

**Eschatological Interpretations in Comparison:  
Arnau de Vilanova's *Gladius iugulans thomatistas* and the Doctrine of Thomas  
Aquinas<sup>1</sup>**

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The aim of this paper is to highlight the key points of the eschatological controversy presented in the *Gladius iugulans thomatistas* (Arnaldus de Villanova, 125-151; Dezza, 35-72), which sets Arnau against the “thomatiste,” without entering into the detailed analysis of the work itself or the circumstances of its composition (Ehrle; Mensa 2014a; Mensa 2014b).

It will suffice to recall that Arnau wrote the *Gladius* in February 1304, in Marseille, addressing it to the canon Jacme Blanc.<sup>2</sup> The work was conceived as a forceful attack against those Dominican friars – followers of Thomas Aquinas – who subtly hindered the dissemination of his eschatological ideas. Rather than confronting him openly, they preached and circulated pamphlets against him without his knowledge. According to the periodization of Arnau's works proposed by Perarnau, the *Gladius* belongs to the third phase, the “spiritual-eschatological” one, which began in 1299 with the publication of the *Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi* and concluded in 1305 with the *Presentatio facta Burdegaliae* to Pope Clement V (Perarnau 2007, 67).

### 1. Arnau and the Followers of Thomas Aquinas

At the outset of the eschatological controversy, Arnau's main opponents were not the Dominicans but rather certain secular masters (including Pierre d'Auvergne) and an otherwise unidentified Franciscan master (Scavizzi, 886, footnote 7). Indeed, among the Dominicans, there were voices such as that of Jean Quidort (*Tractatus de Antichristo et eius temporibus*), who were partially favorable to Arnau's position (Gerwing).

For this reason, in order to support his theology of history, Arnau initially sought backing also among the Dominicans, sending to the communities of Paris and Montpellier two letters introducing the *Tractatus de mysterio cymbalorum ecclesiae*, a more orderly reworking of the earlier *Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi* (Scavizzi, 898-900, 914-916). Arnau held the Dominican Order in high esteem and appreciated its missionary charism, oriented toward preaching and the fight against heresy.

However, when friar Martín de Ateca, friar Bernat de Puigcercós, and friar Joan Vigorós began preaching and circulating writings against his thesis, Arnau felt betrayed by those in whom he had placed his trust.<sup>3</sup> The fact that they openly professed themselves

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<sup>2</sup> Jacme Blanc was probably a physician (hence he receives from Arnau the title *magister*), and also a canon of Digne, present-day Digne-les-Bains in Provence. Besides the *Gladius*, he is also the recipient of the *Apologia* (1302) (Perarnau 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Martín de Ateca was an Aragonese Dominican friar and confessor to King James II of Aragon. He is credited with a *Summa iuris*, which has not survived, and he is said to have died in 1306. According to what Arnau writes in the *Antidotum* (summer of 1305), the short treatise against Arnau was entitled *Contra ponentes certum tempus finis mundi*, and Arnau had later managed to obtain the work in a rather adventurous way. This writing by Martín has also unfortunately been lost (Mensa, 2014c). Friar Bernat was a native of Girona; he made his vows in Barcelona in 1296 and, after studying in Paris, returned to his religious province. In 1304, we find him as a lector in Girona, and again between 1312 and 1314, after a

followers of Thomas Aquinas only intensified his hostility: in the Angelic Doctor Arnau saw one of the causes of the Order's decline, guilty – in his view – of having abandoned the original ideal of Dominic de Guzmán in favor of the philosophy of Aristotle and the pagans.

Since the *Gladius* is written in the form of a self-apologia, it is easy to identify within the text the sections corresponding to specific accusations brought against him, to which he responds point by point. These are listed below:

1. Interpretation of the prophecy of Dan 12:1 (Arnaldus de Villanova, pages 129-131; lines 103-159).
2. Interpretation of Gen 29:28 (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 131-132; ll. 160-181).
3. Defense of *usus pauper* (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 131-137; ll. 182-315).
4. The requirement of charity in the evangelical preacher (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 137-138; ll. 316-342).
5. The excellence of the revelation contained in the *Oraculum Cyrilli* (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 138-139; ll. 343-381).
6. Revelation is also transmitted through the militant Church (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 140; ll. 382-392).
7. It is necessary to know in advance the time of the coming of the Antichrist, against the opinion of Thomas Aquinas (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 140-143; ll. 393-472).
8. It is possible to determine the end times (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 144-149; ll. 473-621).

As can be seen, some themes addressed in the *Gladius* do not directly concern our question, although they are related; nevertheless, the central core of the work remains the eschatological dispute. The tension between Arnau and the Dominican masters focused above all on the possibility of knowing the end times, a divergence rooted in a different conception of revelation (Mensa 2014a; Mensa 2014c).

According to Arnau, Christ could have revealed to whomever He wished the nearness of the end times, so that His disciples might prepare for the struggle against the Antichrist and for the encounter with Him. Foreknowledge of the *eschaton* was not only possible but necessary, so that the “children of light” might not succumb to the “children of darkness.” It was the task, in particular, of scholars and prelates to know and to disseminate this truth. Arnau's works between 1299 and 1305 are rich in biblical and patristic citations in support of this thesis (D'Agostino, 108, footnote 93).

On the contrary, Thomas Aquinas denied both the possibility and the usefulness of knowing the end in advance: such knowledge, he argued, could weaken the hope of believers. If Christ had wished to reveal it, He would have done so; moreover, all past attempts to calculate the date of the coming of the Antichrist, based on human reasoning, had failed. Adhering to Thomas, the Thomists reaffirmed this position.

The most relevant section of the *Gladius* for the purposes of this paper is the seventh, in which Arnau directly attacks the writings of Thomas and describes his followers as

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period of teaching in Valencia (1310). He also served as General Inquisitor of the Kingdom of Aragon (before 1320) and as Provincial Master of Aragon (1324–1333) (Carreras, 17-19). Friar Joan Vigorós (Vigoreux) had been regent of the studium of Montpellier and Inquisitor in Languedoc. He was sent to England together with Friar Raymond de Mévouillon by the General Chapter of the Order of Preachers held in Milan in 1278, in order to suppress internal dissent within the Order against the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, which had been generated by the Oxford condemnation of Kilwardby (Mensa 1998, 217-220).

“the blind leading the blind,” who venerate him as a sun, even as a god. In doing so, however, they overturn the natural order, reducing Christ to a mere poet and elevating Thomas to the rank of an evangelist (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 140-143; ll. 393-472); yet they fail to realize that Thomas is indeed a sun – but one fallen into the abyss of perdition (see Rev. 9:1–6), from which there came a swarm of death-bringing locusts, namely his followers, surrounded by the infernal smoke of their doctrines! (Arnaldus de Villanova, pp. 149-150; ll. 622-656).

## 2. On the Knowability of the End Times

Let us follow Arnau’s text in order to identify the heart of the issue. The first point to be examined is the following: “One point is that, although in the past the end times had not been revealed to the elect, nevertheless in the future they were to be revealed” (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 141; ll. 407-408).<sup>4</sup>

The relevant biblical passages are Matt. 24:36 (“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father alone”); John 16:12 (“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now”); and Acts 1:7 (“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority”).

Thomas Aquinas treats this issue in distinction 43 of his commentary on the fourth book of the *Sentences*, article 3 (*Utrum tempus resurrectionis oporteat differri usque ad finem mundi, ut omnes simul resurgant*), particularly in the second *quaestiuncula*, where the knowledge of the end times is examined. Let us consider the first *sed contra*:

But on the contrary, that which is unknown to the Angels is much more hidden from human beings; because those things which humans can attain by natural reason are known by the Angels far more clearly and certainly through their natural knowledge. Likewise, revelations are not made to humans except through the mediation of the Angels, as is evident from Dionysius in chapter 4 of *The Celestial Hierarchy*. But the Angels do not know the time in a determinate way, as is clear from Matthew 24:36: ‘*Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the Angels of heaven.*’ Therefore, that time is hidden from human beings (Thomas de Aquino 1858, 1063a).<sup>5</sup>

Thomas argues that the future can be known either by natural means or by revelation. By natural means, creatures (both angels and humans) can know with certainty only what is contained in its cause, that is, necessary events; they may have a “conjectural certainty” about events that occur with regularity or appear as inevitable consequences of certain premises. All other events – those produced by free will, whether created or divine – cannot be known with certainty. Angels, who contemplate the divine essence, possess knowledge of all things dependent on natural causes through their innate forms; for us, such things appear contingent only insofar as they have not yet occurred. Other events,

<sup>4</sup> “[U]num est quod, licet in preterito non fuissent electis finalia tempora reuelata, tamen in futuro erant reuelanda.” All translations are my own.

<sup>5</sup> “Sed contra, illud quod est ignoratum ab Angelis, est etiam hominibus multo magis occultum; quia ea ad quae homines naturali ratione pertingere possunt, multo limpidius et certius Angeli naturali cognitione cognoscunt; similiter etiam revelationes hominibus non fiunt nisi mediantibus Angelis, ut patet per Dionysium, 4 cap. Cael. Hier. Sed Angeli nesciunt tempus determinate, ut patet Matth. 24, 36: *de die illa et hora nemo scit, neque Angeli caelorum.* Ergo tempus illud est hominibus occultum.”

however, are not known by all angels, except by those who behold them in the Word, and even then, none can comprehend them perfectly (Thomas de Aquino 1970, 259b).

For human beings, knowledge of the future is even more sharply limited. By studying nature, we can know what happens by necessity. Only in this sense is it legitimate to study the stars in order to obtain information about a future event, such as a lunar eclipse. Any other kind of inquiry into the future is impious, illicit, and sinful, as the Angelic Doctor states in the *Summa theologiae* (II-II, q. 95). In article 3, he provides a comprehensive list of forms of divination, including the invocation of demons, necromancy, geomancy, dream interpretation, augury, haruspicy, chiromancy, and others, among them astrology. Particularly relevant is the beginning of the response to article 5, on whether divination by means of the stars is illicit:

Heavenly bodies cannot, in themselves, be the cause of the acts of free will. They can, however, incline toward this in a dispositive way, insofar as they act upon the human body, and consequently upon the sensitive powers, which are acts of bodily organs and which incline toward human actions. But since the sensitive powers obey reason, as is evident from the Philosopher in *De anima* III and in *Ethics* I, no necessity is thereby imposed on the free will; rather, against the inclination of the heavenly bodies, a human being can act by means of reason (Thomas de Aquino 1897, 320b).<sup>6</sup>

Since no body, whether terrestrial or celestial, has the power to determine the actions of a spiritual faculty such as intellect and will, any attempt to know the future – inasmuch as it depends on free choice – on the basis of the study of the stars is futile.

If the natural route is thus excluded, the supernatural one remains: revelation. According to Thomas Aquinas, no prophetic revelation is granted to human beings except through the mediation of angels. Against this claim, Arnau maintains the opposite possibility, namely that humans might reveal things to angels – for instance, the precise number of Masses celebrated (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 140; ll. 382-392). In the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (q. 12, a. 8), the Angelic Doctor argues that although God is the primary cause of revelation, human beings could not receive an adequate prophetic vision unless the divine light – simple and universal in itself – were in some way adapted to the human mind by the angelic intellect, which also disposes the sensible species through which the human mind is affected (Thomas de Aquino 1970, 258b-259b). Thus, according to Thomas, angelic mediation is an indispensable instrument for revelation to human beings.

Now, as has been said, even angels know by their own power only what occurs by natural necessity; they can have knowledge of contingent realities only inasmuch as some of them are granted access to the perfect knowledge possessed by the Word, inasmuch as He is God. They could, therefore, act as intermediaries, so that what is known by God might also become known to human beings. They could – if God so willed. But, according to Thomas, God has not willed this.

Here lies the crucial point. Arnau agrees that the time of the Antichrist or the return of Christ cannot be determined on the basis of purely human calculations: “Revelation does

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<sup>6</sup> “[C]orpora caelestia non possunt esse per se causa operum liberi arbitrii. Possunt tamen ad hoc dispositive inclinare, in quantum imprimunt in corpus humanum, et per consequens in vires sensitivas, quae sunt actus corporalium organorum, quae inclinant ad humanos actus. Quia tamen vires sensitivae obediunt rationi, ut patet per Philosophum, in III *de Anima* et in I *Ethic.*, nulla necessitas ex hoc libero arbitrio imponitur, sed contra inclinationem caelestium corporum homo potest per rationem operari.”

not depend on natural or human causes, but solely on the grace of God.” (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 144; ll. 478-479).<sup>7</sup> Yet, in his view, God has made it understood that He intends, at the proper time, to make known to human beings the end days.

In question 5 of the *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, Thomas is clear – indeed, in some respects, quite uncompromising:

By revelation, indeed, it could be known, if God were willing to reveal it; nevertheless, it would not be fitting for it to be revealed except to the man Christ. And this for three reasons. First, because the end of the world will not occur except when the number of the elect has been completed; [...] hence it is not fitting that a revelation be made about the end of the world except to him to whom the whole of divine predestination is revealed, namely, to the man Christ [...]. Second, because by the fact that it is unknown how long this present state of the world ought to endure – whether for a short or a long time – the things of this world are regarded as if they were about to pass away immediately [...]. Third, so that human beings may always be ready to await the judgment of God, since the determinate time is entirely unknown [...] (Thomas de Aquino 1953, 146b-147a).<sup>8</sup>

For Thomas, ignorance is better than knowledge: if those who claim to know were mistaken, they would bring discredit upon divine revelation and plunge into despair those who had awaited Christ’s return.

### 3. God Will Reveal the End Times to the Elect

Arnau, for his part, believes he can also rely on the authority of Augustine. This is the second point cited in the *Gladius*: “Another [point] is what is stated in the *Eulogium*, namely that Augustine, in *De Trinitate*, said that the times which the Father has placed in His own power, He will reveal to the elect at the proper time by His own power.” (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 141; ll. 408-411).<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the text of Augustine (*De Trinitate*, 1, 12, 23) seems to support what Arnau strongly maintains:

And: ‘Of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father alone.’ For he [Christ] is said not to know that which he causes others not to know – that is, he did not know it in such a way as to make it known to the disciples at that time [...]. For he was certainly going to tell this also to the disciples at the appropriate time, he who, speaking of what was still future as though it were past, says: ‘I will no longer call you servants, but friends. For the servant does not know the will of his lord; but I have called you friends, because all things that I have

<sup>7</sup> “[R]euelatio non dependet a causis naturalibus uel humanis, sed solum a gratia Dei.”

<sup>8</sup> “Per revelationem uero licet sciri possit, si Deus uellet reuelare, non tamen congruum esset quod reuelaretur nisi homini Christo. Et hoc propter tres rationes. Primo quidem, quia finis mundi non erit nisi completo numero electorum; [...] unde non competit revelationem fieri de fine mundi nisi ei cui fit reuelatio de tota praedestinatione divina, scilicet homini Christo [...]. Secundo, quia per hoc quod ignoratur quamdiu iste status mundi durare debeat, utrum ad modicum uel ad magnum tempus, habentur res huius mundi quasi statim transiturae [...]. Tertio, ut homines semper sint parati ad Dei iudicium expectandum, dum omnino determinatum tempus nescitur [...].”

<sup>9</sup> “[A]liud est quod dicitur in *Eulogio*, scilicet Augustinum in *De Trinitate* dixisse quod tempora, que Pater posuit in sua potestate, tempori oportuno sua potestate reuelabit electis.” (D’Amico et alii, 92).

*heard from my Father I have made known to you.*’ This he had not yet done, but because he was certainly going to do it, he spoke as though he had already done it. For he himself says to them: *‘I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.’* Among these things is also understood: *‘of the day and the hour.’* (Augustinus 1968, 61).<sup>10</sup>

The problem, however, is that Augustine states the opposite elsewhere, in *The City of God*, Book 18, chapter 53:

That final persecution, indeed, which will be brought about by the Antichrist, will be extinguished by the very presence of Jesus himself. [...] Here it is usually asked: *When will this happen?* But this question is altogether inopportune. For if it were beneficial for us to know this, to whom would it have been better revealed than to the disciples when they questioned God himself as their teacher? [...] Therefore, we strive in vain to calculate and determine the years that remain for this world, since we hear from the mouth of Truth that it does not belong to us to know this (Augustinus 1955, 652).<sup>11</sup>

Thomas does not overlook this statement, which he reprises in his commentary on the *Sentences*:

Nor can it be known by revelation, for this reason: that all may always be solicitous and prepared to meet Christ [...]. For what he was unwilling to disclose to the Apostles when they were asking, he will not reveal to others either. Hence, all those who have wished to calculate and predict the appointed time have thus far been found to be false speakers (Thomas de Aquino 1858, 1064b).<sup>12</sup>

But, according to Arnau, such reasoning is fit only for ignorant herdsmen – a *bubulcaritas* (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 144; l. 485). To argue that, because Christ did not reveal these things in the past, He will not reveal them in the future is, formally speaking, an invalid inference, a logical fallacy. It is a hasty – indeed ridiculous – conclusion (Arnaldus de Villanova, p. 144; l. 477) because it rests on faulty premises: as already noted, divine revelation does not operate according to natural necessity. It is not like those things that always behave in the same way, such that if they did not occur in the past, they will not occur in the future.

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<sup>10</sup> “Et: *De die et hora nemo scit neque angeli in caelo neque Filius nisi Pater.* Hoc enim nescit quod nescientes facit, id est quod non ita sciebat ut tunc discipulis indicaret [...]. Nam et illud utique dicturus erat discipulis tempore opportuno, de quo futuro tamquam praeterito loquens ait: *Iam non dicam vos servos sed amicos. Servus enim nescit voluntatem Domini sui; vos autem dixi amicos quia omnia quae audivi a Patre meo nota vobis feci;* quod nondum fecerat, sed quia certo facturus erat quasi iam fecisset locutus est. Ipsi enim ait: *Multa habeo vobis dicere, sed non potestis illa portare modo.* Inter quae intellegitur et: *De die et hora.*”

<sup>11</sup> “Illam sane novissimam persecutionem, quae ab Antichristo futura est, praesentia sua extinguet ipse Iesus. [...] Hic quaeri solet: Quando istud erit? Importune omnino. Si enim hoc nobis nosse prodesset, a quo melius quam ab ipso Deo magistro interrogantibus discipulis diceretur? [...] Frustra igitur annos, qui remanent huic saeculo, computare ac definire conamur, cum hoc scire non esse nostrum ex ore Veritatis audiamus.”

<sup>12</sup> “[N]ec per revelationem haberi potest, ideo, ut omnes semper sint solliciti et praeparati ad Christo occurrendum [...]. Quod enim apostolis quaerentibus noluit indicare, nec aliis revelabit. Unde illi omnes qui tempus praedictum numerare voluerunt, hactenus falsiloqui sunt inventi.”

#### 4. Other Theological Perspectives on the Question

Albert the Great (*Commentarii in quartum librum Sententiarum*, d. 43, a. 7, s.c. 3 et resp.) had also expressed himself clearly on the moral inappropriateness and the scientific impossibility of making such calculations:

Furthermore, from what is said in Matthew 24:36: *'But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, but the Father alone.'* Therefore, those who involve themselves in predicting that revelation seem to be impostors. Response. It must be said that I in no way think that anyone can foreknow the day of judgment. And the reason is given in the text [of the *Sentences*] by Augustine, namely, that the Judge wills to come unexpectedly. But a reason can also be given: it cannot be known through the disposition of the higher motion; nor does God will that anyone know it through revelation; and thus it can in no way be known (Albertus Magnus 1894, 517b).<sup>13</sup>

The position of the Franciscan masters, however, is different. By way of example – without attempting a full treatment of a topic that would require much greater development – we may consider Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and Peter John Olivi.

The Seraphic Doctor, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (ch. 12, n. 59; v. 40), presents the more moderate opinion, simply citing the *Glossa* and other authorities, and concluding: “For this reason, so that we may always be ready, the Lord willed that we should not know the hour of death or the day of judgment.” (Bonaventura 1895, 327a).<sup>14</sup>

However, in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (book 4, d. 48, a. 1, q. 4, resp.), Bonaventure adopts a more open position:

Response. It must be said that, without any doubt, the hour of the day of judgment is known to the whole Trinity and to the assumed man, but it is unknown to all who exist in the state of wayfarers. But concerning this there is a dispute among the doctors as to whether it is known to the Angels and to the blessed souls. Some say that it is, others that it is not. But certainly, what ought to be held on this matter will be taught more by experience, in its proper place and time, than it can now be taught by knowledge; for both positions are possible (Bonaventura 1889, 988b).<sup>15</sup>

A few years later, Peter John Olivi, in his *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (ch. 1), taking into account the plurality of interpretations of Christ’s words “It is not for you to know times or seasons,” likewise advances an open position:

<sup>13</sup> “Item, Ex illo quod dixit, Matth. XXIV, 36: *De die autem illa et hora nemo scit, neque Angeli caelorum, nisi solus Pater.* Ergo videntur esse trutanni, qui se de revelatione illa intromittunt. Responso. Dicendum, quod nullo modo puto quemquam posse praescire diem iudicii. Et causa redditur in Littera ab Augustino, scilicet quia insperate vult iudex venire. Sed ratio etiam reddi potest: quia per dispositionem motus superioris non potest sciri: sed per revelationem non vult Deus aliquem scire: et ita nullo modo sciri potest.”

<sup>14</sup> “Propter hoc ergo, ut semper simus parati, voluit Dominus, nos ignorare horam mortis et diem iudicii.”

<sup>15</sup> “Respondeo: Dicendum, quod absque dubio hora diei iudicii est nota toti Trinitati et homini assumpto, ignota est omnibus in statu viatorum existentibus. Sed de hoc est contentio inter doctores, utrum nota sit Angelis et animabus beatis. Quidam dicunt, quod sic, quidam, quod non. - Sed certe, quid sit super hoc tenendum, magis docebit experientia pro loco et tempore, quam nunc doceat scientia; utrumque enim est possibile.”

Note that the reason for the diversity of the glosses can be taken from the variety of contrary opinions or from different respects or modes of knowledge concerning future times. From the contrariety of opinions, indeed, because some have held and still hold that to no saint, while he was living here, has the time of the Antichrist or of the final judgment been revealed or will be revealed; and that it is with respect to this that Christ speaks here when he says: *'It is not for you,'* etc. And Augustine is of this opinion [...] [see *Epistle I to Hesychius; The City of God*, 18, 53]. Others, however, say that Christ does not say this to the Apostles with regard to the state which they had after the full reception of the Holy Spirit, but only with regard to the state which they then had before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This they prove: [...] Third, because many divine mysteries, of no lesser weight or secrecy, were afterwards revealed to some of them. For were not the mysteries revealed to Paul or to John – *which it is not permitted for a man to speak* (2 Cor. 12:4) – of no less importance than to know the day or the hour of the coming of the Antichrist or of the final judgment? (Petrus Ioannis Olivi, 25-26).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Olivi seems to suggest *a fortiori* that even the day of the end could have been revealed to them later. And if to them – to the apostles, by virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit – why not also, potentially, to others? Revelation is complete in Christ – but is it also definitively closed? In other words, is it possible that something of the divine mysteries, without contradicting what has been revealed by Christ, might still be disclosed in history? Or has everything been said once and for all?

The *quaestio* that opposes the Thomists and Arnau is therefore not merely a question about the latter. It is part of a much broader problem concerning the very nature of divine revelation: its timing, its recipients, its mediators – and the necessity, indeed the urgency, of knowing and making known the approach of the end, in order to be prepared for the struggle.

## 5. Two Different Concepts of Revelation

What Arnau cannot tolerate in the Thomists' critique is the inertia to which they condemn the Church, leaving it deliberately in ignorance of the end times and thus unprepared to confront its enemies. It is no coincidence that, at the height of the eschatological controversy, Arnau draws ever closer to the Franciscan Spirituals and to their theology of history. One may also recall what another Franciscan had written some years earlier. Thus Roger Bacon, in the *Opus maius* (section 4, *Mathematicae in divinis utilitas: Iudicia Astronomiae*), addressed to Clement IV, expresses a similar concern:

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<sup>16</sup> “Nota quod ratio diversitatis glossarum potest sumi ex varietate contrariarum opinionum aut diversorum respectuum seu modorum scientiae temporum futurorum. Ex contrarietate quidem opinionum, quia quidam opinati sunt et opinantur quod nullo sancto dum hic viveret fuerit revelatum aut revelandum tempus Antichristi vel iudicii extremi, et quod respectu huius loquitur hic Christus cum ait: *Non est vestrum* etc. Et huius opinionis est Augustinus [...]. Alii vero dicunt quod Christus non dicit hoc apostolis pro statu quem post plenam susceptionem Sancti Spiritus habuerunt, sed solum pro statu quem tunc ante Sancti Spiritus effusionem habebant. Quod probant: [...] Tertio, quia multa Dei arcana non minoris ponderis aut secreti fuerunt quibusdam eorum postmodum revelata. Numquid enim arcana Paulo vel Ioanni revelata *quae non licet homini loqui* (2Cor 12, 4) fuerunt minoris ponderis quam scire diem vel horam adventus Antichristi vel iudicii extremi?”

I do not wish here to set my mouth in heaven, but I know that if the Church were willing to examine the sacred text and the holy prophecies, as well as the prophecies of the Sibyl, of Merlin, of the Eagle, and of Sestos, of Joachim and many others; moreover, the histories and the books of the philosophers, and if it were to order consideration of the paths of astronomy, there would be found sufficient suspicion – or rather, even certainty – concerning the time of the Antichrist (Rogerus Baco, 268-269).<sup>17</sup>

For the Thomists, however, such a question does not arise. The time of the end cannot be calculated through the study of physics or astronomy, both because it is not possible to know when the motion of the heavens will cease, and because it ultimately depends on the will of the Father and of created agents – angelic and human – who either cooperate with or hinder the coming of the Kingdom of God. The date of the end might be known, at least in part, to certain angels; but even if it were, they would not reveal it to human beings unless God permitted them to do so. Thus, the only reason why knowledge of the end times might be granted in advance would be that God so willed it. Yet, according to them, God – through the revelation attested in Scripture – has shown that He does not will this.

According to Arnau, by contrast, on the basis of a different exegesis of the same texts, God has indicated that He will reveal it at the appropriate time.

For the Thomists, prior knowledge of the end times is even harmful, since it prevents believers from awaiting Christ's return in hope; for the Catalan master, by contrast, it is necessary precisely in order to prepare oneself and to arm against the hosts of the Antichrist.

In essence, these are two irreconcilable worldviews. On the one hand, Arnau advances an “open” conception of revelation, rooted in the interpretation of history in light of Sacred Scripture and other prophetic texts. On the other hand, Thomas and the Thomists propose a “closed” conception of revelation, confined to what is attested in the canon, employing human tools – above all Aristotelian philosophy – for as “scientific” an exegesis as possible, and conceiving theology as a *scientia* abstracted from history.

The polemic between Arnau and the followers of the Angelic Doctor is thus ultimately reduced to a dialogue of the deaf, marked by mutual invective. Yet it remains a fundamental page in the history of philosophical and theological thought, a valuable testimony to the beginning of the end of an era: one in which people still believed in prophecy – even extra-biblical prophecy – and scrutinized ancient writings, the movements of the stars, and the signs of the times in order to make sense of the present and to discern a direction for the future.

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<sup>17</sup> “Nolo hic ponere os meum in coelum, sed scio quod si ecclesia vellet revolvere textum sacrum et prophetias sacras, atque prophetias Sibyllae, et Merlini et Aquilae, et Sestonis, Joachim et multorum aliorum, insuper historias et libros philosophorum, atque juberet considerari vias astronomiae, inveniretur sufficiens suspicio vel magis certitudo de tempore Antichristi.”

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