

A New Proposal about ‘the Fruits of the Mass’

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Abstract

An unresolved question in sacramental theology is whether the Mass is to be considered as limited or unlimited in its efficacy, and in what sense. In modern times, this question has been less discussed, in part from a concern that it is incorrect to attempt to speak of spiritual realities in quantitative terms. I defend the use of such quantitative language, and its application to the so-called special fruit of the Mass, understood both ‘intensively’ and ‘extensively’. I then summarise the two principal positions taken on the question of the efficacy of the Mass, referring to an important representative of each, Cajetan and Bellarmine. I argue that neither position is fully satisfying. I note that authors have generally failed to find a coherent position in Aquinas’s two treatments of the question. I argue that these two positions are in fact coherent, and when combined allow for a new proposal about the fruits of the Mass, integrating the insights of all parties. This proposal may be summed up as intensive infinitude and extensive finitude. I finish by an analogy between the Mass thus understood and one aspect of Aquinas’s Christology.

Keywords

Fruits of the Mass, intensive and extensive limits, Cajetan, Bellarmine, Aquinas, quantification of spiritual realities

Catholics are familiar with the idea that the Eucharistic sacrifice may be offered both for the whole Church, and also for some individual person or departed soul, or limited group of such individuals. Authors note that the liturgy of the Mass itself indicates that it is offered for the whole Church.¹ Thus Cardinal Bona (1609-74) in his liturgical commentary states that ‘it is clear from the canon that the priest must apply [the Mass] for all: for the pope, the bishop, the king, and the whole

¹ I shall generally use the word ‘Mass’ in this article for simplicity’s sake, even though properly speaking this term is used only of the Eucharistic sacrifice in the Latin church.

Church, both militant and under purification'.² St Robert Bellarmine in his *Controversies* points out that in the offertory prayers, the chalice is offered with the words *pro totius mundi salute* ('for the salvation of the whole world').³ Both authors also give an even more profound reason for the same conclusion: the Mass is substantially the same sacrifice as that of the Cross, which Jesus Christ offered for all humankind.

That the Mass may also, and simultaneously, be offered for some special intention is not only suggested by its rubrics, which at certain points oblige the priest to pause and remember those in particular for whom he wishes to pray, but also guaranteed by universal custom. This doctrine has been confirmed by the magisterium. In 1794, Pope Pius VI condemned, in *Auctorem Fidei*, the teaching of the Synod of Pistoia about Mass intentions. Summarising the opinion of this synod as that 'the special offering or oblation of the sacrifice that is made by the priest does not benefit those for whom it is applied more than it benefits anyone else, other things being equal', the pope condemned this opinion as false, rash, pernicious, and injurious to the Church.⁴

Authors generally refer to the benefits received in virtue of the Mass as its 'fruits'. The term 'fruits' in this context is more specific than the term 'effects': the effects of the Mass include both that which it brings about in regard to God, such as adoration and thanksgiving, and that which it brings about in regard to human beings. The fruits or benefits of the Mass are thus understood to be a sub-category of its effects; they are defined by St Alphonsus Liguori as 'the good things that God confers by reason of the sacrifice (*intuitu sacrificii*)'.⁵

What are these good things? We may find an answer sufficient for present purposes in the decree of the Council of Trent on the sacrifice of the Mass. This council defined in its 22nd session that the sacrifice is offered so that 'we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid', and more particularly for 'the sins, punishments, satisfactions and other necessities of the living', as well as for the fuller purgation of those who

² Giovanni Bona, *Tractatus Asceticus de Sacrificio Missae* (Waterford: Johannes Bull [sic!], 1810), ch. 1, section 4, pp. 23-25.

³ St Robert Bellarmine, *De Controversiis*, 'De Sacramento Eucharistiae', bk. 6, c. 6, in *Roberti Bellarmini Omnia Opera* (Paris: Vivès, 1873), vol. 4, p. 377. According to Jungmann, this prayer for the offering of the chalice is found already in a sacramentary of the 9th or 10th century, but without the words *pro totius mundi salute*; Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman rite: its origins and development* vol. 2, tr. Francis Brunner (Indiana: Christian Classics, 2012), p. 57 n. 79. The words are found in a 13th century *Ceremoniale Episcoporum*. I leave aside the question of whether, or in what sense, the Mass is offered for those outside the Church, and hence whether 'the whole world' is to be understood as the 'whole Christian world'; see St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (henceforth: STh) 3a 79, 7: 'Whether this sacrament benefits others than those who receive it'.

⁴ Denzinger-Hünnermann 2630.

⁵ St Alphonsus Liguori, *Theologia Moralis* (Rome, 1909), bk. 6, tr.3 c. 3, n. 312, p. 291. See also L. Godefroy, 'Fruits de la Messe', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907-51).

have died in Christ.⁶ The fruits of the Mass may thus be understood as all the assistance that is received in virtue of the sacrifice, both to be liberated from evils and to advance toward beatitude.⁷

Since the time of Blessed Duns Scotus, it has been common to use technical language to distinguish between the benefits received in virtue of the Mass by the whole Church and those received by the person or group for whom the priest intends particularly to offer: one common and convenient usage is to speak of these benefits as, respectively, the 'general' and the 'special' fruit of the Mass.⁸ In this article I shall be speaking of the so-called special fruit. I shall not offer any more arguments to defend its existence: hence I rely on the principle that the celebrant at Mass is able to offer the sacrifice for a special intention, in a way that differs essentially from the simple power that all the faithful possess of praying for their own intentions.⁹

A question that has exercised theologians over the centuries is whether the fruit of the Mass is limited or unlimited. In discussing this question, they have distinguished between 'intensive' and 'extensive' limits.¹⁰ Intensive limitation refers to the benefit which the person, or group of persons, for whom a given Mass is offered is able to receive from it. Here, the question is whether the Mass itself sets some limit beyond which a person will not benefit when the sacrifice is offered for him, however well disposed he may be. For example, if someone has repented after a life-time of committing mortal sins, could the offering of a single Mass be sufficient to release him from all the debts of temporal punishment in which his sins have entangled him? Note that the question is not whether he will in fact be so released by the offering of one Mass, but whether in principle he might be, if he were well enough

⁶ Session 22, ch. 2; Denzinger-Hünnermann 1743. The decree is quoting Heb. 4:16.

⁷ They should however be distinguished from the increase in sanctifying grace produced by the worthy reception of holy communion.

⁸ Scotus himself referred to them as the 'most general' and the 'middle' fruit, distinguishing also a 'most special fruit', which is the benefit received by the celebrant of the Mass himself; John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, tr. Allan Wolter and Felix Alluntis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), q. 20, 4 and 34. For a fuller discussion of these three fruits, with a description of the confusing fluctuation of the terminology over time, see L. Godefroy, 'Fruits de la Messe', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*.

⁹ I hope however to defend this principle more fully in a future article. For an historical and speculative exposition of a contrary position, see two recent articles by John F. Baldovin SJ: 'Mass Intentions: The Historical Development of a Practice', *Theological Studies*, Volume 81 (4) 2020, pp. 870-921 and 'Mass Intentions: Twentieth Century Theology and Pastoral Reform', *Theological Studies*, Volume 82 (1) 2021, pp. 8-28. The author bases himself on the earlier work of his confrère Edward Kilmartin, who in turn drew on Karl Rahner's 1951 work *Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer*. See Edward Kilmartin SJ, 'The One Fruit or the Many Fruits of the Mass', *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 21 (1966), pp. 37-69.

¹⁰ We find this language, for example, in Francisco Suarez; see *De Sacramentis*, disp. 79, Sect. 11-12 in *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Vivès, 1861), volume 21, p. 754 ff.

disposed. If our answer to this question is 'yes', then we are holding that the sacrifice of the Mass is *intensively infinite* in its power.

The question of the *extensive* finitude or infinitude of the Mass, by contrast, asks whether the benefit that the sacrifice brings to a given person is affected by the number of people for whom it is offered. For example, if a priest offers for a single person, such as his father, will that person benefit more than if the same priest offered for a group of which that person is but one member, such as his whole family? Or does it make no difference to the benefits received by each, that a priest offers for many? If we hold that it makes no difference, then we are claiming that the Mass is *extensively infinite* in its power.

Although authors have distinguished these two questions, they have tended to conflate them in their answers, by adopting overall either a 'finitist' or an 'infinitist' position: that is, holding either that the fruits of the Mass are extensively and intensively finite or that they are extensively and intensively infinite.¹¹ Yet it should be noticed that the questions are logically independent of each other, as will become clearer later on. It is possible, for example, that the Mass should have been instituted by God in such a way that those for whom it is specially offered will never receive more than some fixed benefit, but that this same benefit may be received by all these people, however many they may be.

Some theologians today would be uneasy even about the posing of such questions, on the ground that they exemplify what the Jesuit author, John Baldovin, has called 'a quantitative approach to spiritual realities'.¹² But this allegation, though often made, may be seen on reflection to have little weight. Whilst it would obviously be absurd to quantify spiritual realities if by this was meant trying to place them on some scale that can apply only to bodily ones, assigning them, say, a height or an atomic weight, there is nothing intrinsically strange about claiming that one spiritual reality is greater than another.¹³ Most Catholics, for example, would probably agree that by spending thirty-seven years on a pillar in the Syrian desert, St Simeon Stylites made greater satisfaction for sin than would a person who chose the salmon steak because it was Friday, though he would have rather preferred the beef Wellington. Again, the Parable of the Talents in St Matthew's gospel authorises us to think of divine grace in mathematical terms.

In general, that two finite spiritual realities of the same species stand in some proportion to each other appears to be an example of what

¹¹ St Alphonsus refers to these as the two opinions about the efficacy of the Mass; *Theologia Moralis* (Malines: 1828), book 6, tract. 3, pp. 157-58.

¹² J. Baldovin, 'Mass Intentions: Twentieth Century Theology and Pastoral Reform', p. 11.

¹³ This is what is traditionally referred to as transcendental or virtual, as opposed to predicamental, quantity.

St Thomas Aquinas calls a truth 'self-evident to the wise'; we may therefore invoke this principle in sacramental theology even if we are unable to determine even roughly what this proportion is in some given case. The practice of the Church also reassures us in this regard. In revising the norms for indulgences, Pope Paul VI decreed that 'The faithful who [...] perform an action to which a partial indulgence is attached obtain, in addition to the remission of temporal punishment acquired by the action itself, an equal remission of punishment through the intervention of the Church'.¹⁴ The pope established, in other words, that the indulgenced work should possess twice the reparative value that it had independently of the Church's grant. We may take it, then, that there is nothing absurd about asking, say, whether a given Mass is able to take away a certain quantity of temporal punishment from a given person, and in what circumstances it might free him of twice, or of half, this amount.

This premised, we may now consider the arguments by which theologians have maintained either that the special fruits of the Mass are finite, or that they are unlimited, and in what sense. Theological discussion of this question appears to begin in the late 12th or early 13th century, in the context of commentaries on distinction 45 of the 4th book of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, where the author had asked whether the rich, who had been able to arrange for suffrages to be made for them by name after death, are more benefitted than the poor by the prayers of the Church.¹⁵ From the beginning, two main schools of thought appear. Certain early authors, such as Praepositinus of Cremona (= Gilbert Prevostin, d. 1210) and Guido of Orcelles (d. 1225/33) ascribe an unlimited power to the suffrages of the Church in general and to the Mass in particular. Praepositinus compared these suffrages to a lamp, which may have been lit to give light to a rich man, but which will in the nature of things also enlighten any other people who are with him, and which may even benefit these latter more, if their eyes are keener. The position of Praepositinus was however criticised by other authors, including Bonaventure and Aquinas; according to Edward Kilmartin, it is this contrary position that prevails from the second half of the thirteenth century and for the rest of the mediaeval period.¹⁶

¹⁴ Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 1967, norm 5.

¹⁵ At the same period, a parallel discussion of the efficacy of the Mass is found among canonists, commenting on an ambiguous text attributed to St Jerome and inserted into the *Decretum*, which some took to ascribe what would come to be called 'extensive infinity' to the fruits of the Mass; see Edward Kilmartin SJ, 'The One Fruit or the Many Fruits...', pp. 42-46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49-53. St Bonaventure's treatment of the subject is extremely brief. He writes simply 'in cruce effusum est pretium in omnimoda plenitudine, sed in altari habet effectum determinatum' ('on the cross the price was poured out in fullness of every kind, but on the altar it has a determinate effect'); *Commentaria in quattuor libros Sententiarum in Opera Omnia* (Florence: Quaracchi, 1889), volume 4, p. 947. With Duns Scotus, the finitist position

I shall consider the position of Aquinas below: for now I prefer to consider two slightly later figures as representatives of the two opposing schools of thought, namely, St Robert Bellarmine and Cardinal Cajetan. Cajetan is of particular interest inasmuch as he is consciously reacting against the widespread finitist view of his time, while Bellarmine's defence of this same finitist position is that of the counter-reformation controversialist *par excellence*. Both men, also, treat of our question at some length.

Although Bellarmine is the later author, I shall consider him first, since he, unlike Cajetan, agrees with the late mediaeval consensus. In the sixth book of his controversy 'On the Eucharist', he raises the question of the kind of causality present in the Mass. He states that according to the common opinion of theologians, with which he concurs, 'the value of the sacrifice of the Mass is finite'.¹⁷ This is also, he claims, 'very clearly shown by the practice of the Church', for were it otherwise, it would be unreasonable for Mass to be offered several times for the same end, for example, for a certain departed soul. In this, the Mass contrasts with the sacrifice of the Cross, which could be offered only once because by it alone was acquired that by which all past and future sins may be forgiven.

Bellarmino nevertheless confesses himself uncertain *why* the value of the Mass should be thus finite. He discusses three possible reasons. The first is drawn from considering that which is offered in sacrifice. On the cross, the natural being (*esse naturale*) of Christ in human form was destroyed; in the Mass, only his sacramental being (*esse sacramentale*) is destroyed. Bellarmine is dissatisfied with this explanation, which he thinks would explain at most why the sacrifice of the Cross is of greater value than the Mass, and not why there should be an infinite distance between them. Secondly, then, he proposes that the reason for the difference is to be sought by considering the one who is offering in each case, namely Christ in person, versus a merely human priest acting in Christ's name. In human affairs, he argues, a petition made by some prince or ruler in person has much greater force than when his ambassador makes it, even though the latter is acting in the ruler's name.

The third reason that he proposes, and which he seems to prefer, is that the difference derives simply from the will of Christ, who could certainly obtain everything from God through a single offering of the mystical sacrifice, but who has instead preferred to ask his Father that 'the fruit of his passion should be applied in some fixed measure (*certa mensura*) by each sacrifice, either for the remission of sins, or for the

follows from his opinion that the Church and not Christ is the one directly offering the Mass; see E. Kilmartin, 'The One Fruit or the Many Fruits...', pp. 50-51.

¹⁷ St Robert Bellarmine, *De Controversiis*, 'De Sacramento Eucharistiae', bk. 6, c. 4, p. 375: 'Valor sacrificii Missae finitus est'.

other blessings that we need in this life'. Why the Lord should so have willed, Bellarmine adds, we should not be too curious to know; but we may speculate that it was to encourage us to come frequently to this holy sacrifice, without which religion cannot exist, and also because this befits 'the orderliness of divine providence'.¹⁸

Bellarmino's unqualified affirmation that the sacrifice of the Mass is of finite value is most naturally understood as teaching both intensive and extensive finitude. In other words, Christ has ordained that there be a limit beyond which the Mass will not benefit the person for whom it is particularly offered.¹⁹ Likewise, it will benefit a given person less, if it be offered both for him and for some other person.

Cajetan's position, which he sets forth in his opusculum *On the celebration of the Mass*, and more briefly later in his commentary to question 79 of the third part of the *Summa*, stands opposed to all this.²⁰ He bases himself on these words of St Thomas in the *Summa*: 'Although this oblation, by virtue of its greatness, would suffice to make satisfaction for every penalty, nevertheless, it becomes satisfactory to those for whom it is offered, or even for those who offer, according to the quantity of their devotion, and not for the whole of the penalty'.²¹ He appeals also to Aquinas's statement that what prevents a person from having all his debt remitted by a single offering of the Mass is not some defect in Christ's power, but a defect in human devotion.²² But the quantity of one man's devotion, Cajetan points out, takes away nothing from that of another's.

From this, Cajetan concludes that people are in error when they ask a priest to say Mass only for their intention, if they do this from the conviction that they, or those whose interests they have at heart, will benefit less if the priest combines this intention with another one.²³ Nevertheless, it is not irrational in the Church to approve the practice of offering Mass for some limited intention: for since each person especially loves his one's own good, while what is common is more neglected, our devotion is more stirred up when we know that Mass is

¹⁸ Ibid. Although he does not explain what he means by *ordo divinae providentiae*, we may understand him to be saying that God fittingly manifests his power and wisdom by the harmonious multiplication of secondary causes.

¹⁹ This was also the position of Francisco Suarez: 'It has some maximum limit' ('habebit aliquem terminum maximum'); *De Sacramentis*, disp. 79, sect. 11.5.

²⁰ Cf. 'De celebratione Missae', q. 2; *Opuscula Thomae de Vio Caietani* (Lyon: 1525), vol. 2, 3rd treatise, pp. 146-50.

²¹ STh 3a 79, 5: 'Quamvis [...] haec oblatio ex sui quantitate sufficiat ad satisfaciendum pro omni poena, tamen fit satisfactoria illis pro quibus offertur, vel etiam offerentibus, secundum quantitatem suae devotionis, et non pro tota poena'. We may note that he uses the term *quantitas* twice; he sees no objection, therefore, to the 'quantification of spiritual realities'.

²² STh 3a 79, 5 ad 3: "Hoc quod tollitur pars poenae et non tota per hoc sacramentum, non contingit ex defectu virtutis Christi, sed ex defectu devotionis humanae".

²³ In STh 3a 79, 5.

offered for ourselves alone, or for some loved one alone, and hence greater benefits will accrue in proportion to this increased devotion.²⁴

Cajetan goes still further, in responding to the objection that the Mass must be finite in value, for otherwise there would be no need to offer more than once for the same intention, for example, to arrange for thirty Masses to be said for a departed soul. He replies that if the person who had the Masses offered manifested an equal devotion in asking for one to be said as in asking for thirty to be said, a single Mass would indeed benefit the departed soul as much as the thirty; but that since it is clear that he has greater devotion when he asks for more Masses, insofar as he desires God to be glorified on more occasions, he benefits this soul more by the thirty.²⁵ But it is a widespread error (*communis error multorum*) to suppose that every Mass of itself makes available some fixed quantity of merit or satisfaction (*certum meritum vel certam satisfactionem*) which may be applied to this or that intention.²⁶

Cajetan holds, in other words, that the Church's sacrifice is of infinite value both extensively and intensively: when a priest expands his intention, each one benefits as much as if he were alone the object of that intention; and there is nothing intrinsic to the Mass which prevents it from benefitting any given person beyond some divinely-fixed limit.

Both positions, that of the Jesuit saint and that of the Dominican master-general, have about them something appealing and something unsatisfying. Cajetan's simple statement that 'the power of the Mass is infinite because the power of Jesus Christ is within it'²⁷ seems impossible to gainsay, whereas Bellarmine's bald assertion that 'the value of the Mass is finite' leaves one uneasy. On the other hand, Cajetan surely runs contrary to the *sensus fidelium* in his claim that it is irrational to wish a priest to have a single intention at a given Mass, and not to combine many.²⁸ For his part, Bellarmine gives a perfectly natural explanation of the practice of offering several Masses for a single purpose; the donor, or the priest, supposes that each successive Mass will contribute something more toward achieving the goal, for example, toward the purification of a departed soul. Cajetan's account of this custom, by contrast, is strange: it is not the succession of Masses as such that benefits such a soul, but only the devotion with which they were originally requested. But is the repeated offering of the sacrifice

²⁴ 'De celebratione Missae', q. 2; *Opuscula Thomae de Vio Caietani* (Lyon: 1525), vol. 2, 3rd treatise, p. 148.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ He writes: 'Those who ignorantly ask or demand that in return for their alms, the whole Mass be said for them, or for some departed soul, should be both rebuked and taught'; In 3a 79, 5. In 1665, Pope Alexander VII condemned among other 'errors of the laxists' the opinion that a priest may receive two stipends to say Mass for two donors, and acquit himself of his obligations by a single offering of the sacrifice; Denzinger-Hünnermann 2030.

of Jesus Christ really of no value *in itself* for such an end? And why, on Cajetan's view, would the soul in question not receive all the benefit as soon as the first Mass of the series had been offered? By offering the remaining Masses, would the priest simply be acquitting himself of his promise to the donor, but bringing no more benefit to the one for whom he offers?

How are we to escape this antinomy? I suggest that the passage from St Thomas on which Cajetan bases his position needs to be supplemented by Aquinas's discussion in book 4 of the *Scriptum super Sententiis* of Peter Lombard's question, mentioned above, about the value of the Church's suffrages. In the fourth article of distinction 45, question 2, Aquinas asks how much (*quantum*) the Church's suffrages benefit those for whom they are offered. One little question (*'quaestiuncula'*) raised is whether suffrages (*suffragia*) made for many departed souls benefit each soul as much as if they had been offered for that soul alone.²⁹ He notes that Praepositinus had answered this question in the affirmative, while certain other, unnamed authors, answer in the negative.

In his solution, St Thomas distinguishes between the power that such suffrages have to console the departed in virtue of the charity with which they are offered, and the power that they have to satisfy for the debts owed by these souls to divine justice. From the first point of view, that of consolation, each soul is benefited by common suffrages as much as if the same suffrages had been made for him alone; or rather, he is benefited still more, since whoever is in charity delights when good is done for more rather than for himself alone. But from the second point of view, that of satisfaction, each soul benefits less: 'If we consider the power which suffrages have inasmuch as they are acts of satisfaction directed toward the dead by the intention of the one who performs them, then a suffrage is worth more to someone when it is made for him alone, than when it is made for him and also for many others. For thus is the effect of the suffrage divided by divine justice between those for whom the suffrages are made'.³⁰

In the following *quaestiuncula*, replying to the argument that a single oblation of the Eucharist would suffice to empty purgatory because of the infinitude of Christ's power, St Thomas says: 'Although the power of Christ, contained beneath the sacrament of the Eucharist, is unlimited, nevertheless, the effect to which this sacrament is ordered is something determinate (*determinatus est effectus ad quem illud*

²⁹ IV Sent. dist. 45, 2, 4 qc. 2. It is clear from the context that *suffragia* includes, though is not limited to, the offering of Mass.

³⁰ 'Si autem consideretur valor suffragiorum in quantum sunt satisfactiones quaedam per intentionem facientis translatae in mortuos; tunc magis valet suffragium alicui quod pro eo singulariter fit, quam quod pro eo communiter fit, et multis aliis. Sic enim effectus suffragii dividitur ex divina iustitia inter eos pro quibus suffragia fiunt'.

sacramentum ordinatur), and so it is not inevitable that all the punishment of those in purgatory will be expiated by a single sacrifice of the altar'.³¹

Few authors, whether recent or more ancient, appear to have sought to harmonise St Thomas's position in the *Scriptum* with the later remarks in the *Summa*. We have seen that Cajetan bases himself entirely on the latter.³² Francisco Suarez, by contrast, cites only the earlier texts, from the *Scriptum*, and thus includes Aquinas among those who attribute only a finite power to the Mass, both intensively and extensively.³³ St Alphonsus, likewise, thinks that St Thomas seems to favour the finitist position.³⁴ Among more recent authors, Kilmartin supposes that St Thomas changed his mind about the efficacy of the Mass between the *Scriptum* and the *Summa*.³⁵ Jungmann states that 'it is now agreed' that the latter work corrects the position of the former.³⁶ Baldovin strangely seems to think that the angelic doctor teaches the same thing in each work, namely, that nothing limits the efficacy of the Mass but human devotion.³⁷

On closer inspection, the positions upheld in the *Scriptum* and in the *Summa* can be seen to be both different and yet mutually consistent. We should note that they are not in fact attempting to answer the same question. In the *Scriptum*, Aquinas is asking, in *quaestiuncula* 2, whether suffrages avail equally for John, say, when they are offered for him alone, as when the same suffrages are made for both John and Peter, and he says that they do not. He is also asking, in *quaestiuncula* 3, whether suffrages made for the faithful departed in general benefit John as much as suffrages made for the faithful departed in general *plus*

³¹ IV Sent. 45, 2, 4 qc 3 ad 2.

³² Joao Poinset/John of St Thomas does the same; see John of St Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus, in tertiam partem*, qq. 61-83 (Paris: Vivès, 1886), t. 9, p. 566 ff. The Carmelites of Salamanca also follow the position of Cajetan; see *Collegii Salmanticensis Cursus Theologicus* (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1882), vol 18, pp. 837-856.

³³ *De Sacramentis*, disp. 79, Sect. 11.2, 12.3.

³⁴ St Alphonsus Liguori, *Theologia Moralis*, (Malines: 1828), book 6, tract. 3, pp. 157-58.

³⁵ 'The One Fruit or the Many Fruits...', pp. 48-49.

³⁶ *The Mass of the Roman rite: its origins and development*, p. 77.

³⁷ 'Mass Intentions: The Historical Development of a Practice', p. 886. The author's remarks here are awry in various ways: he takes this passage from the *Supplement to the Summa* (q. 71, a. 12) rather than from the *Scriptum*, and attributes it to Reginald of Piperno rather than to Aquinas. Although Reginald apparently put material of his own into the *Supplement*, what is quoted by Baldovin is not of this kind. Finally, he overlooks St Thomas's statement in the following article (the following 'quaestiuncula', in the *Scriptum*) that 'the effect of the suffrage is divided by divine justice between those for whom the suffrages are made'. On the other hand, the same author helpfully reminds us that *devotio*, in all these scholastic sources, does not refer to an emotion; he suggests 'commitment' as a possible alternative translation. J. Baldovin, 'Mass Intentions: Twentieth Century Theology and Pastoral Reform', p. 12 note 20. The use of the word perhaps derives from its place in the Roman canon, 'quorum tibi fides cognita est, et nota devotio' ('of whose faith you are aware, and whose devotion is known').

suffrages made for Peter's soul in particular benefit Peter, and again, he replies that they do not. In the *Summa*, he is asking whether the fact that John does not receive a full remission of his debt when a Mass is offered for him is due to an inherent limitation in the Mass, or to some fact about John, and he says that it is due to John. However, it is quite possible that John may be less benefited because the sacrifice is being offered also for Peter, but that he would nevertheless have received a full remission of his debt if he had been better disposed than he is. In other words, there is no need to posit that St Thomas changed his position between the *Scriptum* and the *Summa*, even though he himself never sought to combine the two discussions.

I propose that by synthesising these two passages, we overcome the antinomy to which Bellarmine and Cajetan bring us. One offering of the Mass remits a debt of punishment in proportion to the devotion of those for whom it is offered, but in such a way that it benefits each one more in proportion as it is offered for fewer.³⁸ To make this clear, it will be helpful to introduce some simple mathematical phrases, which given the difference between bodily and spiritual realities will no doubt appear incongruous, but which, given the analogy between these two orders of reality, are, as was argued above, legitimate.

Let us suppose, then, that, by divine institution, if the Mass is offered for a person who possesses an intensity of devotion that we may designate as d , it will liberate him from a debt of satisfaction of an amount that we may designate as s . This corresponds to the statement in the *Scriptum* that 'the effect to which this sacrament is ordered is something determinate' (IV dist. 45, 2, 4 qc 3 ad 2). In that case, following St Thomas's principle in the *Summa* that the Mass is satisfactory for a person in accordance with the quantity of his devotion, it follows that if his devotion reaches the level $2d$, he will be freed by the offering of Mass from a debt of satisfaction equivalent to $2s$. What if the same Mass is offered for two people, each of whom has a devotion d ? Following the principle in the *Scriptum* that 'the effect of the suffrage is divided by divine justice between those for whom the suffrages are made', each person will in this case be freed from a debt of satisfaction equal only to $s/2$. On the other hand, if each of these two people should have a devotion of intensity $2d$, then each will be freed from a debt of satisfaction equal to s . Finally, if one person has a devotion of intensity

³⁸ For the sake of simplicity, I leave aside the question of whether the benefit received is also necessarily ('*ex opere operato*') a function of the devotion of those who *offer* (which would include at least the celebrating priest, the other faithful present, and those who arrange for the Mass to be said). Cajetan seems to have assumed that it was, whereas some later authors hold that this devotion can be directed either toward the special intention of the Mass or toward some other intention. See L. Godefroy, 'Fruits de la Messe'. Again, for simplicity's sake, I focus on the comparative remission of temporal punishment rather than on the bestowal of other spiritual or even temporal benefits.

2*d*, while the other has a devotion of intensity *d*, then when the Mass is offered for both together, the first person would benefit to a degree *s*, while the second person would benefit to a degree *s/2*. In summary, if *n* is the number of people for whom a given Mass is offered, then the general formula for each person would be $s = d/n$. The efficacy of the Mass is thus extensively finite but intensively unlimited.

This proposal for understanding the fruitfulness proper to the Eucharistic sacrifice may seem simply an *ad hoc* means to reconcile disparate texts of St Thomas; in fact I suggest that it preserves the insights of all parties. First if all, it preserves the insistence of Cajetan that the Mass is something of unlimited power ('intensively infinite'), insofar as it is the true sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Hence, it is not possible that its power might be exhausted, and prove insufficient to deliver a man on earth or a soul in the next world from the burden of his debts because these debts are too many. Whenever a believer, whether on earth or in purgatory, is *not* fully delivered by the offering of a single Mass, this is always because his devotion was not great enough. It is always the case that, however great his debts, this one Mass would have delivered him had his devotion to God been greater.

On the other hand, the insight of Bellarmine is preserved, that the reason that it is good to offer a series of Masses for the same intention is that each of them will have only a finite effect, and that this is why many may be necessary for the goal to be reached. Lastly, the instinct of the faithful is preserved, by which they are glad to know that a Mass is wholly directed, insofar as it lies within the priest's power, to the interest which they have at heart – for, *pace* Cajetan, it does not appear that they should be 'rebuked' for this sentiment.³⁹ Bellarmine, as we have seen, has provided us with one reason why God would have made the sacrifice of the Church extensively finite in this way, namely, so that we may more readily fulfill our duties of religion by causing Masses to be offered more often. Another reason is that it offers a way to fulfill the natural inclination to do more good to those who are closer to us⁴⁰: for if the Mass were not extensively finite, the only way to benefit those closer to us more by means of the Mass would be deliberately to exclude others from being benefitted by it, even though they might have been benefitted without loss to our loved ones; and this looks like a sin. As for Cajetan's objection that the devotion of one does not harm the devotion of another, one may respond that to postulate extensive

³⁹ Suarez remarks that there is nothing in the Scriptures or the Fathers to settle the question of whether the Mass is extensively limited or not, and hence that one must refer to the practice of the Church to decide it; *De Sacramentis*, disp. 79, Sect. 12.7. We may also offer 'arguments of convenience', as I do here.

⁴⁰ Cf. STh 2a 2ae 26, 6: 'Since the principle of love is God and the person who loves, it must needs be that the affection of love increases in proportion to nearness to one or other of these principles'.

finitude to the fruits of the Mass is not to claim that one person is harmed by another's *devotion*, but simply that he receives less benefit in a certain respect – that of liberation from temporal punishment – in virtue of being less exclusively prayed for. One may also recall St Thomas's statement in the *Scriptum* that in another respect, that of 'consolation', departed souls are *more* benefitted as prayers are offered for a greater number.

A final question that may arise in the mind of the reader is what ground there is for claiming that a given degree of devotion corresponds by divine institution to a *fixed* degree of liberation. I answer that anything else would make of God a 'respector of persons', contrary to Acts 10:34 and Eph. 6:9, since he would then be accepting as payment of a debt from one what he would be refusing as payment of the same debt from another (this does not of course exclude the possibility that he may from mercy remit *more* than this debt.) But we may also draw an analogy with a remark made by St Thomas about the grace of Christ considered as an individual man. Aquinas states that while, absolutely speaking, God could have endowed the humanity of Christ with a higher degree of sanctifying grace than that which it received at the moment of the incarnation, the degree of grace bestowed upon Christ is that which divine wisdom sees to correspond sufficiently to the human nature of a man who is God.⁴¹ God sees what degree of sanctifying grace befits the finite reality that is the humanity of Christ as a result of the relation of this humanity to the Word, unlimited in being. In like manner, the divine wisdom sees what degree of liberation from sin befits the finite devotion by which some man is related to the oblation of the Word, infinite in power.

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⁴¹ STh 3a 7, 12.