own proper autonomy and spontaneity, while also instinctively following the guidance of reason”.⁴ His main motivation is to relate our ordinary human experience with the experience of Christ, the perfect model of our moral life. If Christ did not experience political rule over emotions like we clearly do, it would be very difficult to see him as the best exemplar of human affectivity.⁵

Other scholars instead, such as Giuseppe Butera, claim that Christ did in fact have a despotic rule of his passions. He points out that Jesus was not affected by sin, such as Adam and Mary, and so his passions were totally under the guidance of reason. While he has a persuasive argument, Butera does not provide detailed textual evidence of Aquinas’ approach in applying the analogy.⁶

In this paper I will address this question whether Aquinas’ analogy can be properly applied to Christ as having political or despotic rule over his passions. I will argue that a close reading of various texts of Aquinas, especially the more mature *Compendium of Theology*, leads to the conclusion that Jesus’ reason exercised a

² *STh* I, q. 81 a. 3.

³ *STh* III, q. 15 a. 4. Propassions are still true passions, although with radical differences. See *De Ver.* q. 26 a. 8. Nevertheless, Aquinas does explicitly mention propassions in relation to fallen human man. See Super Psalms 2.6 where he refers to a “human propassion” (*humana propassio*). The condition Aquinas lays out for what constitutes a propassion in *De Ver.* q. 26, a. 8, although he says they are found in Christ, need not be limited to Christ, but can exist in the just. An extended explanation of Christ’s propassions can be found in B.H. Turner, ‘The Propassiones of Christ, His Fullness of Grace, and His Moral Exemplarity According to St. Thomas Aquinas’, in: *Nova et Vetera* (Denver, CO) 18 (2020), 201–236. I am grateful to Nicholas Ramirez for his insights regarding Aquinas’ use of the term *propassion*.

⁴ N. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 211.

⁵ Stewart Clem offers an insightful argument of Christ’s passions in Aquinas as a source for moral reflection in S. Clem, ‘The Passions of Christ in the Moral Theology of Thomas Aquinas: An Integrative Account’, in: *New Blackfriars* 99, no. 1082 (2018), 458–480.

⁶ G. Butera, ‘On Reason’s Control of the Passions in Aquinas’s Theory of Temperance’, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 68 (2006), 133–160.

despotic rule over his passions, not a political rule. His propassions were totally under the control of his reason and could not resist it; they did not retain "something of their own", which is the ability to resist reason.

The case of Mary's passions in the writings of Aquinas make this point even more clear. The Blessed Virgin, according to Aquinas, was conceived with original sin and sanctified in the womb of her mother. Hence, the *fomes* was present in her but fettered, so that Mary never mortally and venially sinned. After she conceived Christ, she was totally free from original sin and the *fomes*. However, despite never having sinned, Aquinas argues that she did experience spontaneous movements of the sense appetites outside reason. He claims that this is a consequence of her being conceived with original sin.⁷ We can conclude that because her emotions had "something of their own", they were under a political rule. This is extremely important to our argument, because the difference between Christ and Mary's passion in Aquinas reinforces the idea that Christ had despotic rule over his passions.

Therefore, I firstly will examine in detail Lombardo's position, which serves as a model of Christ's political rule over his passions. Then, I will analyze what Aquinas means by political and despotic rule, especially the expression "something of their own" applied to the passions. Next, I will explore how Aquinas envisions the passions in Christ in its relation to reason as despotic. Finally, I will show how Aquinas' explanation of the passions in Mary makes more clear the despotic rule of the passions in Christ.

Before I begin this argument, I should present a couple of caveats. First, I will use the terms "passions", "emotions", "sentiments", and "feelings" univocally. I do not pretend to make a distinction between the meaning of those words in this paper. Second, the term "despotic rule" has a rather negative connotation in our democratic society, and for a good reason. I employ this political expression in a metaphorical way in order to portray the relation between reason and passions. In fact, I do not endorse the despotic rule as a political system.⁸

1. The Case for the Political Rule of the Passions in Christ

In this first section, I will present the approach to the relation between Christ's reason and passion as a political rule. Nicholas Lombardo is the main proponent of this perspective. I will analyze in detail Aquinas' political metaphor in the next session.

Lombardo claims that for Aquinas, Christ has a political rule over his passions rather than a despotic one. He is committed to show that Christ is fully human and his way of experiencing the passions is very similar to ours. Otherwise, it would be

⁷ *STh III*, q. 27 a. 5 ad 2; *Comp. Theol.* 224.

⁸ Jensen makes some interesting remarks regarding the limits of using the political metaphor, especially regarding the expression "despotic rule", see pages 204-208 in S.J. Jensen, 'Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions', in: *The Thomist* 77, no. 2 (2013), 193-227.

hard to see Jesus as a moral exemplar that can motivate us. It is consoling to see that Jesus' relation to emotions is of the same type as ours. This is how he addresses the issue:⁹

It is not possible to give a confident answer based on this text alone. But when this question is considered in the context of Aquinas' anthropology and his repeated affirmations that Christ's human nature is in complete solidarity with ours, the answer is clear. **Aquinas must mean to apply to Christ his preferred metaphor of reason ruling the passions politically, implying that Christ's passions enjoyed their own proper autonomy and spontaneity, while also instinctively following the guidance of reason.** In other words, Aquinas does not mean that Christ became angry only after he commanded himself to become angry, but rather that Christ spontaneously became angry in ways that complemented his reason and cooperated with its implicit judgments. (...) Aquinas has no difficulty affirming that Christ's passions may chronologically precede the conscious judgment of Christ's reason. He does, however, exclude from Christ those spontaneous movements of disordered passion that Aquinas calls antecedent passion.

Lombardo first argues that we cannot give a definitive answer to whether Aquinas thought that Christ had despotic or political rule over his passions based on text only. Lombardo himself is the one who assigns the political rule to Christ, based on what he considers evidence to the fact in Aquinas. The main reason that he gives us is that Christ's human nature is in complete solidarity with ours, thus similarly to us his passions should be politically ruled by our reason. He thinks that Christ's passions enjoyed autonomy and spontaneity, and that they were "implicitly" guided by reason. The spontaneity of emotions is extremely important for Lombardo. Without spontaneity, the person has a cold, artificial emotional life. It seems that the opposite of being spontaneous is to have one's passion totally commanded by reason, which he thinks is not the case in Christ. He argues that in Jesus there are movements of the passions that were not "commanded" by reason, but followed implicit judgements of reason and complemented its content. The command of reason would be a type of "conscious" judgment. In this way, Lombardo believes that he can hold that Jesus's passions were spontaneous and followed reason at the same time.

Furthermore, Lombardo makes reference to chapter four of his book *The Logic of Desire*. There, he examines the relation between reason and sense appetite. He argues that reason does not interact with passions just with command or with direct judgments. There is also a relation between reason and emotions through cognitive process and the formation of habits. Reason is involved in the process of learning about the world around us. The information that the sense appetite receives through

⁹ Lombardo, *Logic*, 211, bold is mine.

the senses has a participation of reason. In this way, Lombardo reinforces the idea that Christ can still have spontaneous passions that are under the indirect influence of reason, but not necessarily commanded by it.¹⁰ This is how he thinks that Christ has political rule over his passions.¹¹

Memory and discursive reasoning continually shape and reshape particular reason's evaluation of objects, and the *intentio* of a given object varies accordingly. For instance, a man sees a wolf, and his intentional grasp of the wolf includes a sense that the wolf is a threatening evil, and so fear follows. On another day, he sees the same wolf again, but this time he is carrying a bazooka, and so his intentional grasp of the wolf does not include a sense that the wolf is a threatening evil, and, consequently, fear does not follow. Aquinas explains how particular reason is guided by universal reason as follows: "Moreover, it is natural to this particular reason to be moved and directed by universal reason, as when individual conclusions are logically derived from universal propositions. Evidently, therefore, universal reason commands the sense appetite, which is divided into the concupiscible and the irascible, and this appetite obeys". Particular reason, an interior sensory power, is the faculty that evaluates sensible objects with respect to the inclinations of the sense appetite. Universal reason, an immaterial power, is the locus of abstract thought, and as such it has oversight over particular reason. Its judgments, however, have to be applied by engaging particular reason; its conclusions do not penetrate particular reason automatically.

This passage shows how the particular reason influences the sense appetite, whereas the particular reason itself can be directed by universal reason. Hence, the passions in the process of knowing are receiving indirect guidance from reason. Lombardo thinks that there is some kind of participation of emotions in reason, which would be another reason to say that Christ has political rule over his spontaneous passions.

Moreover, Lombardo believes that the passions participate in reason in a spontaneous, non-controlled way, through the formation of habits. He explains that:¹²

The concept of habitus does not simply express the strength of our resolve to behave in certain ways, much less some empirical estimation of our future actions. Habitus shape our entire psychological structure, not just the rational powers: they modify all faculties that have some capacity for being shaped by

¹⁰ Jean Porter makes a similar point regarding the participation of passions in reason through learning and cognition in J. Porter, *The Perfection of Desire: Habit, Reason, and Virtue in Aquinas' Summa Theologiae* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2018).

¹¹ Lombardo, *Logic*, 96.

¹² Lombardo, *Logic*, 103.

reason, and actually penetrate and subsist in them. Since the sense appetite is responsive to reason, and capable of being shaped by it, there are habitus in the sense appetite, that is, there are stable dispositions and inclinations of the passions to respond in certain determinate ways. Since the passions are “rational by participation,” reason can specify them, and, by repeated acts, shape them into habitus that resolve the various desires of the sense appetite and the will into stable dispositions. This formation of character in turn redounds back to our desires: it confirms them and propels us toward actions that will further deepen their embeddedness in us.

The formation of habits is another form in which sense appetites unite within reason. In this context, they shape the passions in a certain fashion and make them “stable dispositions”. When the passions kick in after being formed, they are acting not by direct command of reason, but still participate in it. Together with the cognitive process, the formation of habits justifies Christ having spontaneous passions that are in sync with reason.¹³

Lombardo analyzes Aquinas’ usage of the political metaphor in detail in chapter four of his book:¹⁴

It is not surprising that Aquinas appeals to Aristotle’s metaphor so frequently. It beautifully captures some key points that are central to Aquinas’ account of the passions: the passions operate independently of reason, but nonetheless are inclined to obey it, and yet if reason attempts to rule the passions like the soul rules the body, the passions will erupt in rebellion. Furthermore, the metaphor implies that the inclinations of the passions are basically legitimate, just in need of some guidance. Elsewhere he echoes this view by distancing himself from some more extreme ideas about the soul’s ideal mastery over passion. For instance, in response to Augustine’s contention that genital arousal would have been subject to the will in the Garden of Eden, Aquinas instead maintains that the genitals have their own proper principles of motion that respond not to the rational powers, but to the apprehension of objects. His assessment of the passions is notably optimistic. Despite the possibility of internal conflict, Aquinas trusts the fundamental orientation of the passions, as well as their capacity to be guided by reason.

¹³ Craig Titus and Paul Gondreau share the same position of spontaneous passions participating in reason through the moral virtues. C.S. Titus, ‘Passions in Christ: Spontaneity, Development, and Virtue’, in: *The Thomist* 73, no. 1 (2009), 53–87, 81–83; Paul Gondreau argues in a similar way for spontaneous passions in P. Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002), 340–341.

¹⁴ Lombardo, *Logic*, 101.

Here Lombardo is interested to show how the passions are connected to reason and are inclined to obey it, but still have their independence. If the soul tries to control the passions, like it does with the body, the passions will rebel against the soul. They have a certain autonomy of their own. This is why he thinks that the passions should be ruled in a political way. He believes that this is also the case with Christ, with the difference that in him the passions would not resist reason. This is a very problematic argument, since it is hard to reconcile the idea of the passions in Christ having the ability to resist reason and being immune to it at the same time. A less problematic way to approach this would be to understand Christ's spontaneous passions as fully shaped by moral virtue and therefore entirely governed by reason, operating under a kind of predetermined guidance of reason rather than possessing any independence or "self-determining" quality. In this view, the relationship between reason and the sense appetite would remain one of despotic rather than political rule, contrary to Lombardo's position.

Another author who examines in detail the relation between passions and reason is Paul Gondreau. He never directly assigns the political nor the despotic rule to Christ, but he does claim that Jesus' reason had absolute control over his passions and that the relation of reason and passions was strictly different in Christ than in other humans. On the other hand, he also points out that Jesus has the spontaneity of passions without letting them go against reason. He holds a similar argument to Lombardo's for the spontaneity of Christ's passion without walking the extra step of assigning the political rule to him.¹⁵

In sum, Lombardo stresses the political rule of the passions in Christ based on the necessity to show Christ as having the same human experiences as any other man, except sin. He also argues that reason does not always directly command the passions in Christ, but rather is indirectly involved through the cognitive process and the formation of habits.

2. The Political Analogy

First of all, let us see with more detail the metaphor of the political rule borrowed by Aquinas from Aristotle:¹⁶

Aristotle says in the *Politics* that both despotic and political rule can be observed in animals: for the soul governs the body with despotic rule, but the intellect governs the appetite with political and regal rule. Rule is despotic when someone rules slaves who cannot resist his mastery, because they have nothing of their own. Rule is political and regal, however, when someone rules the free: those who are subject to being governed by a ruler, but nonetheless

¹⁵ Gondreau, *Passions*, 309.

¹⁶ *STh* I, q. 81 a. 3 ad 2.

have something of their own, on account of which they can resist his mastery. In this way, therefore, the soul is said to govern the body with despotic rule. For the members of the body cannot in any way resist the mastery of the soul: hand and foot are moved immediately by the appetite, as is any bodily member that can be moved by the will. But intellect or reason is said to govern the irascible and concupiscible powers with political rule, because the sense appetite has something of its own, and therefore can resist the mastery of reason. For it is natural to the sense appetite to be moved, not only by the estimative power in other animals, and for the cogitative power (directed by universal reason) in man, but also by imagination and sensation. So it is that we experience the irascible and concupiscible powers resisting reason when we sense or imagine something pleasurable that reason forbids, or something distressing that reason commands. And thus the fact that the irascible and concupiscible powers resist reason in something does not mean that they do not obey it.

Aquinas uses the idea of rule in a *polis* to portray how human beings relate with their passions. In a democratic community, the authority is exercised by the ruler through deliberation. The will of the ruler does not replace the will of the citizens. The ruler will try to convince by the best means of the direction to take. The citizens are free to accept it or not. If they reject it, they can turn against the ruler and try to impose their own will against his dispositions. In this democratic society the citizens clearly have their own intentionality. The opposite situation is that of despotic rule. It is the community that is ruled by a tyrant. There are no true citizens in such a society, everyone below the rule are merely slaves that must obey the prescriptions of the master. There is no way out of it. The slaves do not have their own intentionality, and there is no need to convince them. Instead, the will of the ruler is the absolute, unquestionable norm.

The analogy that Aquinas makes to the relation between reason and sense appetite is the following. In the political rule of the soul, reason must convince the passions of the direction to take. The passions have a type of intentionality of their own, if they reject the disposition of reason they can force their way against it. They are free to accept or reject reason. This is why Aquinas uses the expression “they have something of their own”. For instance, a person who is grieving the loss of a loved one might rationally know several reasons to hope. He believes in eternal life, knows that the person had an end to his sufferings and lived life to the fullest, etc. But still, the sorrow that comes from missing his beloved will continue despite the dispositions of reason to do otherwise.

This is not the case with the despotic rule, which for Aquinas is the model of ruling of the soul in relation to the parts of the body. Whatever the soul commands to the parts of the body, if they are functioning organs, they will certainly obey. As I am typing up this paper in my laptop, my reason is giving a series of commands to my

fingers and hands. The reason does not need to convince my fingers of typing, it just issues commands that readily obey without other repercussions. My fingers do not have an intentionality of their own that could be at odds with the soul and start an internal rebellion.

The key point of the whole text is the expression “something of their own”. Reason’s political or despotic rule will depend on whether the sense appetite has its own intentionality and moves outside the control of reason. The idea that the sense appetite can “resist to reason” specify further down the “something of their own”. Besides having an intentionality, they have autonomy of movement that goes beyond reason and can even go against it. This is a common experience in human life, but it is not certainly the experience of Christ. Aquinas has this very clear as I will present below.

Steven Jensen also agrees that “to have something of their own” of passions in political rule mainly means to be able to resist reason. Although he does not claim that this is an ideal state, at least he thinks that the political rule is the actual situation of postlapsarian human nature.¹⁷

Paul Gondreau, when addressing the political rule in Aquinas, never directly assigns it to Christ. Instead, he defines it by the ability of the sense appetites to rebel against reason and will. He says that “such a model illustrates the way reason governs the sense appetite; though reason and will own supreme *imperium*, certain commands of these higher powers, if they are to be fully executed, require the consent of the sense appetite, as evidenced by the common experience of the ability of the lower appetites to rebel against such commands”.¹⁸ Thus, for Gondreau one the keys to understanding the political relation between reason and emotions is also based on the ability of the passions to resist reason.

In conclusion, there is enough evidence to think that Aquinas meant “something of their own” to be the ability of the passions to resist and rebel against reason. This is a key distinction to understand the difference between the political and despotic rule. In the despotic rule there is no resistance against reason, like the parts of the body that are controlled by the command of the will.

3. The Passions in Christ

Aquinas addresses the passions in Christ in the third part of the *Summa*. He first shows that Christ had indeed passions because of his human nature. Then, he explains how his passions were different from ours. This is the part that is most interesting to this argument.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jensen, *Virtuous*, 204; Leonard Donald Gordon Ferry also argues in this direction in L.D.G. Ferry, ‘Passionalist or Rationalist? The Emotions in Aquinas’ Moral Theology’, in: *New Blackfriars* 93, no. 1045 (2011).

¹⁸ Gondreau, *Passions*, 275.

¹⁹ *STh* III, q. 15 a. 4.

Nevertheless we must know that the passions were in Christ otherwise than in us, in three ways. First, as regards the object, since in us these passions very often tend towards what is unlawful, but not so in Christ. Secondly, as regards the principle, since these passions in us frequently forestall the judgment of reason; but in Christ all movements of the sensitive appetite sprang from the disposition of the reason. Hence Augustine says (*De Civ. Dei* xiv, 9), that "Christ assumed these movements, in His human soul, by an unfailing dispensation, when He willed; even as He became man when He willed". Thirdly, as regards the effect, because in us these movements, at times, do not remain in the sensitive appetite, but deflect the reason; but not so in Christ, since by His disposition the movements that are naturally becoming to human flesh so remained in the sensitive appetite that the reason was nowise hindered in doing what was right. Hence Jerome says (on Mt. 26, 37) that "Our Lord, in order to prove the reality of the assumed manhood, 'was sorrowful' in very deed; yet lest a passion should hold sway over His soul, it is by a propassion that He is said to have 'begun to grow sorrowful and to be sad'; so that it is a perfect "passion" when it dominates the soul, i.e. the reason; and a "propassion" when it has its beginning in the sensitive appetite, but goes no further.

Aquinas is upfront to say that although Jesus shared in our human nature and thus had passions, the sense appetites were in Christ in a different manner than in us. For this reason he will even call the passions in Christ as "propassions", meaning the beginning of passion that does not achieve completeness by overpowering reason.²⁰ He explains that the passions of Christ are distinct in three ways. First the object, then the principle, and finally the effect. For this discussion, the most important difference is that related to the principle. He is speaking here of the origin of the movements of the passions. We have movements of the passions that do not start in reason, but rather start on the sense appetite and even impede reason to act normally. In Christ, the passions are not an obstacle to reason, they rather invariably start in reason. This is a first indication why we should think that the passions in Christ are despotically ruled by reason. It appears from the text that Aquinas believes that Christ's reason is indeed commanding the passions as it would command a body part; in him there is no movement of passions outside reason. This is a version of the control of reason over passions that is much stronger than what Lombardo would admit, as I previously pointed out.

Another factor that helps us understand why Christ has his emotions totally under the control of reason is to compare it with the present human state of sin. When talking about *fomes peccati*, which is the inclination that we have towards sin, Aquinas

²⁰ Gondreau, *Passions*, 369.

makes the connection between reason and the passions rebelling against it. This is how he puts it:²¹

The *fomes* is nothing but a certain inordinate, but habitual, concupiscence of the sensitive appetite for actual concupiscence is a sinful motion. Now sensual concupiscence is said to be inordinate, insofar as it rebels against reason; and this it does by inclining to evil, or hindering from good. Consequently it is essential to the *fomes* to incline to evil, or hinder from good.

This explanation about the *fomes* was made in the context of the examination of the passions in Mary. Aquinas explains that the taint of original sin provokes inordinate movement in the soul. This movement is precisely inordinate because it rebels against reason. It is a very similar phrasing from the passage that talks about the political metaphor, which says that sense appetite “can resist the mastery of reason”.²² Therefore, in a way it seems that the ability of the passions to resist reason is a consequence of original sin.

Gondreau also points to this connection between sin and the nature of passions in Christ. He points out that the sinlessness of Christ is the critical difference between the moral quality of Jesus' passions and all other human beings. In a way, the sinlessness of Christ is what makes his passions be under the absolute control of reason, like the case of Adam in the prelapsarian nature.²³

Similarly, Giuseppe Butera makes reference to Adam's example. He holds that Christ had despotic rule over his passions, like Adam before the fall and the blessed Virgin. He thinks that the evidence in Aquinas for this is that he did not allow for movements of the passions outside reason. Therefore, if the passions are bound to move under the prompts of reason, they should be considered to be under the despotic rule²⁴. Butera compares the state of Christ's soul to that of Adam pre-fall and he thinks that as far as the relation between passions and reason goes, they had the same experience of despotic rule.²⁵

An objection could be raised against the perfect rule of the passions by the soul in Christ. The episode of the prayer in Gethsemane seems to portray Christ's sense appetite going in a different direction of his reason, especially when he says “My

²¹ *STh* III, q. 27 a.3.

²² *STh* I q. 81 a.3 ad 2.

²³ Gondreau, *Passions*, 287.

²⁴ Butera, *Reason*, 154.

²⁵ Butera adds the state of Mary to the conversation, saying that she also enjoys the same despotic rule. While this is true to Mary as immaculately conceived, this is not the way that Aquinas understood it as we can see in the next section. See Butera, *Reason*, 157.

Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will" (Mt. 26, 39).²⁶ Aquinas touches on this issue in the *STh* III, q. 18 a. 5, saying that,

As was said, in Christ according to His human nature there is a twofold will, viz. the will of sensuality, which is called will by participation, and the rational will, whether considered after the manner of nature, or after the manner of reason. Now it was said above that by a certain dispensation the Son of God before His Passion "allowed His flesh to do and suffer what belonged to it". And in like manner He allowed all the powers of His soul to do what belonged to them. Now it is clear that the will of sensuality naturally shrinks from sensible pains and bodily hurt. In like manner, the will as nature turns from what is against nature and what is evil in itself, as death and the like; yet the will as reason may at times choose these things in relation to an end, as in a mere man the sensuality and the will absolutely considered shrink from burning, which, nevertheless, the will as reason may choose for the sake of health. Now it was the will of God that Christ should undergo pain, suffering, and death, not that these of themselves were willed by God, but for the sake of man's salvation. Hence it is plain that in His will of sensuality and in His rational will considered as nature, Christ could will what God did not; but in His will as reason He always willed the same as God, which appears from what He says (Mt. 26, 39): "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt". For He willed in His reason that the Divine will should be fulfilled although He said that He willed something else by another will.

In this passage, Aquinas discusses whether the will of Christ was conformed to the divine will. He recalls the distinction between the will of sensuality, meaning the sense appetite, and the rational will, the intellectual appetite. Then, he draws another distinction on the rational will, which is the will as nature and will as reason. The former is the will as desiring the good in general and in itself, while the latter presents the will in action to particular goods and as a means to an end.²⁷

The main point here is that Aquinas thinks that the divine will allows all Christ's powers to do what is proper to them. It is proper to the sense the appetite to suffer pain and reject suffering, while the will as nature also is repelled by death and suffering as experienced in themselves. The will of reason chooses death as a means of salvation to mankind in accordance to the divine will. So, the will of sensuality and the will of nature are not in contradiction to reason, but are rather following their

²⁶ New American Bible, revised edition. A complete and insightful study of Aquinas' approach to Gethsemane can be found in J.R. Gallagher, 'The Gethsemane Event according to Thomas Aquinas', in: *Angelicum* 94, no. 4 (2017), 673–708.

²⁷ Gondreau offers a detailed explanation of the distinction of the will as nature and will as reason in Gondreau, *Passions*, 337–361.

proper functions as designed and allowed by the divine will. Ultimately, sorrow and fear experienced by Christ are in the bounds of his reason.²⁸

Summing up, a close reading of Aquinas shows that Christ's passions were absolutely under the control of reason.²⁹ There were no movements of the sense appetites that could resist or have origin outside the higher parts of Christ's soul. For this reason, we can apply the political analogy of Aquinas to Christ by saying that his reason had despotic control over his passions. Contrary to the position held by Lombardo, the despotic rule does not detract from his humanity, just as his sinlessness does not. Jesus' humanity is not diminished by his sinlessness; in fact, it's enhanced to the fullness. The inclination to sin and the ability to resist reason of the political rule are interconnected, and as Christ was free from sin, he also lacked the capacity to resist his intellect provided by the despotic rule. The treatment of Mary's passion in Aquinas makes this point even more clear as I shall examine next.

4. The Passions in Mary

One of the strongest arguments that can be made to show that Aquinas considers Christ to have despotic rule over his passions is to point out the section of the compendium of theology about the passions in Mary. The compendium is one of the latest writings of Aquinas and it is considered one of the most mature expressions of his thought. He wrote it after he had finished most of the *Summa Theologiae*. He composed it in the last two years of his life 1272-1273.³⁰ In this text, Aquinas compares the relation between reason and passions in both Christ and Mary. The difference between them is very noticeable and helps us understand better why a close reading to Aquinas' writings should dismiss the political rule in Christ's soul.³¹

But her sanctification was more ample than that of others who were sanctified in the wombs of their mothers. Others thus sanctified in the womb were, it is true, cleansed from original sin; but the grace of being unable to sin later on, even venially, was not granted to them. The Blessed Virgin Mary, however, was sanctified with such a wealth of grace that thenceforth she was preserved free from all sin, and not only from mortal sin, but also from venial sin. Moreover

²⁸ In his commentary on Christ's sadness in Gethsemane (Mark 14, 34) in *Postilla super Psalmos 54* [n. 530], Aquinas explains: "*Alia est tristitia quae propassio dicitur quae est subitus motus; et haec tristitia fuit in Christo.*" In other words, this sadness was a sudden incomplete movement—a propassio—that did not affect reason and therefore did not constitute a full-blown emotion. Such complete and uncontrolled sudden passions, Aquinas notes in *De Ver.* q. 26 a. 8, are characteristic of those subject to original sin and are excluded from Christ.

²⁹ Besides the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas makes a similar argument *In III Sent.* d. 15; the *Comp. Theol.* 232; *De Ver.* q. 26 a. 8; *In Matt.* 26, lect. 5; *In Io.* 11, lect. 5.

³⁰ C. Vollert, *Compendium of Theology* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), v.

³¹ *Comp. Theol.* 224. Bold is mine. The translation of the *Compendium* cited here is by C. Vollert, *Compendium of Theology* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948). Bold is mine.

venial sin sometimes creeps up on us unawares, owing to the fact that an inordinate motion of concupiscence or of some other passion arises prior to the advertence of the mind, yet in such a way that the first motions are called sins. Hence we conclude that the Blessed Virgin Mary never committed a venial sin, for she did not experience such inordinate motions of passion. Inordinate motions of this kind arise because the sensitive appetite, which is the subject of these passions, is not so obedient to reason as not sometimes to move toward an object outside the order of reason, or even, occasionally, against reason; and this is what engenders the sinful impulse. In the Blessed Virgin, accordingly, the sensitive appetite was rendered so subject to reason by the power of the grace which sanctified it, that it was never aroused against reason, but was always in conformity with the order of reason. **Nevertheless she could experience some spontaneous movements not ordered by reason.**

Aquinas argues that because Mary was sanctified in the womb of her mother, she never experienced inordinate passions that would move her to commit a sin, not even venial. This is different from us who were not subjected to such a sanctification. We do experience inordinate movements of passions that can cause us to go against reason and sin as fruit of the *fomes peccati* in our tainted soul. What is very interesting is to notice that, according to Aquinas, Mary was conceived with sin, she was not spared from the original fault, like Adam and Jesus.³² As a consequence of being at least conceived with original sin, despite not being subject to the *fomes*, Aquinas makes sure to point out that Mary experienced some “spontaneous movements not ordered by reason”. Here the key idea is that in a nature minimally tainted by sin, passions will move outside the boundaries of reason, even if those movements themselves are not sinful. It is clear that such a situation would imply that Mary’s reason had political rule over her passions. Mary’s sense appetite had something of its own, it had a source of interior movement outside reason. This opens the possibility for resistance against reason, even though in the case of Mary this never happened because she was sanctified in the womb and the *fomes peccati* was not developed or active in her.

What follows this paragraph is even more revealing, Aquinas goes on to the point of comparing Christ to Mary in order to show that Christ, being conceived without original sin, does not have any autonomous movements of passions outside reason.³³

³² The dogma of the Immaculate Conception from December 8th, 1854 brings this argument a step further. Now all the faithful are required to believe that Mary was spared from any taint of original sin from the first instant of conception. Aquinas did not have this piece of information at his time and was free to speculate about it. After the dogma, it seems that the Blessed Virgin should have a similar experience of the propassions of Christ, since her emotions were totally under the control of reason. Therefore, she also exercised despotic rule over her passions.

³³ *Comp. Theol.* 244. Bold is mine.

In our Lord Jesus Christ there was something more. In Him the lower appetite was so perfectly subject to reason that it did not move in the direction of any object except in accord with the order of reason, that is, so far as reason regulated the lower appetite or permitted it to go into action of its own accord. So far as we can judge, a characteristic pertaining to the integrity of the original state was the complete subjection of the lower powers to reason. This subjection was destroyed by the sin of our first parent, not only in himself, but in all the others who contracted original sin from him. In all of these the rebellion or disobedience of the lower powers to reason, which is called concupiscence (*fomes peccati*), remains even after they have been cleansed from sin by the sacrament of grace. But such was by no means the case with Christ, according to the explanation given above. **In the Blessed Virgin Mary, however, the lower powers were not so completely subject to reason as never to experience any movement not preordained by reason.** Yet they were so restrained by the power of grace that they were at no time aroused contrary to reason. Because of this we usually say that after the Blessed Virgin was sanctified concupiscence remained in her according to its substance, but that it was shackled.

I arrived at the key text for this argument. Christ has “something more” than Mary, and for that matter, more than all other human beings conceived with original sin. Aquinas is clear in explaining that the passions were totally subjected to reason in Christ. They did not move except when prompted by reason. He uses the expressions “perfectly subjected”, “order of reason”, “reason regulated”, “reason permitted”. All those phrases evoke the idea of a strict control and command of reason. For this reason we can say that Aquinas’ most mature texts point towards an understanding that Christ had a despotic control over his passions. Not even Mary, who was sanctified and never sinned, had such dominion over her passions, since spontaneous movements that were not sinful were present in her soul.

In the face of such strong wording and extensive explanation, it is very hard to hold like Lombardo did that Christ had a political rule over his passions. Aquinas is quick to show that there is no room for spontaneous movements of passions in Christ that have “something of their own”. He is very different from us in this matter. Christ was never affected by sinful inclinations and thus his passions do not have “something of their own”. Further, he did not even have harmless motions, such as the ones that his sinless mother experienced. His emotions cannot resist or rebel against reason. These internal realities are experienced by human beings tainted by original sin. Perhaps the only way to allow for any kind of spontaneous passions in Christ, as Gondreau and Titus suggest, is to hold that they are entirely governed by reason through the moral virtues. In this sense, they would be predetermined, lacking any independent operation, and would still remain under the despotic rule of reason.

5. Conclusion

In sum, the political metaphor employed by Aquinas shows that reason can rule the other faculties of the soul and the body with a despotic or political rule, to which “have something of its own” is the key distinction. This is the ability of resisting reason that is present in the passions in the fallen human nature. Since Christ’s human nature is free from any taint of original sin, his reason has a perfect control of his passions. A close reading of Aquinas’ more mature writings revealed that there are no movements of the passions that retain independence or “something of their own”. Therefore, while we have a political rule over our passions as fallen human beings, Christ has rather a despotic rule over his. The situation of Mary presented by Aquinas makes this point even more clear. He believed that she was conceived with sin, but was sanctified in the womb of her mother. Thus, although she never sinned, Aquinas argued that there were still sinless movements of the passions in her that were not subjected to reason, meaning that they retained “something of their own”. Instead, Christ did not even have these sinless affective motions. Therefore, it becomes evident that Jesus had a despotic rule over his passions. This reality does not diminish Jesus’ humanity nor his moral exemplarity as his sinlessness does not decrease them either. He is still the perfect model of virtuous life, even if he himself never experienced sin and his reason ruled over his passions in a despotic way.