Aquinas and the Grace of Auxilium
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In his mature treatment on grace St. Thomas Aquinas develops an important distinction within sanctifying grace, the difference between habitual grace and divine auxilium. This distinction exerts vital influence on Aquinas’s presentation of the Christian life, particularly the act of justification and the on-going work of sanctification. In one sense, Thomas’s thought continues the patristic and medieval association of sanctifying grace with habitual grace which equips and disposes the recipient to do works of surpassing good. In another, Thomas’s position develops a related sense of grace as help or auxilium, where God reduces a recipient’s potential habit or virtue into action. Scholars have noted that Thomas develops the category of auxilium after the Scriptum and only fully in the treatise on grace in the Summa theologiae (I-II:109-114). While the development may seem subtle, it provides Thomas with a powerful explanatory tool to further expoit the relationship between divine and human agency, particularly as it relates to and perfects the created nature of human beings.

The proposed paper will present Thomas’s mature teaching on grace with a particular emphasis on the category and utility of divine auxilium. To that end, it will outline Thomas’s presentation of the necessity of grace and its operative and cooperative effects on the recipient. As it does so, it will identify and examine the ways in which auxilium enhances Thomas’s presentation of divine and human action both in the operative moments of justification and perseverance as well as in the cooperative moments of meritorious action. Having set out the advantages of Thomas’s mature insights on grace, the paper will underscore that the concept of auxilium illustrates and deploys Thomas’s approach to metaphysics. Specifically, it will suggest that auxilium more adequate describes (1) how grace is participation in divine esse, (2) how potential virtues are rendered actual through participation in God’s nature, and (3) how auxilium reduces human nature to its origin in and radical dependence on God for existence. As time permits, the paper will illustrate these theoretical points with practical references to Thomas’s treatments of Christology and the Holy Spirit’s on-going role in the sacraments.