

Christ Our Ritual Sage? A Chinese Articulation of Christ's Priesthood

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This article concerns developing an account of Christ's priesthood utilizing concepts and terms from Chinese philosophy. The primary problem I address is methodological: how can an intercultural reading of Christological doctrine be simultaneously culturally relevant and orthodox? In answer to this question, I seek to negotiate intellectual complications that arise in attempting to articulate a doctrine concerning Christ's historical and cultural embodied person while drawing on a cultural and ritual milieu vastly different from those of the Christian Scriptures or doctrinal tradition. Focusing on the question of Christ's priesthood, I demonstrate here that a reading that is at once both culturally relevant and orthodox is possible through cultivating a reading of two concrete programs and then using these perspectives to analyze and resolve issues in articulating Christ's priesthood in a Chinese key. Thus, I base this work here on an analysis of ritual and ritual agency in the philosophical writings of the early Confucian Xúnzǐ 荀子 (310–210 BC) and St. Thomas Aquinas's account of Christ's priesthood in question 22 of *Summa theologiae* [ST] III.¹

The framework in which I pose this reading of Christ's priesthood is,

¹ I would like to thank both Matthew Levering for his extensive comments and suggestions on this article, and the blind-peer reviewer for *Nova et Vetera* (English) for his excellent and helpful comments. Any mistakes that remain are my own. Although Xúnzǐ is not as important to the Confucian tradition as his near contemporary Mèngzǐ 孟子, he was vastly important in the early Confucian period and has a sophisticated theory of ritual that makes him especially fitting for this article's purposes.

then, the relationship between human culture and Christian doctrine. In the modern West, the difficulties of articulating Christian teaching in a Western idiom have been by and large negotiated for a long time, and thus many Western Christians do not have any trouble understanding Christian doctrine in their native intellectual categories. However, especially in the wake of postmodernism and postcolonialism, this is not true in many parts of the world. In recent decades, a number of Asian and Asian American theologians have articulated some variety of the claim that traditional Christian doctrinal categories, especially Christological doctrines, are products of and are only relevant to the dominant intellectual culture of the West and that, hence, a culturally relevant and responsive theology for Asian peoples must find a different foundation to be really “Asian.”²

Modern theology therefore faces a considerable dilemma. On the one hand, many Asian theologians are suspicious of the possibility of a truly Asian theology being founded on traditional Christian categories and discourse. On the other hand, sociologically speaking, it seems that Christianity itself is fading in the West and that the dominant Christian culture will be Chinese within a matter of decades.³ We face, then, a very imaginable situation in which the majority of Christians might be led to believe that the doctrinal content of traditional Christology is not culturally relevant to them, and thus can be replaced. What is to become of these categories, then, and the doctrines they communicate? What is to become of the theological sciences that today seek to better understand and articulate these doctrines and their categories? Will they fall away and, indeed,

² The strongest statement of this approach can be found in the works of C. S. Song, such as *Jesus, the Crucified People* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 6–12. A more recent work that defines “Asian” theology over and against Western theology is Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012). In common parlance, “banana” is a derogatory term for someone of Asian lineage whose “insides” (i.e., practices, language, conceptual framework) are “white.”

³ See Fenggang Yang, “When Will China Become the World’s Largest Christian Country,” *Slate*, December 2, 2014 (online). At the very least, the Chinese cultural umbrella would pertain to those members of the Chinese diaspora who left China during the late Qīng 清 dynasty (1644–1912) for predominantly economic reasons, or those who fled China in the republican era, particularly after the rise of Máo Zédōng 毛泽东 (r. 1949–1976). This diasporic community would include, but not be limited to, Chinese-speaking citizens of nations such as Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the United States, Canada, and Western European countries. If we take a step further and expand the Chinese cultural imprint to cultures heavily influenced by Chinese thought, history, and language, we would also have to include at least Vietnam and Korea, and Japan to some degree.

become irrelevant, or will they find ways to speak to a changing context?

In this article, I seek to show that being responsive to the changing global context enables Christianity to accommodate the concerns for both cultural relevance and traditional Christian doctrinal categories. Yet doing so requires a difficult process of understanding how traditional Christian proclamation can inform and be relevant to the intellectual devices of historically non-Christian cultures, such as that of China. And so, instead of making an argument for method, I demonstrate what this work could look like.

In this demonstration, I focus on the challenge of articulating Christ's priesthood in a Chinese idiom, mediated by Xúnzǐ. Ultimately, the prospects for this articulation will rest heavily on the ability to consider Christ's priesthood within the category of the ritual sage, the *shèngrén* 聖人, as it functions in Xúnzǐ's philosophy. But, in order to appreciate why this move is necessary, we first require a presentation of Xúnzǐ's broader understanding of rituals and their role in moral cultivation. Then, we must understand Christ's priesthood in traditional doctrinal categories so that we may explore the relationship between this doctrine and Xúnzǐ's thought. Hence, in the second section of the present article, I will analyze Christ's priesthood as presented in *ST*, q. 22, aa. 1–3. In the concluding section of the article, I will discuss in brief some of the challenges to articulating Christ's priesthood in the conceptual idiom of Xúnzǐ's philosophy and suggest a path to resolution by forging a link between the hypostatic union and Xúnzǐ's category of the ritual sage. Consequently, at the end of this reading, we will arrive at an account of Christ's priesthood that is both culturally relevant to Chinese concepts and faithful to the traditional Christian categories informing the doctrine of Christ's priesthood.

A Chinese Account of Ritual Agency

Xunzi, a member of the Confucian school (*Rújiā* 儒家) of early China, was one of the most important Confucian thinkers, not least because of his systematic reflections on the importance of rituals and the virtue of ritual propriety, both captured in the same term, *lǐ* 禮.⁴ At the heart of

⁴ The best literature on Xúnzǐ's life and thought remains largely written in Chinese, such as the study by Chén Dàqí 陳大齊 (for Chinese names, when presented as the author of a Chinese-language work, I observe the Chinese tradition of surname before given name), *Xúnzǐ Xuéshuō* 荀子學說 (Taipei: Zhonghua Wenhua Chubanshuiyuan, 1954). The standard English-language introduction to Xúnzǐ's philosophy remains Paul Rakita Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xúnzǐ* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999). As for translations of Xúnzǐ, the tradi-

Xúnzǐ's moral philosophy is his insight that rituals are essential for moral cultivation and formation. Indeed, for him, all of the rituals taught by the Confucian tradition were fundamental to the moral development of individuals and to the broader flourishing of society. While we do not have the space here to sufficiently cover his entire position on the subject, we can nonetheless sufficiently summarize the major threads of his approach.⁵

In a work entitled “Discourse on Ritual” (*Lǐlùn* 禮論), Xúnzǐ begins with a history of the *lǐ*: whence did the *lǐ* come, and what was their purpose? According to Xúnzǐ, “human beings are born and have desires, yet they do not obtain what they desire, and then they are unable to stop seeking what they desire.”⁶ This observation is distinctive of Xúnzǐ, who

tional eponymous collection of his writings, there are three main texts in English. For a partial but good translation of important chapters, see Burton Watson, *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). For an extensive translation with scholarly commentary, see John Knoblock, *Xúnzǐ: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988–1994). More recently, a very good and accessible translation has been published, with good scholarly references, but not overly burdensome for the reader unfamiliar with this discourse, and I would suggest this volume for those interested in reading the Xúnzǐ in English: Eric L. Hutton, *Xúnzǐ: The Complete Text* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵ Much of the literature on this topic tends to fall into arguments that make Xúnzǐ into a conventionalist as regards ritual. Furthering this point, many scholars have argued that Xúnzǐ sees human beings as crafting the conventions of ritual in order to create the order of the cosmos and society. This view is difficult to justly portray and refute in a footnote, but quite simply, I find this categorization of Xúnzǐ to be indebted to a modern dialecticism between the transcendent and immanent. I find that Xúnzǐ perceives both a givenness to human life and the ability to “make” the world. Thus, I do not think his theory of ritual is completely conventional, but rather includes knowledge of the cosmic *Dào* 道 and the use of human faculties to establish ritual forms that enable humans to conform to the Dao. In my reading, the key point is anthropological: human acts such as rituals and naming are in some measure conventional due to the faculties of the human person as an intellectual creature. Yet there is always a givenness to the faculties that gives them coherence. This is something not foreign to Christianity, we might add: Adam is allowed to name the animals, but he never thinks he allows them to exist in their particular forms. The interpretation I present here resonates with Janghee Lee’s presentation in *Xúnzǐ and early Chinese Naturalism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005). A good example of the type of reading I find problematic regarding Xúnzǐ, while it still has much worth consideration in its proposals, is Kurtis Hagen, *The Philosophy of Xúnzǐ: A Reconstruction* (Chicago: Open Court, 2007).

⁶ *Xúnzǐ* 19.1: “禮起於何也 曰人生而有欲欲而不得則不能無求。” All citations of the *Xúnzǐ* (in which “Discourse on Ritual” [*Lǐlùn*] is a section or chap-

argues elsewhere that human moral nature (*rénxìng* 人性) is bad (*è* 惡).⁷ In this other essay, which is focused on human moral nature, Xúnzǐ argues there are three types of desires with which humans are born: a love for profit (*lì* 利; note the difference from *lǐ* 禮), a proclivity toward hatred and viciousness, and desires of the eyes and ears bringing about a love of sound and color. According to Xúnzǐ, if we nurture a love of profit, this will lead to contention and taking goods by force, and then discourse and submission will be vitiated. If we follow our desires for hatred and viciousness, oppression and thievery will rise, and loyalty and fidelity will decline. Finally, if we give in to the desires of our eyes and ears, obscenity and disorder (*luàn* 亂) will arise and *lǐ*, appropriateness, culture, and the pattern of life will disappear.⁸

For Xúnzǐ, the complication is not necessarily the fact of human desiring as such, but what human beings desire and in what degree. As a gloss on the *Lìlùn* passage, we might say that Xúnzǐ finds it problematic that human desires are not aimed at particular goods that can be obtained, but rather are open-ended and self-centered needs.⁹ In his use, the word

ter) are based on text divisions as found in the Chinese Text Project, at ctext.org, since it is a widely used resource. I have checked the quotations against existing manuscripts, including digital copies available from ctext.org. My many thanks to the editors of this free resource for their assistance in making these texts widely available. All translations from it are my own work from the Chinese manuals available at ctext.org, although note 4 above provides information on published translations for readers wishing to investigate the *Xúnzǐ* itself further.

⁷ Wáng Xiānqiān 王先谦, *Xúnzǐ Jíjiě* 荀子集解, ed. Chén Xiàohuán 沈嘯寰 and Wáng Xiānqiān 王星贤 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2012), 420. The commentary on Xúnzǐ by Hǎo Yìxíng (郝懿行) defines the word often rendered as “nature” (*xìng* 性) as meaning “what is immediate to the self,” or *zìrán* 自然. This helps us see that, for Xúnzǐ, the moral quality of *xìng* is less about faculties of human nature (which he holds elsewhere are basically equal and are not in themselves bad) and more about the inherent tendencies of humans to act in particular ways. As we shall see, for Xúnzǐ, the problem is precisely that humans need something to help us learn to be moral, that we cannot just do it “naturally” (*zìrán*). Aaron Stalknaker has helpfully compared this conception of human nature and how to correct it in Xúnzǐ with that of St. Augustine (*Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* [Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006]).

⁸ *Xúnzǐ* 23.1.

⁹ See Winnie Sung, “Ritual in the *Xúnzǐ*: A Change of the Heart/Mind,” *Sophia* 51 (2012): 215. Sung argues that Xúnzǐ understands *lì* 利 in terms of “interests that pertain exclusively to the self.” Thus, for her, Xunzi’s conception of ritual is that it corrects or reforms the heart-mind (*xīn* 心) aimed toward self-interest. Generally,

“profit” means a rather abstract sense of more money or material wealth—but what can be enough? Hence, in the *Lǐlùn*, after stating the problem of human desiring, Xúnzǐ shows why human desiring is problematic: “If in their seeking to fulfill their desires there is no limit to their striving, then it would be impossible for people to *not* contend with one another; contention leads to disorder, and disorder to destitution.”¹⁰

This, then, is the human condition out of which the need for *lǐ* arises. The problem of human desire is that it is neither limited nor measured and has no guide or rule to channel it properly. Moreover, the desires we experience are innately unrestrained. Here we must call to mind Xúnzǐ’s historical context if we are to interpret his reading of human desire properly. Xunzi lived in the later stages of the Zhōu周 dynasty, in a time called the Warring States period. This period was primarily characterized by the decay of the Zhōu ruling family, which was not only political but also cultural in scope. Indeed, by Xúnzǐ’s time, China was embroiled in various bids for power by various leaders of states who sought to gain imperial rule over all of China. For scholars like Xúnzǐ, human desires and tendencies played out on a grand scale of lords marching to war and instituting policies so as to marshal their resources for consolidating power.¹¹

Like many Confucians, Xúnzǐ seemed to take an overall dim view of the leaders of his day and saw their approaches as participating in and extending the disorder of human desiring, rather than correcting it. Hence, Xúnzǐ points to historical models for kingship that brings about true order and harmony in society, put into practice by a group of sage leaders known collectively as the *xiānwáng*先王, the “former kings,” or more strongly, the “ancient kings.”¹² Not only were these rulers not them-

I find Sung’s position helpful and clarifying of Xunzi’s thought, but I also find that it brings a slight complication. Self-interest cannot be a categorical problem for Xúnzǐ; after all, he argues we should pursue becoming like sages precisely because it is best for us. Hence, I argue that *lǐ* is better understood in the sense of excessive possession, or trying to get as much as one can without regard for proper order or distinctions. In other words, Xúnzǐ does not seem to me to think the desire to eat, learn, or have houseroom is problematic, but rather how I desire and move to acquire these things in excess.

¹⁰ Xúnzǐ 19.1: “求而無度量分界則不能不爭爭則亂亂則窮。”

¹¹ See, e.g., the policies championed by the legalist philosopher Shāng Yáng商鞅, who was an important minister in the state of Qín and advocated aligning the entire Qín society around agriculture and war, explicitly subordinating moral questions to these ends (see *The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China*, trans. and ed. Yuri Pines [New York: Columbia University Press, 2017]).

¹² Customarily, in the Confucian tradition, the term *xiānwáng* at least implies a

selves morally disordered or chaotic; they were also able to provide moral stability and rectification to the broader society. Rather than nurturing our desires that lead to contention, the *xiānwáng* instituted ways of redirecting, guiding, and re-forming desires to prevent disorder. According to Xúnzǐ, the rituals are the primary means the *xiānwáng* used to cultivate the moral rectification of society and bring order in the place of chaos. He writes that the ancient kings hated disorder, and thus established *lǐ* in order to “distinguish things [*fēn zhī*; 分之], nourish people’s desires, and give to them what they seek.”¹³ This then caused the people to have moderate desire for things, and the things were not broken apart due to the desiring.¹⁴

Thus did the former kings establish *lǐ* as a way to guide the people toward human flourishing. In his chapter on human moral nature, Xúnzǐ compares our moral tendencies to a wooden branch, and the *lǐ* of the former kings to steam. The steam impacts the wood by reshaping it, and then it can be made straight (*zhí* 直). The ancient sage kings knew that people’s desires went astray and tended to disorder, and so they established laws and rituals in order to “straighten out” (*jiǎo* 矯) peoples emotional desires and help them become rectified (*zhèng* 正).¹⁵ Hence, Xúnzǐ’s famous argument is that our moral tendencies are bad and that we are made good only through “artifice” (*wěi* 偽).

Yet it is vital to see that, for Xúnzǐ, it is not simply ritual behavior or just any artifice that makes for human flourishing.¹⁶ Mark Edward Lewis

reference to the ancient ruling figures who were said to establish Chinese culture and help it prosper: the Three Sovereigns (*Sānhuáng* 三皇), who were Fúxī 伏羲, Shénnóng 神農, and Suìrén 燧人; and the Five Emperors (*wǔdì*), who were Huángdì 黃帝, Zhuānxù 顓頊, Kù 嚳, Yáo 堯, and Shùn 舜. The list for Confucians also tended to include the celebrated founders of the Zhōu dynasty. While Xúnzǐ does seem to hold these kings in high regard, he also seems to prefer the current ruler to look to models closer to his own time, rather than looking to the far reaches of the Chinese past for sage guidance. One might argue that Xúnzǐ interprets the ancient kings as establishing the true nature of virtuous kingship, such that all other virtuous kings are reiterations of this type. For this reason, we should read Xunzi’s remarks as understanding the ancient kings as only one important subset of “former kings” who are useful models of governance.

¹³ Xúnzǐ 19.1: “先王惡其亂也故制禮義以分之以養人之欲給人之求。”

¹⁴ Xúnzǐ 19.1: “使欲必不窮乎物物必不屈於欲。”

¹⁵ Xúnzǐ 23.2.

¹⁶ See *Introduction to Ritual and Religion in the Xúnzǐ*, ed. T. C. Kline III and Justin Tiwald (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), a response to

has argued that, for Confucians, the “dark side” of human nature was borne out in mere human convention or custom (*sú* 俗). The fact that human beings may ritualize behavior is not enough to make it an artifice that genuinely straightens the poor tendencies of human nature. Rather, at stake for Xúnzǐ was the Confucian program of education, whereby one learned the proper “straightening artifice” by studying the ancient texts and traditions championed in Confucianism.¹⁷ For Xúnzǐ, straightening (*jiǎo* 矯) human tendencies required a particular, Confucian formation (*jiào* 教).

But, at this point, we might pose the following question: why does Xúnzǐ postulate that it is not ritual behavior per se that constitutes the path to human flourishing, but only the *lǐ* as founded by the former kings? Is this merely a claim that the Confucian way is “better” because it is his own? Fortunately, Xúnzǐ goes on to build up the substructure of the *lǐ* with a discussion of it as founded in nature, not merely as the conventional whim of certain celebrated governors. Xúnzǐ teaches that the *lǐ* has three roots. The first is Heaven and earth (*Tiāndì* 天地), which is the root of life. Then are the forefathers and ancestors, who are the root of one’s class of existence (*lèi* 類). Third are the ruler and teacher, who are the root of order (*zhì* 治).¹⁸ These three roots make the flourishing life possible, and it is the *lǐ* that are established to properly serve all three. Hence, the *lǐ* concern the negotiation of the proper relationship between existence, history, cosmos, and present relationships all at the same time. Such negotiations cannot be merely “constructed” on the whim of whoever might want to do so, but rather require particular insight into the cosmological order and the human person.

Elsewhere, Xúnzǐ speaks of the “methods of the sage king” (*shèngwáng zhī yòng* 聖王之用) as, in part, constituted by observing Heaven (*chá Tiān* 察天), and so, as able to “ornament” (*cuò* 錯) the earth.¹⁹ The introduction

scholars who argue that Xúnzǐ is antagonistic toward religious practice: “What we find in Xunzi is not a critique of religious practice as such but rather a critique of certain forms of religious practice and interpretations of religious practice—the forms that treat rituals and supernatural beings as mere instruments of personal advantage and interpretations that fail to appreciate the proper function of ritual in moral cultivation” (3).

¹⁷ Mark Edward Lewis, “Custom and Human Nature in Early China,” *Philosophy East & West* 53, no. 3 (July 2003): 309–22.

¹⁸ Xúnzǐ 19.5: “禮有三本：天地者生之本也先祖者類之本也君師者治之本也。” Zhì 治 usually means something like “to rule,” but more basically means giving order to things.

¹⁹ Xúnzǐ 9.23. The verb *cuò* usually means to make a mistake or err, but was also used

of *Tiān* into the *shèngrén* paradigm is significant, since for many early Chinese thinkers—including Xunzi, I would argue— *Tiān* functions as a divine force similar to Aristotle's unmoved mover.²⁰ This is related to another argument from Xúnzǐ that there exists a harmonious, triadic relationship (*cān* 參) between heaven, earth, and the human being: "Heaven has its seasons, the Earth has its resources, and humanity has its ability to govern."²¹ Here, Xúnzǐ means to key in on the specific contribution of humanity within the cosmos and articulate how that contribution is essential to understanding human life and its responsibilities. The human capacity for governance, for bringing order into the world, is a response to the life and resources given by Heaven and earth.

A similar point is found in Xúnzǐ's observation that "only the sage does not seek to know Heaven [*zhī Tiān* 知天]."²² In context, the word *zhī* (知 typically signifying intellectual comprehension, which is related to though not completely identified with wisdom, or *zhì* 智) means an intimate knowledge of Heaven's movements, as though the human being might completely understand, and then indeed mimic, the acts of Heaven himself. Xúnzǐ means to teach here that the sage recognizes the need for humanity not to mimic Heaven, but to relate to it properly by providing ways that order and govern the gift of life and resources Heaven has given

to describe inlaying items with precious metal, polishing, or sharpening objects.

²⁰ In early China, *Tiān* could mean something like the heavens or seasons, or even nature itself. Hence, the passage cited in footnote 21, Xúnzǐ speaks of *Tiān* having seasons. Yet at the same time, there are many occasions when Xúnzǐ speaks of *Tiān* as giving life to all things (but not order), which is a more divine quality. Due to these features of his thought, many modern interpreters have seen Xúnzǐ as a thoroughgoing naturalist and atheistic philosopher. There is insufficient space here to argue against this, but there is support for my view among significant scholars as well. See, for example, Edward Machle, *Nature and Heaven in the Xúnzǐ: A Study of the Tian Lun* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), and Machle, "Xunzi as a Religious Philosopher," *Philosophy East and West* 26, no. 4 (1976): 443–61, repr. in Kline and Tiwald, *Ritual and Religion in the Xúnzǐ*, 21–42. The Kline and Tiwald volume develops a broad account sympathetic with my interpretation of Xúnzǐ on the question of *Tiān*.

²¹ *Xúnzǐ* 17.2: "天有其時地有其財人有其治夫是之謂能參。"

²² *Xúnzǐ* 17.3: "唯聖人為不求知天。" Chén, *Xúnzǐ Xuéshuō*, 144. Chén contends that, for Xúnzǐ, "the *li* are not obtained from *Tian* and cannot take their model from *Tian*" "故禮義不得之於天，亦非取法於天。" He seems to imply by this that humans ought not have concern for *Tiān*, but I would argue this is not the case. It seems to me that Xúnzǐ's point is that the type of existence of *Tiān* (especially in its transcendent aspects) is different from human existence, and thus cannot be a model (*qǔfǎ* 取法) of how to flourish as a human being.

to humanity. Hence, in the “Discourse on Ritual,” we find *Xunzi* claiming: “Heaven can bring things into being, but it cannot distinguish them from each other; Earth can give human beings body and movement, but it cannot govern them.”²³

The cosmological aspects of sagehood demonstrate that, for Xúnzǐ, while rituals are certainly conventions, they are not merely conventions. They are rather expressions of qualities within certain exemplary individuals who desire to communicate an interior moral order from themselves to broader society. Consequently, for Xúnzǐ, the efficacy of rituals in the moral reformation of human tendencies is rooted in the sage wisdom of the one who institutes and carries on the ritual framework at a given time. According to Xúnzǐ, the rituals were established by the former kings as a means of bringing order (*zhì*) and distinction (*fēn*) to the world, and they could accomplish this because they knew order and distinction within themselves.

A last word we can add about Xúnzǐ’s account of ritual is that, because of his emphasis on sagehood, his philosophy allows adequate space for the transformation of ritual forms that occur over time. For Xúnzǐ, ritual forms can be changed, but only by sages. In fact, Xúnzǐ argues for the historical existence of at least a hundred sages, and advocates following only those closer in time to our era: “If you wish to observe the traces of the sage-kings, then look to the most clear of them, the most recent kings [*hòu wáng*; 後王].”²⁴ This is no progressivism from Xúnzǐ; rather, he holds that the later kings who are sages continue the trajectory of the ancient sages, but in ways that are more fitting to the disorder of the age. Xúnzǐ claims that, if one desires to know the ancient ways (*shàng shì* 上世), one ought observe the *dào* of the Zhōu dynasty: “By means of the near you may know the far; by means of the one you may know the many [*yī jìn zhī yuǎn, yī yī zhī wàn*; 以近知遠, 以一知萬].”²⁵ Looking forward to our Christological ends, this idea that ritual forms are mutable and dependent on ritual sagehood is a foundational point of focus. However, before exploring it, we first must gather an account of Christ’s priesthood in traditional Christian terms so that we can properly assess and articulate Christ’s priestly work in concepts taken from Xúnzǐ’s thought.

St. Thomas on Christ’s Priesthood

It should be clear from the preceding analysis that, whatever value there

²³ *Xúnzǐ* 19.22: “天能生物不能辯物也地能載人不能治人。”

²⁴ *Xúnzǐ* 5.6.

²⁵ *Xúnzǐ* 5.6.

is in Xúnzǐ's philosophy for a Chinese articulation of Christ's priesthood, this intellectual program is developed in a context and with concerns very different from those of the traditional Christian teaching. Therefore, we require a theological account of Christ's priesthood in order to facilitate a fruitful and orthodox reflection on this doctrine in Xúnzǐ's concepts. I have elected to present this account by referencing Christ's priesthood as taught by St. Thomas Aquinas in question 22 of the *tertia pars* of *ST*. That this choice is particularly warranted is seen, for instance, in Jean-Pierre Torrell's note that Aquinas is unique among his contemporaries both in writing a commentary on the Book of Hebrews and in including a *quaestio* on Christ's Priesthood in his most mature work.²⁶ Moreover, Serge-Thomas Bonino has contended that, although Aquinas's conception of Christ's priesthood does not invoke a concept of a "natural" priesthood, his theology allows for the development of such an account, and thus Aquinas treats the revealed truth of Christ's priesthood in ways that prepare us well to perceive the possibilities and problems of reading Christ in light of Xúnzǐ.²⁷ Because this theme has been well-treated in Aquinas's thought, I

²⁶ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., "The Priesthood of Christ in the *Summa Theologiae*," in *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 126–58, at 127–28 (this article by Torrell originally appeared in French as "Le sacerdoce du Christ dans la *Somme de théologie*," *Revue thomiste* 99 [1999]: 75–100).

²⁷ Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., "Le sacerdoce comme institution naturelle selon saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 33–57, at 34–36. Bonino's article develops a concept of natural priesthood out of St. Thomas's discussion of religious virtue. He points out that Thomas also neither possesses a general notion of priesthood nor seems to have thought such an account necessary: "Non seulement saint Thomas n'a jamais élaboré pour elle-même une telle notion générale du sacerdoce, mais surtout il ne semble guère en avoir éprouvé le besoin [Not only does St. Thomas never elaborate such a general notion of priesthood itself, he moreover hardly seems to have felt the need; translation mine]" (34–35). However, Thomas's consideration of human nature allows for a development of a general account of priesthood, even an interreligious account. Bonino evokes St. Thomas's description of marriage as a natural institution, by virtue of the fact that humans may incline to marriage but must act in free will to fulfill this good. Bonino suggests "priesthood" in general is this type of natural inclination of human nature: "Il est une institution naturelle dans le mesure où il est une structure sociale universelle qui découle de la nature humaine comme telle considérée dans sa dimension religieuse [It is a *natural* institution inasmuch as it is a universal social structure which follows upon human nature, when human nature as such is considered in its religious dimension; translation mine]" (36). Similarly, I argue through Xúnzǐ that "ritual sagehood" can name a type of priestly inclination of human nature, one preferable here because it allows for the union of ritual action and intellectual perfection. Regardless, as I hope to make clear, whether developing a general account of priest-

do not hope to break new ground here and will limit myself to describing the most concise presentation Aquinas makes of this doctrine.²⁸

Before treating question 22, we require a brief prolegomenon to this discussion, since, as Joseph P. Wawrykow has noted, Aquinas assumed some knowledge on the part of his readers.²⁹ In terms of the context of *ST*, Aquinas locates the *quaestio* on Christ's priesthood within the division of the *tertia pars* pertaining the person of Christ as the incarnate Word.³⁰ Thus, Aquinas interprets Christ's priesthood in light of the hypostatic union, indeed, as a consequence of this union and its salvific character (see *ST* III, prol. and q. 1). The question is more specifically located within a discussion of the grace of the hypostatic union and its effects in bringing Christ's human nature to graced perfection. Additionally, as his assumed reader would have been studying theology in the medieval university and hearing lectures from a *magister in Sacra Pagina* or *cursus biblicus*, Aquinas can take for granted his reader will readily profess that Jesus is the incarnate Word, know Christ as the mediator of salvation, and know that Christ's body and blood is received in the Eucharist.³¹

hood or ritual sagehood, in a Christological trajectory, Christ will be the measure of these forms, which Bonino also notes (34).

²⁸ The best literature on Christ's priesthood in Aquinas is the 1999 volume of *Revue thomiste*, dedicated to this theme. In my judgment, the best English-language treatments of Christ's priesthood in Aquinas are given by Matthew Levering: "Christ the Priest: An Exploration of *Summa Theologiae* III, Question 22," *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 379–417; *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2001); and *Christ and the Catholic Priesthood: Ecclesial Hierarchy and the Pattern of the Trinity* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2010), esp. ch. 2. Regarding Aquinas's conception of Christ's priesthood outside of the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*], consult particularly Gilles Berceville, O.P., "Le sacerdoce du Christ dans le Commentaire de l'Épître aux Hébreux de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 143–58, and Martin Morard, "Sacerdoce du Christ et sacerdoce des chrétiens dans le Commentaire des Psaumes de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue thomiste* 99 (1999): 119–42.

²⁹ Joseph P. Wawrykow, "Wisdom in the Christology of Thomas Aquinas," in *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans*, ed. Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 177.

³⁰ See, e.g., John F. Boyle, "The Twofold Division of St. Thomas's Christology in the *Tertium Pars*," *The Thomist* 60 (1996): 439–47. Boyle argues contra M.-D. Chenu, who had claimed that qq. 1–26 of the *tertia pars* evinced a "scientific" approach to Christology, while qq. 27–59 were "scriptural." Boyle argues instead that both divisions are scriptural and that the distinction between the parts arises out of the struggle to describe the Church's proclamation about Christ in keeping with the historical narrative of his life. Thomas approaches the problem by first discussing who Christ is (i.e., the incarnate Word) and then understanding what Christ does.

³¹ See Leonard Boyle, *The Setting of the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas* (Toronto:

With regard to the theme of Christ's priesthood in general, St. Thomas might have assumed that his reader would also know of the traditional perspectives unique to each Gospel, specifically that Luke is said to emphasize Christ's priesthood.³² It is instructive that, in his interpretation of the location of Luke's genealogy of Jesus, Aquinas contends that Luke intends by this location to assert a link between Christ's priesthood, the sacramental economy (in baptism), and Christ's work to expiate sins.³³ In other words, there are at least three supporting themes Aquinas might assume on the part of his reader before they contemplate Christ's priesthood: (1) the doctrine of the hypostatic union, (2) the soteriological cause of the Incarnation, and (3) the link between Christ's priesthood, the fullness of grace, and his work to expiate sins.

With this background in mind, we can now focus on *ST* III, q. 22, especially articles 1–3. In article 1, Aquinas asks whether it is fitting for Christ to be a priest (*utrum conveniat Christo esse sacerdotum*). The objections unfold in two basic trajectories: the ontological dissonance between the priesthood and the *Verbum caro* (obj. 1), and the dissonance between Christ's ministry and the characteristics of the priesthood of the Old Testament (obj. 2–3). The first objection contends that, whereas priests are lower than the angels, Christ is higher, making it beneath his dignity to think him *sacerdos*.³⁴ The second objection argues that, since Christ was not from the tribe of Levi, he cannot be a priest in fulfillment of the Old Testament *typos*, and the third argues the same by pointing to the Old

Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1982). Boyle argues that *ST* was written to fill a lacuna in Dominican education for the *iuniores* of the order. If this is the case, then these observations about the assumed reader are intensified, since the reader would have at least taken the initial vow to join the Dominican order and would have at the least been taught Scripture daily in the priory, as well as engaged in other spiritual disciplines.

³² It is significant that Aquinas attributes this line of thought to Augustine's *De concordia evangelium* both in the prologue of the *Catena in Lucam* and in *Super Matt* 1, lec. 2.

³³ *Super Matt* 1, lec. 2. "Luke primarily intends to speak of the priestly personage of Christ, and to this priesthood pertains the expiation of sins. Therefore, it is fitting that Luke place Christ's generation after his baptism, in which the expiation of sins happens [Lucas autem maxime intendit commendare in Christo personam sacerdotalem, ad sacerdotem autem pertinent expiatio peccatorum, et ideo post Baptismum, in quo fit peccatorum expiatio, convenientur a Luca ponitur Christi generatio]." Unless otherwise noted, all English translation from the works of Thomas are mine, done from the Latin as found at corpusthomaticum.org.

³⁴ Significantly, this objection draws its force from the comparison between Christ and the angels in Hebrews 1:7–14.

Testament distinction between the offices of lawgiver and priest.³⁵

The objections in article 1 show the basic shape of concerns Thomas will develop throughout the question, and so they are worth special attention. On the one hand, the ontological concern deals with the union of God and man and the perfections of the latter as cause of the union.³⁶ On the other, Thomas is unsurprisingly sensitive to scriptural harmony. We see in the objections an interest in maintaining the rules for interpreting Sacred Scripture, whereby the literal sense serves as a guide for the allegorical. For Aquinas, however, the proper interpretation of Christ's priesthood functions within the broader way the New Law fulfills the Old Law.³⁷

In his response, St. Thomas first defines *sacerdos* as "handing over divine things to the people" (*divina populo tradit*); hence, the priest is a "giver of sacred things" (*sacra dans*). He then identifies three divine things the priest mediates: the law to the people, the people's prayers to God, and satisfaction for sins. On the basis of these divine things, Aquinas argues that it is most fitting that Christ be a priest, for he is the mediator of the gift of partaking of the divine nature and he effects reconciliation between the people and God.³⁸

Thomas' response primarily concerns imbuing the questions of the objections with an incarnational logic, emphasizing the perfections of Christ's human nature flowing from the hypostatic union. To the first objection he argues that Christ's dignity is higher than the angels in his human nature as well as his divine nature, since he possesses the "fullness of grace and glory" (*habuit plenitudinem gratiae et gloriae*). Yet, at the same time, the fullness of grace and glory is given to the human nature assumed by the Word, and hence Jesus "was conformed to the way-faring men who are constituted in the priesthood" (*conformis fuit hominibus viatoribus in sacerdotio constitutes*). Similarly, because Christ is the perfect union

³⁵ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1, obj. 1–3.

³⁶ Berceville, "Le sacerdoce du Christ," 145–46. Berceville, though drawing upon Thomas's commentary on Hebrews, here shows well what is at stake in the question of Christ's priesthood as regards an orthodox confession of the hypostatic union: "L'attribution du sacerdoce au Fils de Dieu, Seigneur universel, soulève cependant une difficulté théologique qui n'existe pas pour les titres de roi, de juge ou de docteur: la notion même de sacerdoce implique en effet celle de service, et donc d'infériorité [The attribution of priesthood to the Son of God, the savior of all, raises, however, a theological difficulty that does not exist for the titles of king, judge, or teacher: the notion of priesthood itself implies in effect this is an attribution of service, and therefore inferiority]" (translation mine).

³⁷ See Levering, "Christ the Priest," 384.

³⁸ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 1 resp.

of Word and man, it does not matter that the Old Testament Levitical priesthood and distinction between priest and legislator are not present in him. Christ is not an instance of priesthood, but its norm and type: the Old Testament priesthood is a figure of Christ, and Christ contains the perfect harmony of graces as legislator, priest, and king.³⁹ We can briefly note that, in view of the larger ends of the present essay, Aquinas's insight that Christ is the true archetype of priesthood formally different from his own ritual agency will prove important to configuring a Chinese account of Christ's priesthood.

After it is established that Christ is priest, article 2 poses the question of the material over which he presides as priest, whether Christ can be both priest and victim. The objections here are built on the perfections of Christ that Aquinas emphasizes in article 1. Objection 1 notes that the priestly sacrifice requires the killing of a victim, and Jesus did not kill himself; hence, Jesus cannot be both priest and victim. Objection 2 similarly argues that, because human sacrifice is alien to the Jewish priesthood, Christ would not have exercised his priesthood in treating himself as the victim. Objection 3 is perhaps the most skillful, given its anti-Nestorian logic: since victims are consecrated to God in the act of sacrificing, Christ cannot be the victim of his priesthood because his consecration is due to his union with God and has always been a characteristic of his existence as incarnate Word.⁴⁰

It is very clear that Aquinas is not interested in simply ascribing priesthood to Christ, but specifically ascribing to Christ's priesthood the ministry of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, in which Christ is both priest and Host. In his response to these objections, Aquinas first identifies a sacrifice as "something that is offered to God so that the human spirit is elevated to God" and then identifies three types of sacrifices. The first type is an offering for the remission of sin, according to Hebrews 5 and Leviticus 4:3. The second, taken from the peace offering in Leviticus 3, is an offering for the sake of being conserved in a state of grace. Third, echoing the holocaust of Leviticus 1:1–9, is the offering for being perfectly united with God.

Building on these three reasons for sacrifice, St. Thomas shows how Christ's human nature confers these effects on us through his crucial sacrifice. First, our sins are forever remitted (*deleta sunt*). Second, we receive the grace of salvation through him. And third, we have obtained

³⁹ ST III, q. 22, a. 1, ad 1–3 and obj. 1–3.

⁴⁰ ST III, q. 22, a. 2, obj. 1–3.

the perfection of glory through him.⁴¹ Now, it is clear that the priest cannot have these effects on his own power; he exercises these effects as a form of mediation through the offering of a victim and God's accepting it. In short, a pleasing sacrifice requires not only an empowered mediator (*sacerdos*) but also a fitting victim sacrificed in a fitting way. In Leviticus, even though a cow is required for all three sacrifices Thomas mentions, there are different stipulations: the offering for union with God requires a male without blemish, the peace offering can be a male or female without blemish with only certain parts required for sacrifice, and the sin offering requires a young, spotless bullock.⁴²

In light of this observation, Thomas's reply to the objections focus on why Christ is the most fitting victim for the sacrifice over which he is the official, or perhaps why Christ is the most ritually proper (Xúnzǐ's *lǐ*) victim.⁴³ To the first, Aquinas emphasizes that Christ exercised his free will to give himself over to death, and thus is the victim of his own priestly act. Second, however, Christ's free will is not to kill himself as a human sacrifice, but to give himself over to suffering. This is exceptionally important, for Christ's place as victim of sacrifice is not simply corporeal. Rather, Aquinas demonstrates that man's spirit can be offered to God. In the case of Jesus, his sacrifice is most essentially his surrender of himself unto suffering, in his acceptance of the mission of redemption as the God-man.⁴⁴ As to the third objection, many editions do not contain the reply, but we can construct a rough sense of what it might have been: because the Incarnation is entirely aimed toward the salvation worked out for humanity on the Cross, Jesus's humanity is, from the moment of his conception, consecrated as perfect and fitting victim.

So, having secured the proclamation that Christ is priest (a. 1) and is the perfect victim in his priestly ministry (a. 2), Aquinas next considers the question of whether Christ's priesthood has the effect of expiating sins. Clearly, he will answer affirmatively, but it is important to see what is at stake. For Aquinas, it is not simply whether Christ can expiate sins, but whether this expiation occurs in the Passion, with Christ acting as both priest and victim.

⁴¹ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2, resp.

⁴² See Lev 1:3–4; 3:1–2; 4:3–4 (respectively).

⁴³ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2, resp.: "And therefore Christ himself, inasmuch as he is man, was not only priest, but also the perfect victim, simultaneously being the victim on account of sin, the victim of peace-making, and the holocaust [Et ideo ipse Christus, in quantum homo, non solum fuit sacerdos, sed etiam hostia perfecta, simul existens hostia pro peccato, et hostia pacificorum, et holocaustem]."

⁴⁴ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2, ad 1–2.

Answering this question properly requires understanding the union of the Word and man. The first objection is based on apparent limits of the *communicatio idiomatum*, arguing that, because only God can forgive sins and Christ is priest according to his human nature, his *priesthood* cannot expiate sins. Hence, the objection calls into question whether Jesus's human nature (of which is predicated his priesthood) can bring about expiation of sins, or whether this must be an act of his divine nature alone. The second and third objections point again to the relationship between the priesthood of Christ and the Old Testament. Hebrews 10:1–3 teaches that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were not able to “make participants perfect” (*non potuerunt perfectos facere*), proving this from their need to be offered again and again (*alioquin cessassent offerri*). As both in the Lord's prayer, where Jesus commends us to pray “forgive” us our sins in the present tense (*dimitte*), and in the daily sacrifice offered by the Church, the logic of Hebrews suggests his sacrifice is not efficacious to expiate sins. Similarly, the third objection argues that, because Christ is the “lamb,” he does not align with the typology of the proper victims for the sin sacrifice in the Old Testament, and thus his sacrifice does not expiate sins.

Although there is a formal distinction between the objection couched in the terms of Ephesus and the two taking a scriptural approach, the argument is basically the same: all three objections question the efficacy of Christ's *priestly* acts. The importance of these objections cannot be overlooked: if Christ's expiation of sins is not mediated through his human priesthood, then this unravels the entire reason for the Incarnation as St. Thomas has laid it out. For Aquinas, this ritual act of expiating sins is essential to the Church's testimony about who Jesus is and what he accomplishes for us, the nature and cause of the Incarnation.

Aquinas responds to the objections by arguing that expiation of sins requires cleansing in two aspects: the stain of guilt (*macula culpae*) and the debt of punishment (*reatus poenae*). The stain of guilt is forgiven through grace, which turns the sinner's heart toward God, and the debt of punishment is fully removed through man's making satisfaction to God. Aquinas then states that Christ's priesthood effects both forms of cleansing. With regard to the stain of guilt, Christ's priesthood communicates the grace to us that turns our hearts toward God, and Aquinas cites Romans 3:24–25 that it is through faith *in Christ's blood* that we are justified. Regarding the debt of punishment, Christ's priesthood satisfies for us completely, inasmuch as he “took on our diseases and bore our sorrows” (Isa 53:4). For Thomas, Jesus mediates grace to us for the redemption of sins through his blood on the Cross. His sacrifice actually communicates this grace to us and turns our hearts toward God. Also, Jesus's sacrifice fulfills the perfect

offering as priest and what is offered as victim so as to be the perfect satisfaction for our sins.⁴⁵

As we see in the reply to objection 1, Aquinas is concerned to show that the logic of the Passion as expiatory requires understanding the mystery of the Incarnation. Because the Word is united to human nature and acts through it, Jesus Christ's human nature can work out the expiation of sins. Citing Augustine, Aquinas shows that the priestly act of the incarnate Word is efficacious in four ways: Christ (1) is united with God as the one to whom the sacrifice is offered, (2) is united with sinners, for whom he offered the sacrifice, (3) offers it himself, and (4) is the sacrifice offered. Jesus's act of priesthood, then, is a product of the unique miracle of the Incarnation that allows Jesus's sacrifice to be perfect in each aspect of the sacrificial act.⁴⁶

Therefore, Christ's sacrifice is uniquely efficacious and has no need to be repeated. Aquinas clarifies that the New Law requires continual expiation for sins because of the frailty of the covenant members, not due to deficiency in the sacrifice. Unlike the Levitical priesthood, with its multiple and repeated sacrifices, the Church offers the same sacrifice daily. Similarly, just as the Old Covenant featured several types of animals used in sacrifice, Jesus gives himself as the perfect lamb who was the "consummate sacrifice of all things."⁴⁷ According to Aquinas, Jesus's sacrificial act is categorically unique because he is the incarnate Word. Hence, the sacrifices of the Old Testament are consummated in him and he is the norm for understanding the efficacy of the former rituals for communicating grace and reconciliation with God.

Before redirecting Aquinas's insights to our aim of constructing a Chinese account of Christ's priesthood, we must add a brief coda to the content of articles 1–3 in question 22. For Aquinas, the soteriological effect of Christ's priesthood, the expiation of sins, is his organizing principle, but we must understand the full scope of this effect, which includes a moral sense. According to Aquinas, sin is, in its simplest definition, an inordinate and willful departure from the eternal law.⁴⁸ However, on top of this, the divine law is God's perfect knowledge of created things and their good, and so sin is a departure from the good of one's own nature and perfection as well as a rejection of God.⁴⁹ Following this, the sacramental

⁴⁵ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, resp.

⁴⁶ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, ad 1.

⁴⁷ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, ad 3.

⁴⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 71, a. 6.

⁴⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 93.

graces flowing from Christ's priesthood that expiate sin also lead human beings into human moral perfection. For example, baptism allows man to be cut off from sin and instills the virtue of faith, which perfects the cardinal virtues.⁵⁰ For Christ to expiate our sins has intrinsically to do with enabling the perfection of the human person. With this clearly in mind, we can now turn to the ultimate goal of the present essay.

A Chinese Articulation of Christ's Priesthood

Our analyses of Xúnzǐ and Aquinas have, to this point, been focused on describing their accounts of ritual sagehood and Christ's priesthood in their respective conceptual contexts in order to cultivate two concrete resources for considering Christ's priesthood in a Chinese manner. In this final section, then, we will go about the task of articulating Christ's priesthood according to the principles of Xúnzǐ's moral philosophy while remaining faithful to the interpretation of Christ's priesthood provided by Aquinas. The first necessary step in this process of articulating a Chinese account of Christ's priesthood is to carefully delineate theological challenges to cross-cultural reading of Christ's priesthood, especially in our case, those concerning Xúnzǐ's philosophy. Then, we will be able to focus on what resources from Xúnzǐ can be drawn into a Chinese-Christian account of Christ's priesthood in a way that honors both the Christian tradition and the convictions of Xúnzǐ. For convenience, then, this section will advance in two parts: the first will describe a principal problem for reading Christ's priesthood in Xúnzǐ's categories and suggest a resolution, and the second will provide an interpretation of Christ's priesthood in the idiom of Xúnzǐ's ritual sagehood, *mutatis mutandis*.

It is clear from reviewing Xúnzǐ and Aquinas that they use very different metaphors, authorities, and philosophical worldviews in considering their respective themes. This is not a shocking observation, yet if we wish to somehow conjoin these two programs as this article proposes, these facts illustrate difficulties in our method. This is not merely because the two guiding projects for this essay are themselves historically separate and linguistically and culturally disparate. It also because, as a Christian theologian, Aquinas founds his theology on a salvation history that is communicated through a concrete, historical people (Israel and then the Church), while Xúnzǐ's understanding of proper rituals and ritual propriety is ineluctably tied to an equally concrete, historical people, those of ancient China.

⁵⁰ ST III, q. 62, a. 2.

One of the more felicitous results of studying Aquinas on Christ's priesthood is that it becomes absolutely clear to what a great degree the Christian understanding of Christ as priest of the New Law is tied to a theological account of the Church as fulfilling and extending the life of Israel. As we saw, at every point in question 22, Aquinas demonstrates the importance of resolving the connections between Christ's priesthood of the New Law and the Levitical priesthood of the Old Law. Although Christ's priesthood does not fulfill the typology of the Levitical priesthood exactly, Aquinas articulates Christ's priesthood as still working within the typological trajectory of the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifices performed therein.

This continuity between Christ and Israel is important to our Chinese reading of Christ's priesthood because it means that the Christian proclamation about this doctrine is, in some ways, inseparable from the concrete Hebraic nature of Christ's priesthood. The Hebrew culture and heritage is the initial context in which Christ performs his priestly acts, and his priesthood must be interpreted in this light. Hence, if we were to attempt to merely transport Christ's priesthood completely into Xúnzǐ's context, we might find this possible, but the result would not be a *Christian* claim about Christ's priesthood.

Naturally, this raises the question of what would be missing in such an account? Theologically, there are a great many things that the Hebrew cultus provides for explaining the priesthood of Christ but for which Xúnzǐ's philosophy cannot account. Most important among these is the fact that, in the Hebrew cultus, the sacrifices of the priests are offered to God (the electing YHWH, it must be said) and are meant to mediate between the people and God. It is possible, of course, to perhaps make something like this be said through Xúnzǐ's categories, but this sort of salvific mediation is not native to his thought. Additionally, the notion of the priestly ministry as actually working to expiate sins is something for which Xúnzǐ could not account. In part, this is because there is no clear sense that Xúnzǐ understands human disorder explicitly in terms of sin against God and human nature. And finally, Xúnzǐ has no way to understand the rites as able to objectively make a change in the relationship between the people and God (i.e., from reprobation to justification). By the same token, since Xúnzǐ's ritual sages are exemplary humans rather than divine figures, this is ultimately to his credit and philosophically understandable apart from the clarifying light of revelation.

In short, then, the formal differences between the Chinese rites Xúnzǐ knew and the Hebrew rites Aquinas draws on in his theology of Christ's priesthood are not merely formal differences. The latter participate in the

revealed framework of God's election and work of redemption, and the former (by Xúnzǐ's own admission) are products of human ingenuity and genius. Consequently, "translating" Christ's priesthood into the idiom of Xúnzǐ's rituals is problematic from both sides. From the side of Christian theology, Xúnzǐ cannot speak clearly enough to the role rituals play in *divine* agency to save human beings from our disorder, which is a rejection of the divine love at its root. From the side of Xúnzǐ's philosophy, efficacious rituals are those that flow from ritual sages, and thus, if the forms are not those given and promulgated by a ritual sage like those of ancient China, the question remains of how these are efficacious to bring about moral reformation. Would not the rites of Christ's priesthood be mere *sú* 俗, or customs?

Felicitously, the Christian and Chinese challenges require a similar mode of response. What Christian theology demands of a Chinese account of Christ's priesthood in Xúnzǐ's categories is a way to allow the *lǐ* of Xúnzǐ be applied to Christ so that it becomes his person and perfection that principally define his ritual agency. With this definition present, the Christian theologian can then successfully point out the aspects of the ritual framework and forms that are fulfilled in Christ's ministry without having to equate Christ's ritual agency with the formal appearance of Xúnzǐ's *lǐ*. Just as Aquinas negotiated the formal differences between the rites of the Levitical priesthood and Christ by appealing to the logic of the Incarnation as true archetype of priesthood, so the Christian theologian can assert Christ as the archetype of all efficacious rituals across cultural boundaries.

On the other hand, Xúnzǐ's perspective demands an account of why we should follow Christ's rituals rather than those of the sages of ancient China. Xúnzǐ's philosophy requires an articulation of the sage qualities of Jesus Christ in order to plausibly say that, through his coming near to us, we may know the far away aims of the rites of ancient Chinese culture. In sum, this requires an account of Christ as a ritual sage so that there is sufficient ground to say he can alter the forms of the rituals while also instituting proper, efficacious rituals.

It is plain at this point why Aquinas's theology of Christ's priesthood is a helpful choice. Because Aquinas emphasizes the logic of the hypostatic union as a way to explain the typological and soteriological concerns of the biblical character of priesthood, his account also helpfully brings those Christological doctrines useful in considering Christ as ritual sage to the foreground. If we are to successfully articulate Christ's priesthood in the Chinese idiom of Xúnzǐ, this can be done only by laying the foundation for considering how Christ's perfections in the hypostatic union can be

considered in harmony with the categories and concepts Xúnzǐ employs.

What we require, then, is to understand Christ in the conceptual framework of the *shèngrén*, which requires harmonizing this concept with the traditional Christian understanding of the hypostatic union. Briefly, we can recall that, for Xúnzǐ, the *shèngrén* is, in a way, a historical ideal, but he also does not enumerate a complete list of sages. This is because, philosophically, Xúnzǐ wishes to leave open the possibility for new sages, and thus he is forced to articulate a basic typology of the *shèngrén*. At the heart of this typology in terms of its ritual aspects is that the *shèngrén* is one who properly understands the relationship between *Tiān*, earth, and humanity and that the rituals he institutes are meant to establish this sort of proper order and distinction in the world. This is key: the *shèngrén* perceives and understands the proper distinctions in the world himself, and the rites become ways this perception and understanding can become communicated to others, and thus practicable.

Can Christ be thought of in this way? Certainly, in the instrumental aspect of the question, the answer is yes. A Christian theologian has no issue saying that through the rituals performed by Christ in the ongoing ministry of the Church human beings are brought out of their disorder and into the proper order and proportion found in Jesus Christ. We can, without dilemma, articulate that the sacraments established by Christ's priesthood govern (*zhi*) human desires: they "straighten" (*jiǎo*) and "educate" (*jiào*) in the pedagogy of Christ's true and eternal priesthood. Thus, it does seem that the rituals of the Church do bring about precisely the sort of ends that Xúnzǐ imagines the rites of sages are supposed to accomplish. The question, then, is how we might say that Christ fits the description of the ritual sage of Heaven, earth, and humanity and communicates these distinctions to us.

The answer lies in the hypostatic union. Because Jesus Christ is the union of God and man, the Christian can say that Christ's priesthood not only meets the requirements of ritual sagehood in Xúnzǐ's mind but is also the most perfect form of ritual sagehood in Xúnzǐ's categories. According to Christian theology, Christ is the union of God and man but maintains the distinction between the divine and human natures. In other words, Christ does not merely perceive and understand the distinction between *Tiān*, earth, and humanity; Christ *is* this distinction in himself.⁵¹ In terms of his knowledge, Christ knows this distinction as well, and in a most

⁵¹ Here, I am allowing for an ad hoc Christian interpretation of the *Tiān* of Xúnzǐ as an adequate description of divinity of the one God, though admitting that Xúnzǐ's conception certainly falls short of the Christian doctrine of God in key aspects.

perfect fashion, since he knows it from the side of God as the creative agency that brings about the earth, but he also knows it as completely human.

We saw above in Aquinas's discussion of Christ as victim that the reason Christ is priest over himself is that he is the most perfect sacrifice. That is because Christ's sacrifice is not only a corporeal sacrifice, but the giving of his human nature to the divine salvific will in perfect obedience. This is a vitally important observation, because in this, we see that Jesus Christ lived out the proper distinction and relationship between God, man, and earth that Xúnzǐ ascribes to the sages of ancient China. Jesus Christ did not seek to "know" God in the way that Adam and Eve strove to know God, seeking to be like God and, thus, rejecting their role of being human. Rather, he sought to love and obey God in his human nature, and in this love and obedience, to demonstrate the proper order of human loves and properly distinguish human existence from the divine life.

For these reasons, we can also say that Christ understands the roots of human disorder better than any sage before. Christ knows that the root of the disordered desires of human beings is not merely the context of a material world full of limited material goods; it comes from the way humanity has conditioned itself to live in such a world. Our instincts to have immoderate desires resulting in a chaotic society stem from a chaos inside ourselves, a rejection of the proper distinction and relationship between God, humanity, and the earth we are made to inhabit as stewards.

Ultimately, this is precisely why it is essential that Christ is both the proper priest and victim of his rites. Christ must be the priest because he must be a ritual sage in Xúnzǐ's language: he is the greatest *shèngrén* to ever be, and therefore, as an exercise of this sagehood, institutes efficacious rites. But Christ must be the matter of these efficacious rites because of his sage properties. Since he knows that human disorder runs so deep, Christ knows that the only rites that can correct and straighten humanity in fullness must communicate his own love and obedience. The symbolic mediation of ritual forms is not adequate for this work. Rather, he institutes rituals that actively draw practitioners into the proper order and distinction of love and obedience that Christ himself embodies.

Therefore, we can say that, in Xúnzǐ's conception, Jesus is the perfect ritual sage who "straightens" humanity through his priesthood both by removing the debt of sin and by converting our hearts toward God.⁵² We

⁵² *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3, resp. "For by its virtue [i.e., Christ's priesthood], grace is given to us, by which our hearts are turned to God [Nam virtute ipsius gratia nobis datur, qua corda nostra convertuntur ad Deum]."

might even say the Cross is the true artifice (*wěi*) by which our true sage not only communicates to humans what propriety and moral rectification are but also makes them possible from *inside* the one who participates in the sacraments. As priest, Jesus not only removes the cause of our disorder; he also enables us to become reformed and reshaped to become functional as the carpenter's square or however else we are meant to be truly used by God in the world.

In sum, Xúnzǐ's discourse on rituals offers a fruitful way to consider Christ's priesthood in a Chinese idiom if Christian theology is successful in articulating how Christ meets the standard of the *shèngrén* of Xúnzǐ's philosophy. In this section, I have demonstrated that Christian theology can indeed make such an articulation about Christ, with the end result that it gains the ability to understand and articulate an understanding of Christ as fulfilling not only the Levitical priesthood and its ministry in service to God but also the typology of the ritual sage of ancient China. Certainly, just as with the Levitical priesthood, Christ's fulfillment goes beyond what Xúnzǐ or the sages themselves thought ritual sagehood to be. Yet Christ's fulfillment of sagehood is still continuous with the essence of the concept and brings it to its perfection.

As China and Chinese culture promises to become increasingly important to living Christians, it is an exigent need for academic Christian theology to undertake the difficult work of composing theology with an eye toward the fulfillment of Chinese culture. In this article, I have sought to demonstrate that this work need entail neither an abandonment of classical Christian categories or doctrines nor a curtailment of Chinese concepts in an attempt to hold to Christian orthodoxy. Instead, dealing with robust Chinese concepts such as those provided by Xúnzǐ and robust Christian interpretations such as those of Aquinas enables rather than attenuates theology that is both culturally relevant and profoundly faithful. N.V