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ON THE SOURCES OF MERIT OF THE ACTIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE LIVES. A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Treść: 1. Aristotle's account of the Two Kinds of Lives, 2. The Incarnation, 3. The Wisdom of the Saints, 4. The Ultimate Source of Merit of the Active and Contemplative Lives.

The Church today is animated by a spirit of active charity. Some of the greatest saints of our times, such as Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II, were very active, and in his most recent Lenten message Pope Francis tells us that all Christians are called to spread the Good News and the mercy of God.¹ It seems that everywhere, Mother Church beckons us to go out and live our faith in the world. And this message is good, because it has a foundation upon Christ, who urges us to shine our light in the world and to do good works to glorify God the Father. However, while today's Church stresses action, her greatest theologians have maintained that the contemplative life is the best life that man can live. Their view is in line with Aristotle, who held that the contemplative life is the highest and happiest life.

A puzzle is thus presented to us. While both Christ and his Church explicitly encourage action, the greatest thinkers advocate contemplation. We are then left with the question, how has the Incarnation truly affected the objective merit of the active and the contemplative lives? One of the first to hold the contemplative life above the active life was Aristotle. Thus, our first task is to re-evaluate his conclusion in light of the later Incarnation

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¹ "Lenten Message of Our Holy Father Francis 2014," 26 December 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco_20131226_messaggio-quaresima2014_en.html

of Christ. In order to solve our puzzle, we must understand what is meant by action and contemplation. A summary of Jesus' teaching will then force us to examine the superiority of the contemplative life as it is presented by Aristotle. Later, examples of the lives of the most active saints will illustrate the newfound merit of the active life, and then, the perspective of the great theologians will help us find the ultimate source of merit of each life.

1. Aristotle's account of the Two Kinds of Lives

What the active life and the contemplative life is

Aristotle was very interested in the question of wherein human happiness lies. He notes that virtuous action, besides being the most praised and admired of all of man's activities, is the most distinctly human because it involves man's reason, which is most proper to him. Because the proper activity of each living thing is also that which perfects it, it follows that virtuous activity is the best and most fulfilling activity of man. This activity will therefore be human happiness, defined as the "activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete," and this in a complete life.²

Thus for Aristotle, human happiness is found in a life of virtue, in which man performs the noblest and most fulfilling actions. He finds that there are two kinds of virtue which correspond to man's rational principle or reason, and an element that is of itself in opposition to this principle, namely, the irrational appetite. Though the appetite of itself resists reason, it partakes of reason insofar as it obeys it. The distinct nature of the reason and the appetite accounts for the twofold division of the virtues. While the intellectual virtues pertain to reason alone, the moral virtues involve the appetite guided by reason. Moreover, the virtues have their proper activities. Moral actions have to do with the disciplining of the appetite and oftentimes require other people, while the intellectual virtues involve the mind alone.³ For this reason, the proper activities of the intellect are relatively independent, for instance, a man who contemplates the highest things does so by himself.

² ARISTOTLE, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1941), 1098a16.

³ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a3.

Aristotle's investigation into the nature of human happiness culminates in the laying-down of two distinct paths that man may choose from in order to achieve happiness - he can either exercise virtue in the environment most natural to him, that is, the society in which he lives, or he can choose a life of contemplation, which bears the greatest resemblance to the life of God.⁴ Because the latter is most in accordance with what is best in man, his reason, and because reason is the means by which man grasps the divine, the philosopher concludes that the contemplative life provides man with the greatest happiness, whereas the active life does so only in a secondary way.

In sum, the activities that man chooses to perform in his life determine the kind of life that he lives. He who performs morally good actions, such as the politician, lives the active life, whereas one who dwells upon the first principles of science, e.g. the movement of the heavenly spheres, which eternally guide the consistent and regular motions of the planets,⁵ lives the contemplative life.⁶

What kind of life is the happiest for man?

Aristotle concludes that the contemplative life is higher than the active life because it is the proper activity of reason, which is in itself the best thing in man. It is the ruler of man because it guides all of the other faculties.⁷ Moreover, contemplative activity is superior to any other activity because the philosopher can do it for long periods of time without strain. Not only is it the most pleasant and leisurely activity, but it is also the most self-sufficient insofar as man does not need another person in order to do it. Also, because there are no alternative gains or benefits, this life has a greater degree of finality than does the active life.⁸

Furthermore, Aristotle claims that the contemplative life is best because reason defines what man truly is, for reason guides our every action and is what makes us good. For Aristotle, the rational principle's rule within each person means that the whole self of man is fully contained by, captured if

⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b23.

⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b3.

⁶ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a8.

⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a15.

⁸ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a20.

you will, by reason.⁹ Aristotle here does not mean to say that man can be reduced to his reason alone, or that man is identical to reason. He is taking reason which is a part of man, for the whole man, because a whole is often-times known by that part which is its highest ruling element, e.g. as a king stands for his country.¹⁰ Because of reason's authority, and because reason is possessed by man alone, it is man, and is in fact his very self, for "that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasan-test, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest."¹¹

Aristotle further reinforces the superiority of the contemplative life when he points out that the active life involves the passions together with the reason; contemplation, in contrast, is relatively free from the passions. Because the passions arise from the body, and bodily existence is common to man and beast alike, activities involving the passions are less proper to humans. Moreover, he who lives an active life interacts with his fellow men, which manifests his being a social animal. This is why Aristotle calls the activities involving the passions "typically human," because they involve the composite nature of man insofar as they engage both his rational soul and his body.¹²

But what arises from all of this is a seeming paradox. For Aristotle, reason is what is most properly human, yet man by nature is a composite. Reason above all is man, yet moral actions are typically human because they involve the entirety of man's being, both his passions and his reason. Herein lies the puzzle of what is most distinctly human. Is our reason alone what characterizes us? Or is it the fact that we are beings having a body and a soul endowed with reason?

The language that Aristotle uses to describe the two lives shows that the active life is more common to man, and this is in keeping with our experience. Put simply, it is a more typical life because it is a more natural life and most people live in this way. The contemplative life, on the other hand, he treats as a life which man must aspire to despite his natural human inclinations. Living contemplatively means going against the perennial com-

⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a2.

¹⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1168b32.

¹¹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a4.

¹² ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a14.

mon opinion that man should pursue mortal things because he is mortal.¹³ The way in which he encourages the contemplative life, together with his description of it as divine, are very telling; the contemplative life seems unnatural for man, or perhaps outside and beyond the order of nature. Yet we gather from Aristotle that it is our *true self*, our spiritual self, a going-beyond the natural self. Thus, with regards to the question of what is most distinctly human, it seems right to say that the contemplative life is the fruit of what is most proper to man, but that the active life is more *fully* human, insofar as it engages man as a whole, as a being that is composite.

The divine nature of the contemplative life

Yet Aristotle says that reason is that which allows man to consider the highest and most divine truths.¹⁴ And this is the foremost reason as to why the contemplative life is best, that is, because *it is the most divine life that man can live*. It bears the greatest resemblance to the life of God, whose activity is contemplative since he is wholly self-sufficient. Moreover, because God is the happiest and most blessed of all beings, the contemplative life is the happiest life that man can live.¹⁵

Indeed, contemplative activity is the pure fruit of reason alone, and for Aristotle, reason connects man with the divine. Aristotle goes on to say that a life of contemplation “is too high for man; for it is not so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him...”¹⁶ He goes on to say that the contemplative life is indeed divine because,

If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things... but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.¹⁷

Thus, for man to live a life of contemplation is for him to live not as a man, but as a divine being. Contemplation has man going beyond him-

¹³ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b31.

¹⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a16.

¹⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b8.

¹⁶ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b26.

¹⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b27.

self and his very nature. Indeed, he transforms his merely human life into a divine life, his merely human existence to divine being, to immortality.

Aristotle here shows a striking awareness that man's ultimate happiness lies in God. Man must *strain* himself to be divine, and the only way in which he can do so is through intense study wherein he discovers the first truths. In urging us to strain ourselves, he recognizes that man must go beyond himself in this life - this striving seems to be a kind of human duty. This indicates that he knows, on some level, that man's total and complete fulfillment lies in his being united with God. The fact that such a life is divine in nature is the determining factor for Aristotle's conclusion that it is the highest and most choice worthy life. The active life, in his mind, simply does not connect man to God to the same degree.

Though man can connect with the Divine in the active life, this connection is one that is far weaker than that which can be established through the contemplative life. He who lives in the world works for his community and ultimately his state, the good of which is more divine than the mere individual good. Aristotle makes this clear when he says, "though it is worthwhile to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states."¹⁸ Moreover, the active man often-times has a family, and all animals strive to attain immortality through their offspring.¹⁹ So, though the active life connects man with God in some manner, it does so in a far more removed way than contemplation does. It leaves man a good distance from God especially in comparison to the contemplative life, because it does not have man making a conscious effort to unite himself with the divine. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that the active man, and indeed all men, seek union with God.

2. The Incarnation

So far, we have closely looked at Aristotle's inquiry into human happiness. He wrote the *Ethics* several hundred years before Christ (about the year 330 BC). Aristotle on some level knew that man's ultimate happiness is found in God. Man does indeed contemplate and reach God in knowing the eternal truths of nature, since the divine effects are true means for gra-

¹⁸ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b7.

¹⁹ ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1941), 415a25.

sping God. In fact, St. Thomas says that contemplating the divine effects belongs to contemplation proper.²⁰ Interestingly enough, the philosopher is aware of the existence of the afterlife when he discusses the commonly held opinion that evil and the good exist for the dead.²¹ Some passages even have him taking up the existence of life after death. But because evidence for the afterlife is lacking, and because there is doubt surrounding such questions, he proceeds with his inquiry into human happiness only within the framework of earthly life. And though he reached God through physics and even has strikingly accurate insight as to the nature of His divine activity, he deems God “removed to a great distance” from man.²²

The coming of Christ completely transforms man's relationship with the Divine. No longer does he strain for a mere approach to Him through his intellect alone, for man has beheld God face-to-face. The revelation of divine truth was indeed necessary for the salvation of man, whose duty is to order his entire being to God. Without this revelation, only the learned philosophers like Aristotle would have access to these truths. Even they needed revelation, insofar as their discoveries were sometimes erroneous or inaccurate.²³

Christ definitively revealed what was only implied by Aristotle – that man's end is God; the philosopher's writings only hinted at this fact. Aristotle sees that the most fulfilling life is one in which man has the closest possible relationship to God. However his treatise concerns happiness in this life, and it proceeds on the assumption that the earthly life is all there is. And thus, Aristotle's consideration of the happiness of man must be “filled in” in light of Christ.

Our Lord made clear that man's end is not to be found in this life, but in the next. He repeatedly proclaims the Kingdom of Heaven, where the faithful shall be after death, as when he hangs on the cross beside the two thieves and says, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”²⁴ Moreover, he tells us that the Kingdom is the place of the Father and

²⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II* in *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcon, vol. 18, (Lander: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), q180 a4 c.

²¹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a19.

²² ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1159a4.

²³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae I*, in *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcon, vol.13, (Lander: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), q1 a1 c.

²⁴ *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1965), Luke 23:43.

the home of the saints, the eternal life of blessedness in Heaven. So, while Aristotle regards the contemplative life (in this life) to be the happiest and most final end of man, Christ reveals that this life is a means, is something akin to a preamble to the eternal life. For this reason, neither the active nor the contemplative life can be called a true end in itself. Ultimate happiness can no longer be said to lie within the bounds of earthly existence, but in Heaven, the eternal life of blessedness. All of man's activities are to be ordered to God, and they are a preparation for the life to come.

How revelation changes the character of the two lives

Aristotle's contemplation, or natural contemplation, connects man with the divine in a better way than the active life does, insofar as such a life allows man to uncover the first eternal truths. Yet this life is undeniably a laborious one. A man who wishes to discover and to understand these truths must go through many years of philosophical and scientific study. He must discipline his mind and acquire much knowledge to grasp the first principles, even if they are handed down to him by a teacher. It is for this reason, this general inaccessibility to the ultimate truths, that Aristotle describes this life as "remarkable... and difficult."²⁵

Christ has broken down the age-old walls of inaccessibility to the Divine. Through simple words the Incarnate Word has proclaimed Truth for all to hear. And the clinging of man to the Gospel throughout the ages has propagated the Church and ensured the passing-on of wisdom, thus, rigorous, lengthy study is no longer necessary for grasping the divine truths. Moreover, those who seek a greater understanding of them may deepen their knowledge of the divine through prayer and study if they so choose.

Before, the eternal truths were available to a philosophical elite, a privileged class, since each had the time to forego work and live a life devoted to study. If a man of ancient Greece had desired to become a philosopher and to rest in the highest truths, his whole life and action would be determined by his choice of life. He would not work but study, and he would be set apart from the rest of society because of his life-path. Thus, natural contemplation necessitates an exclusive life, very different from the active, social life. But now, the divine truths are accessible to all. All that is needed is simple exposure, oral or written, and we cannot forget, the grace of faith.

²⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b7.

Christ himself points out this new accessibility in contrast to former times when he says, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."²⁶ The wise and the understanding are none other than the scholars and philosophers! There is now so much more available than the mere natural seeking of the mind. Now, contemplation cannot truly be said to require a whole life's worth of effort.

This new accessibility makes contemplation possible for the active and contemplative alike. Aristotle's approach was very much a categorical one – either you live the active life or the contemplative life. And this sharp division is understandable, at least within the context of Aristotle's time, because then, contemplation only could be achieved in a very particular type of life. Christ, who has given his truth to the world and who rains graces upon the faithful, has given us a new *freedom of life*. His followers do not need to undergo rigorous study. This is not to say that there is no distinct and proper contemplative life for the Christian, indeed there is in that of the contemplative religious orders such as the Carmelites. Rather, the divine truths are no longer difficult to attain, and now, contemplation can be done in any kind of life, as long as one makes room for it. The philosopher's path is one of intellectual labour because rigorous study and self-discipline is required in order to arrive at the first truths. Such labour is no longer necessary with Christ, who communicates his message to the faithful clearly and directly.

And this resting in divine truth is what contemplation truly is. All other activities involve movements of the intellect which make for a multiplicity of objects of the mind. This is the distinguishing factor of contemplation according to St. Thomas, who defines it as "the simple act of gazing on truth."²⁷ He also says that, "discoursing must be laid aside and the soul's gaze fixed on the contemplation of one simple truth."²⁸ The Catechism, too, is in keeping with this, defining contemplation as "a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus, and attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love."²⁹

²⁶ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 11:25-26.

²⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q180 a3 c.

²⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q180 a6 c.

²⁹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica*, trans. United States Catholic Conference, Inc – Libreria Editrice Vaticana, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1995), 2724.

Thus, St. Thomas' definition of contemplation is different from that of Aristotle's. For St. Thomas, the final and most proper act of contemplation does not involve only the first, or natural truths, but of divine truth who is God Himself.³⁰ Yet St. Thomas acknowledges that the divine effects pertain to the contemplative life, as well.³¹ Aristotle's philosopher saw the divine effects manifest in nature and contemplated the first scientific principles.³² Since the Incarnation, the object of the contemplator's gaze is actually the Divine. Though St. Thomas grants that the divine effects are the object of contemplation, Aristotle's contemplator nevertheless failed to reach the perfect act of contemplation, which is the gaze upon God himself. Herein we see a key difference between the two thinkers' ideas of contemplative activity. While Aristotle's philosopher has for his object natural truths, St. Thomas' contemplator rests in truths divinely revealed, and God Himself.

Clearly, revelation changes the nature of contemplation, and it forces us to re-examine the question of which life is best. Even Aristotle recognizes that man's true happiness is found in God, and we now know that this means living in conformity to His will. Happiness then, really, is holiness. Though the true and most fulfilling happiness lies in the Beatific vision, there still remains the question of wherein happiness and holiness lies here, in human life on Earth. What kind of life prepares us best for Heaven? If contemplation is now possible both in the active and the contemplative life, are the two kinds of lives of equal merit? How are we to live to be happiest and holiest, and is there one best way to do so? Amidst all of these questions we can be sure that as Christians, we are to live our lives in accordance with Christ's, and there is no better way to do this than to look to Christ's life as our model.

The Life of Christ

For most of his life, Jesus lived in poverty with Mary and Joseph, and he worked as a carpenter through his adulthood. Once he reached his 30's he

³⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q180 a3 c.

³¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q180 a4 c.

³² In the Ethics, Aristotle says that the object of the contemplator's gaze is the first principles of science. This statement implies that the object can be or is God, though Aristotle never mentions God explicitly, yet Aristotle arrived at God in his *Physics and Metaphysics*. Granted that the contemplator's gaze is fixed upon God, this contemplation remains efficient insofar as it lacks the grasping of the divine "attributes" (love and mercy, for example), or that He is the Trinity.

began to preach in the synagogues and in the open air. He travelled across Judea and Galilee with his disciples, who accompanied him wherever he went. In the cities he was at all times present to the people, serving them as their healer and their leader. As we know from Scripture, Christ healed the physical infirmities of innumerable persons – the blind, the lame and the paralyzed alike. He raised the dead and exorcised the possessed, and he even fed earthly bread to his followers. On top of all of this, he provided spiritual healing to those around him simply by talking to them, as he did with Zaccheus, and by preaching the love of Father and His Kingdom. And he even had friends whom he loved dearly; Scripture describes John as the one whom he loved. From all of this we gather that Christ was undeniably active, indeed he lived a very active life, even to the point that he defied Jewish tradition. It held that no work should be done on the Sabbath, and yet he went ahead and healed on that day.³³ In doing so, he raised action to a supernatural plane, showing that it is holy and good and ultimately, sanctifying. Indeed, Jesus was very human, and he had a distinctly hands-on approach to his ministry.

Yet we also see Christ entering a boat to distance himself from the crowds, and after healing a man with leprosy, bidding him not to tell anyone and then hiding out to pray in the wilderness to escape the masses seeking healing.³⁴ Moreover, when the disciples have no success in casting out a demon from a boy, Christ replies, “This kind can only come out by prayer.”³⁵ Such events in Christ's life show that activity in itself is not his end, and not always the best choice or solution; prayer is very powerful, perhaps even more powerful than action, and even for the greater glory of God.

We also see our Lord praying to God the Father alone. This is where we see Christ in his most contemplative state. Interspersed throughout the Gospels are Christ's voyages into the wilderness, where he would pray to the Father in solitude. The first time we see this is when the Spirit leads him into the desert for forty days to be tempted by the devil shortly after his baptism and right before he begins to preach.³⁶ >>>Jesus also prays alone for a whole night before choosing the twelve disciples.³⁷ Perhaps the most

³³ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 12:12.

³⁴ *The Holy Bible*, Luke 5:12-16

³⁵ *The Holy Bible*, Mark 9:29

³⁶ *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 4:1-11

³⁷ *The Holy Bible*, Luke 6:12-14

standout instance of our Lord's personal prayer is at the Garden in Gethsemane, where he goes a distance away from the apostles and begins to feel great anxiety for his coming Passion. There, he earnestly prays to the Father that His will be done.³⁸ In all of these instances, Christ prays shortly before some significant event in his life. He prays in order to prepare himself for completing some action essential to his mission. Each of these prayers is a preparatory prayer; in the desert he prays so as to prepare himself to begin preaching, he prays to choose well the twelve apostles, and he prays to have strength and perseverance to sacrifice himself on the Cross. So, not only was Christ's life filled with much action, but even what we read of his most contemplative activity was for the sake of action. Indeed, Christ came for us, for man - he came to serve, to die and ultimately save us. He came to act for us.

Yet Christ also had genuine and true contemplation, since he entertained the Beatific vision. St. Thomas tells us that because all men attain the Beatific vision through Christ, and because the perfection of the effect must be pre-eminently present in the cause, Christ must have had the Beatific vision in a pre-eminent way.³⁹ His human soul had a constant vision of God in virtue of its union with the person of the Word, who is the Divine Essence.⁴⁰ So, even with the fulness of the possession of God, the final end of man, he went on to live a very active life. And this fact gives Christ's life of action new meaning and significance. With the vision of God constantly before his eyes, Christ himself had no need for action, because his life, unlike ours, was not a means for his own eternal blessedness, since he already had eternal blessedness. He alone possessed perfect contemplation at all times, in its complete fullness, man's final and true end, and he nevertheless lived a very active life. And why? Because there was much to be done! Man needed to be reconciled to his God through Christ by hearing the Gospel proclaimed, and humanity had to come to know who Christ was and how to live in him. Even with perfect contemplation, he acted out of love for man and for his salvation.

Christ could have saved man in a very different manner, and maybe even with far fewer divine teachings. He could have chosen any means to

³⁸ *The Holy Bible*, Matthew 26:36-40

³⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae III*, in *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcon, vol.20, (Lander: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), q9 a2 c.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* q9 a2 ad1.

save man, anything other than the action of dying a gruesome death on the Cross. We know that the Incarnate Word need not have lived a fully human life to save man.⁴¹ Perhaps Christ could have been a man who merely appeared on Earth as a grown man. In any case, we know that Christ chose to live a fully human life. He needed and desired to employ his whole humanity, his human nature and activities, to achieve a divine mission. And in doing so, he shows that a seeming impossibility is in fact possible – we can serve God and become holy through our humanity, through our human action. And it was precisely through his human action that he achieved a divine purpose, which is the salvation of man.

As discussed earlier, Aristotle on some level knows that man's happiness is found in God. Since Christ, this unity with Him is what we call holiness, and because Christ shows us that we can become holy through the active life, the two lives seem to be placed on a kind of equal footing. Certainly the natural question that follows this one is which life unites us with God in a better way, and we will now attend to this question. Let us move from an examination of the life of Christ to his teachings on the kind of life we are to live.

Jesus encourages us to live actively

Jesus says that the each person is to love God with his whole heart, soul and mind. This is the greatest commandment, and the second is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. These fundamental rules are central to living a holy life yet they are rather broad and general, so let us turn to other, more specific directions that Jesus gives us on how to live.

In Scripture, Jesus frequently tells his followers to be active. For instance, he tells his disciples to go out into the world and spread the Gospel when he says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always...”⁴² Here, he urges man to spread the Gospel, which is essentially an invitation to help him, to become a part of his mission to live and act for the salvation of man. So when Jesus encourages man to spread the Gospel, he is inviting him to help bring salvation to all of man. Jesus

⁴¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Compendium Theologiae*, ch. 231, trans. Cyril Collert, St. Louis and London, B. Herder Book Co., 1947, <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/Compendium.htm#231>.

⁴² *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 28:18-20.

also encourages the distribution of the sacrament of his body when he tells his apostles, “This is my body given for you, do this in memory of me,”⁴³ and when he tells Peter, “Feed my sheep.”⁴⁴ Also, when Jesus looks upon the crowds of his followers and says, “the harvest is plenty but the labourers are few,” he recognizes the great need for teachers, healers, and a shepherd for his people.⁴⁵

These passages have Christ enunciating the need for leaders of the Church and distributors of the sacraments. One might then think that these directions apply only to a few in the Church hierarchy, but we know that Christ wants all of the members, laity and religious alike, to be teachers and evangelists. There are many passages that have Christ urging all to be active, for example, he says,

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father.⁴⁶

Thus, it is clear that Jesus desires the faithful to be active in the world. We know this not only from the example of Jesus' life and his explicit teachings, but also by the lives and teachings of his first followers, the apostles, which we find in the Gospels and in Acts (the name of this book itself is noteworthy). Their message to live actively is further reinforced in the apostolic letters.

Martha and Mary

Perhaps the most famous Scriptural text on the active and the contemplative life is the story of Martha and Mary. A woman named Martha invites Jesus to her house, and:

She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all of the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things;

⁴³ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Luke 22:19.

⁴⁴ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 5:16.

⁴⁵ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 9:37-38.

⁴⁶ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 5: 14-16.

there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”⁴⁷

This well-known story has the busybody Martha going about her house as host and servant of the Lord. She serves him through her action, while her sister Mary quietly sits by the Lord and receives his teaching. Martha thus represents the active life, while Mary's restful focus on Christ alone makes her a representative of the contemplative life.

St. Thomas says that in this passage, Jesus provides another reason (in addition to Aristotle) why the contemplative life is superior to the active life. Quoting St. Augustine, he says that Mary's contemplation will not be taken away from her, whereas Martha's burden of action will.⁴⁸ This is because many charitable activities of this life are only temporal. Once man reaches blessedness, there will be no need to do anything for someone else; if there is no sickness then there is no one to heal and comfort, and if no death then there is no one to bury. Since these evils will not be present in Heaven, their activities also will not be present. This is why Martha's “burden of necessity” will be taken away from her. But Mary chooses to put all action aside so as to take in the teachings of our Lord. She takes the better part because the divine truth, together with its sweetness, persists through this life and eternity.⁴⁹

In this passage, Jesus tells us why Mary's part is better. It is better not only because it is lasting, but also because Jesus is the sole focus of the contemplative act. Martha is distracted by many things – her numerous duties as hostess and lady of the house make her occupied by much, indeed by everything except for Jesus. Yet Mary is focused on Jesus alone. While Martha strove to serve Jesus in her action she lost sight of him, yet Mary never let her gaze leave him. As St. Augustine so beautifully puts it, “Martha was intent how she might feed the Lord; Mary intent on how she might be fed by the Lord. By Martha a feast was being prepared for the Lord, in whose feast Mary was even now delighting herself.”⁵⁰ Mary's choice was wise indeed, since what Jesus has to give us really is better than anything that we can give him. Also, Mary's interior state was such that she was more intimately

⁴⁷ *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Luke 10: 39-42.

⁴⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q182 a1 c.

⁴⁹ AUGUSTINE, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, trans. R.G. MacMullen, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol 6, reprint (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1980), Sermon LIV, p. 430.

⁵⁰ ST. AUGUSTINE, *ibid.*

united with Jesus. Mary's part is thus better because her heart was wholly centred upon, entirely receptive to our Lord. By simply listening to his words, she was partaking in the final end of man, union with God. She did not concern herself with anyone else's doings, only on Christ. In her simple receiving of his words, she was partaking in her final end and the end of man, which is union with Christ and delight in his divine Truth.

We can see that Christ explicitly encourages us to action not only by words but even by the example of his very active life, yet he also points out that contemplation is better and more enduring than action. Rather than maintaining the focus of her heart on our Lord, Martha was concerned with multiple things – the various tasks involved with exteriorly serving him and the lack of help she received from her sister. Her focus was on everything except for him; she even attempts to destroy the good of her sister Mary, a good that she could not understand.⁵¹ It is worthwhile to note that Jesus does not tell Martha to stop serving him, but only to focus on him and him alone. Thus our Lord brings out two reasons for the superiority of contemplation. Mary's part better not only because it is enduring, but also because her heart is completely given to Christ.

3. The Wisdom of the Saints

The perspective of the great saint-theologians

St. Thomas, in line with Aristotle, says that the contemplative life is generically of greater merit than the active life. This is because the love of God is worthy of more merit than the love of neighbor:

*Et ideo illud quod directius pertinet ad dilectionem Dei, magis est meritum ex suo genere quam id quod directe pertinet ad dilectionem proximi propter Deum. Vita autem contemplativa directe et immediate pertinet ad dilectionem Dei...et ideo ex suo genere contemplativa vita est maioris meriti quam activa.*⁵²

In addition, St. Thomas says that the active life orders the phantasms

⁵¹ KAREN ZEDLICK, *On Martha and Mary*, paper presented as part of the Thomas Aquinas College lecture series, Santa Paula, California, 2010.

⁵² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q182 a2 c.

by properly disposing the interior passions, thus quieting the passions and allowing for peaceful contemplation.⁵³ It is for this reason that St. Thomas views the active life as a preparation for the contemplative life. Indeed, the moral virtues are necessary to perform the contemplative act. Ultimately, though, action becomes a distraction and a hindrance to contemplation, and though the active life is prior in time, the contemplative life higher and generically better.⁵⁴

St. Augustine, on the other hand, points out that there are certain duties that must be attended to in each life. For example, everyone has a duty to his neighbor no matter what kind of life he lives. The right love of God must always be present in the active life, and charity towards neighbor in the contemplative: “No man has a right to lead such a life of contemplation as to forget in his own ease the service due to his neighbor; nor has any man a right to be immersed in active life as to neglect the contemplation of God.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, as shown previously, St. Augustine grants the objective superiority of the contemplative life. Not only do our Lord’s words strongly indicate this fact, but the greatest thinkers of the Church conform to this view. The endurance of contemplation into eternity makes it indisputably superior to action. Yet whichever life you choose, you must fulfil your duties to neighbor and to God.

Clearly, the contemplative life is generically superior to the active life, but we are left asking the question, how relevant is the generic superiority of the contemplative life over the active life when the personal sanctity of the individual is of primary importance? In reality, there are individuals, individual people, the self. One life’s superiority does not mean that given a particular person, the contemplative life is absolutely speaking the best life for him. Each individual has his own holy desires given to him by God, his own interior life and particular kind of spirituality. God has a plan for each of us; we are predestined to a particular path from the moment God conceived of us in His mind. God wills each of us to become holy in our own particular way yet in conformity with one of these paths. So how is the consideration of individual sanctity to be reconciled with the generic superiority of contemplation? Let us turn to the lives of some active saints in order to shed light upon this question.

⁵³ *ibid.*, q182 a4 c.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, q182 a2 c.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1980), XIX, p. 413.

The lives of the active saints

St. Francis chose to live actively not only because he had a very action-driven nature, but also because God revealed to him that His will is for him to live the active life. After his conversion, God told Francis to rebuild the Church at St. Damian's, so he went ahead and did so, rock by rock. He sought to imitate Christ as much as he possibly could, and because the salvation of souls was the ultimate reason for Christ's death and resurrection, the saint devoted his entire life to help save souls. He recognized that he could devote his life to this task either in prayer or through preaching, and he struggled when deciding how to live, so he prayed that God may show him what kind of life to lead. He asked Brother Silvester and St. Clare to pray for his discernment, and both of them, after much prayer, received the message that God desired he live an active life of preaching.⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit later directly revealed the same to him in a Gospel reading of a mass he attended.⁵⁷

Francis became a saint by living actively and in total conformity to the life of Christ. Nevertheless, the interior life of prayer was of utmost importance to him and his brothers. In his efforts to transform himself into Christ, St. Francis never stopped praying for suffering. Due to his most pleasing imitation of the Lord he received the stigmata, which St. Bonaventure takes to be a sign from God, a divine message of Francis' great holiness and worthiness to receive this most divine cross:

The cross of Christ given to you and by you accepted at the beginning of your conversion and which from then on you carried continuously in the course of your most upright life, giving an example to others, shows that you have finally reached the summit of Gospel perfection with such clear certitude that no truly devout person can reject this proof of Christian wisdom ploughed into the dust of your flesh.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 294.

⁵⁷ Brother Ugolino di Monte Santa Maria, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, trans. Raphael Brown, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1958), p. 14.

⁵⁸ Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis*, p. 314.

In living a Gospel life of activity and contemplation, St. Francis, with God's grace, succeeded in transforming his being into that of Christ. God Himself revealed to St. Francis not only that he shall have eternal life, but also that his brothers will too, through their perfect observation of Christ's life.⁵⁹ Moreover, God has willed the active life for a number of other saints, as well. Perhaps the most well known example today is that of Mother Teresa, who heard Christ telling her to be his fire of love amongst the poor, the sick, the dying and the little children. And these are just a few instances making it very clear that God wills many to live the active life.⁶⁰

A central principle for St. Maximilian Kolbe was that Christ is alive and present in every single person.⁶¹ This principle led St. Maximilian to sacrifice his life for Francis Gajowniczek in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Mother Teresa also followed this principle in her work for the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. For her, a poor and sick person was Jesus himself, as he told us, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."⁶² Indeed, there are a number of passages in Scripture where Christ makes it clear that he himself is present in the most lowly of human beings.

Mother Teresa acknowledged that Jesus is not fully present to us in his flesh, but alive and present in our neighbor. She explained it well when she said that, "In Holy Communion we have Christ under the appearance of bread. In our work we find him under the appearance of flesh and blood. It is the same Christ. 'I was hungry, I was naked, I was sick, I was homeless.'"⁶³ For Mother Teresa and her sisters, Christ was truly present in those they served. When an Austrian lady named Marie visited the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa gave her a young boy who was gravely sick. Shortly thereafter, he died peacefully in her arms. Right at that moment of his death, she saw the face of Christ right there in the face of the little boy. This experience led Marie to become an active sister.⁶⁴ She and the other sisters did not understand Christ's words in a figurative or in a mystical way, but they literally saw Christ in other people. This same seeing also inspired

⁵⁹ Brother Ugolino, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, p. 182.

⁶⁰ Msgr. Leo Maasburg and Fr. Pascual Cervera, "Mother Teresa," lecture presented at Thomas Aquinas College, Santa Paula, California, Feb.15th 2014.

⁶¹ Patricia Treece, *A Man for Others: Maximilian Kolbe, the "Saint of Auschwitz,"* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 120.

⁶² *The Holy Bible*, RSV, Matthew 25:40.

⁶³ MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE, *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 74.

⁶⁴ Msgr. Leo Maasburg and Fr. Pascual Cervera, "Mother Teresa," Thomas Aquinas College.

Maximilian Kolbe to sacrifice himself for another in Auschwitz.

If Christ is truly present in human persons, service done in the active life becomes a direct act of love for God. And this is a worthwhile consideration because it brings about a kind of *transformation of action*, for, loving action for neighbor becomes loving service to God. Upon this distinction rests St. Thomas' conclusion that the contemplative life is superior to the active life. As previously mentioned, part of the merit of the contemplative life lies in the fact that it is a direct, unmediated love of God. If one grants that service to neighbor is a direct act of love of God, then the merit flowing from the 'directness factor' belongs both to the active and the contemplative life.

4. The Ultimate Source of Merit of the Active and Contemplative Lives

Since the Incarnation, the active life has become a real means for divinizing man. Man can live a holy life in the world as long as he remains united to God in grace and in his will, and he can even incorporate contemplation into his very active life. Yet the fuel for the good works he does, and indeed his very animating principle, is his love of God. The individual's love of the Divine is the real source for all of the good he does for his neighbor and for the world. In fact, external action presupposes love of God, since no work really can be good if it is not done out of love for God and for the sake of His glory.

St. Thomas is correct in that the root of merit is charity, and the direct love of God is indeed the most meritorious. We are to love him by being with him and receiving him, and this in many ways is the best way to love him, just as the best way to love our friends is to simply be with them and listen to them. We are most receptive to Jesus in the contemplative act, when we place all of our work aside so as to perfectly receive him. Some, while in this loving state of passivity, receive God's will for them to live in the world, in action. When they go out into the world, it is their love of God that inspires their action and makes it good. Not only does well-reasoned reflection reveal the utmost importance of our direct love of the Divine, but even the example of the lives of the most active saints testify to this fact.

It is only through the active saints' deep love of God that they witnessed Christ in those they served. Their loving service for others was an expres-

sion for their love of God and the joy of their work was to love God through and in those in need. This is why it is so moving to hear Mother Teresa's poor being Christ himself. Moreover, the active saints here discussed received a direct call from God to live actively. Each one discerned their way of life through prayer and in contemplation, and each one fulfilled their active vocation because of their love of Him in obedience and in unity with His will. Out of their deep love of Him, they loved those around them.

The primacy of contemplation is emphasized not only in the lives of the active saints, but also in their writings. Though he worked tirelessly and travelled, St. Maximilian Kolbe's priority was prayer. Commenting on the relationship between his prayer and his work, he said that the fruitfulness of work depends solely on one's union with God.⁶⁵ He urged devotion to the Immaculata and he provided unceasing consolation to his fellow inmates in the concentration camp with a profound spiritual strength that flowed from his intimacy with the divine. His union with God in prayer was the fuel for all of his good action and is what made his work good. This inner act of love is direct and pure, wholly unmediated and alive in the interior person, and is itself a kind of contemplation that is in its purest form in the contemplative act. For this reason, the merit of action lies in the direct love of God, and in the contemplative act. This fact, then, answers our question - the merit of the active life and contemplative life alike ultimately flows from the contemplative act.

The active life is indeed the life for some because it is the best means for deepening their love of God. St. Thomas grants that the particular inclinations of individuals make them more apt for the active life.⁶⁶ Knowing God does indeed lead to the love of God, but our love of Him can also be deepened by serving others. The active Sisters of Life, for example, said that their work with pregnant women enriched their interior life by showing them the great goodness of the Lord at work in the lives of those they serve. Their work inspired awe, wonder and an increase of their love for Him.⁶⁷ St. Thomas recognizes this fact, too, when he says that the works of the active life can make one more apt for contemplation.⁶⁸ Yet ultimately,

⁶⁵ Fr. Luigi Faccenda, *Symbiosis: Contemplation and Action*, (West Covina: Immaculata, 1991), p. 60.

⁶⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II*, q182 a4 ad 4.

⁶⁷ Sisters of Life, "The Sisters of Life," presentation at Thomas Aquinas College, Santa Paula, California, Jan. 20th 2014.

⁶⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae II*, q182 a4 ad 3.

the most intimate union that a soul can have to the Divine comes about in the contemplative act.⁶⁹ Indeed, from one's love of God flows good action, and good action can make hearts grow in love for Him and can thus enrich contemplation.

In the Martha and Mary story, Christ tells Martha that one thing is needed, and this one thing is focus on Christ. He does not ask her to stop serving him in action – no, in fact, the Church needs its Marthas. It needs those who are on fire to act for Christ. Christ wanted Martha's action to be more contemplative in character; he wanted her work to be contemplation in action. In the same way that a mother's steadfast love for her spouse and her children animates all that she does for them, our love of God is to animate all of the action we do in the world. This, indeed, was lacking in Martha, that her work be contemplation in action.⁷⁰

The contemplative act, which is the simple, receptive gaze on the Divine, is man's final end. We can begin to realize it in this life and in fact, we must do so. Everything we do must be contemplative in character and we must set aside time to partake in contemplation. It will preserve the goodness of our action and it is itself the greatest and most lasting good. Granting that good action serves God directly, service to the members of the Body of Christ will indeed pass away, while our interior love of him is everlasting. For this reason, and because the primary focus of the contemplative life is contemplation, it is the de facto highest life that man can live. This is an indisputable fact, founded upon Christ himself. Yet its objective superiority does not allow us to say it is the best for everyone. God has made it clear that he wills some to live active lives – not just a few individuals, and not only those who have some kind of restlessness.

Yet it is of great importance that each life contain elements of the other. While the active life must be lived as contemplation in action, the contemplative life necessitates working together with others and praying for the people of the world. Moreover, human interaction safeguards contemplation from corruption into melancholy, wherein an abstract truth replaces divine truth and the contemplative act becomes a deification of the intellect. Indeed, what is most essential to contemplation is that it is a loving gaze on a person who is Christ: “what is loved is not the universal, but the individual thing itself. The individuality does not fall away as it does in

⁶⁹ Ibid., q182 a3 ad 3.

⁷⁰ Fr. LUIGI FACCENDA, *Symbiosis: Contemplation and Action*, p.11.

knowing.⁷¹ This is the reason for the common practice in Spain, so rich in contemplative vocations, of having laypeople visit and talk to cloistered religious. Such a practice maintains the reality of humanity and personhood in the minds and hearts of the contemplatives.⁷² Undeniably, action and contemplation both have their own gift which serves to perfect the other. Their unique interaction has led some to call their relationship a kind of symbiosis.

* * *

The Catholic Church today does much good for the world, be it through missionary work or evangelization. It frequently encourages us to live our faith in action. Active charity is so emphasized that some high schools have permitted community service to replace the standard religion class.⁷³ Yet within this mentality there is a temptation for the faithful. Like Martha, we can lose sight of Christ when we busy ourselves in striving to do good works, and when we do so, our work is rendered into a kind of faithless social work. Yet to serve is our duty; in Christ, and as Christians, we are called to evangelize the world and to serve those in need. We have seen that this service to neighbor is not merely a service to neighbor, but in a very real but very mysterious way, a service to Christ. This direct, divine encounter, so wonderfully available to the faithful, is what all of the members of the Body of Christ are called to do.

At the same time, every Christians is called to the contemplation of the Beatific Vision. This seeing begins here and now with contemplative prayer. This is why the Church today should strongly encourage the faithful to partake in, indeed, to indulge in, the joy of receiving Christ in the contemplative act. It is ironic that we humans must be urged to this most restful and delightful thing; perhaps it is the effect of a society whose incessant drive to work drains even into our spiritual lives, or maybe it is human nature to always want to do something. In any case, we must not lose sight of Christ and we must begin our life to come. Begin the feast now and drink deeply of Him, and *let God push your boat into deep waters, toward the unfathomable*.

⁷¹ KAREN ZEDLICK, "On Martha and Mary" op.cit.

⁷² Msgr. LEO MAASBURG and Fr. PASCUAL CERVERA, "Mother Teresa" op.cit.

⁷³ For instance, in 2006, a Catholic high school in Winnipeg, Canada, had a number of hours of community service as a religion credit.

*ble depths of the interior life.*⁷⁴

Summary

The article is concerned with the question of which life is the best kind of life to live – the active life or the contemplative life. Its point of departure is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; there, he concludes that the contemplative life is superior to the active life because it is a life that is more divine in character. For Aristotle, the contemplative life divinizes man because it is a life lived most in accordance with reason, which is the highest and most divine element in man, and it is a life which most resembles the life of God. But since Christ, and with the introduction of grace into the lives of the faithful, it seems that both the active and the contemplative lives acquire a kind of divine character when lived in accordance with God's will. For this reason, Aristotle's conclusion must be re-evaluated in light of the Incarnation. The thesis shows how Aristotle's conclusion is in fact confirmed by Christ in the Martha and Mary story, where he says that Mary's contemplative role is the "better part" in comparison with Martha's action. This point, that the contemplative life is generically more meritorious than the active life, is brought out by the Church Doctors and is shown to be reinforced by the lives and writings of the active saints. Indeed, the contemplative life is found to be the best kind of life that man can live, and contemplation is the source of merit for the active and contemplative lives alike.

Key words: *Active life, contemplative life, action, contemplation, merit, spirituality, Aristotle, Aquinas,*

O źródłach zasługi życia czynnego i kontemplacyjnego. Studium porównawcze

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy kwestii: jaki rodzaj życia jest najlepszym rodzajem życia – życie aktywne czy kontemplacyjne. Punktem wyjścia jest *Etyka nikomachejska* Arystotelesa, w której stwierdza, że kontemplacyjne życie

⁷⁴ Faustina Kowalska, *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 1987), p. 28.

jest lepsze do aktywnego, ponieważ jest to życie, które jest bardziej boskie w swym charakterze. Dla Arystotelesa, życie kontemplacyjne ubóstwia człowieka, ponieważ jest ono życiem przeżywanym najbardziej zgodnie z rozumem, który jest najwyższym i najbardziej boskim pierwiastkiem w człowieku, i jest to życie, które najbardziej przypomina życie Boga. Ale od czasów Chrystusa, i wraz z wprowadzeniem łaski w życie wiernych, wydaje się, że zarówno aktywne, jak i kontemplacyjne życie nabierają pewnego rodzaju boskiego charakteru, kiedy przeżywa się je zgodnie z wolą Bożą. Z tego powodu, konkluzja Arystotelesa musi być ponownie oceniona w świetle Wcielenia. Artykuł powyższy pokazuje jak konkluzja Arystotelesa jest rzeczywiście potwierdzona przez Chrystusa w historii Marty i Marii, kiedy mówi On, że kontemplacyjna rola Marii jest „lepszą częścią” w porównaniu z działaniem Marty. Myśl ta, że życie kontemplacyjne jest ze swej istoty bardziej zasługujące niż życie aktywne, jest wyprowadzana przez doktorów Kościoła i jest ukazana jako wzmocniona przez życie i pisma aktywnych świętych. Rzeczywiście, kontemplacyjne życie jest uznane za najlepszy rodzaj życia, jakim człowiek może żyć, a kontemplacja jest źródłem zasług zarówno dla czynnego, jak i dla kontemplacyjnego życia.

Słowa kluczowe: *życie aktywne, życie kontemplacyjne, działanie, kontemplacja, zasługa, duchowość, Arystoteles, Tomasz z Akwinu.*

