

Obedient unto Death, Even Death on a Cross: Christ's Obedience in the Soteriology of St. Thomas Aquinas

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IN *The New Testament and the People of God*, N. T. Wright describes how first-century Jewish theology saw salvation-history in terms of God's sapiential plan for dealing with the sin of Adam by using Abraham and his family to bring God's grace first to Israel (understood as the true Adamic humanity) and thence to the entire cosmos.¹ Wright then shows how, for Paul, Abraham's family has become part of the problem rather than the solution.² According to Paul, the solution to the problem is quite simply Jesus Christ, who effectively undoes the sin of Adam, fulfilling in his own person all of the symbols of Israel (Torah, Temple, Land, Messiah),³ instantiating in himself the true Adamic humanity, inaugurating the new creation, and incorporating those who have faith that God has fulfilled his covenant promises in Jesus into his New Covenant family.⁴ Recent Aquinas scholarship suggests that Thomas needs to be read in a similar light. In particular, Matthew Levering writes that "at the heart of Thomas Aquinas's scientific theology of salvation lies the narrative of Scripture—the fulfillment of Israel's Torah and Temple through the

¹ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge [SPCK], 1992), 262–79.

² *Ibid.*, 403–9.

³ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 369–442.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 18–40; *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005), 36–37; (as Tom Wright) *What St Paul Really Said* (Oxford: Lion, 1997), 135–50.

New Covenant of Christ Jesus.”⁵ For Aquinas, as for Paul, what Jesus does is to deal with the sin of Adam by fulfilling Israel’s Torah and Temple and by manifesting in himself that graced, redeemed humanity which he shares sacramentally with the members of his mystical body, who thereby become God’s New Covenant family.

In this study I propose to show that one of the many ways of looking at Christ’s fulfillment of Torah and Temple is to focus specifically on the question of Christ’s obedience. Aquinas’s understanding of salvation-history in terms of the history of disobedience and obedience unfolds in four stages: (1) Adam’s sin of disobedience, (2) God’s sapiential preparation for a solution in terms of Israel’s external obedience to him through Torah, (3) God’s reversal of Adam’s sin in terms of Christ’s internal and external obedience, and (4) the New Law, which consists in that internal obedience which is the result of the grace of the Spirit communicated by means of the sacraments in virtue of which the members of Christ’s mystical body share in his true Adamic humanity (that is, Adam’s state of original justice plus additional sanctifying grace).⁶ In what follows I shall be focusing on phase 3 of this narrative—Christ’s reversal of the sin of Adam through his meritorious, satisfactory, and sacrificial obedience—and in this regard I propose to discuss passages from Aquinas’s commentaries on Philippians, Romans, Hebrews, and John, and also from that part of the *Summa theologiae* where Aquinas addresses the question “whether Christ died out of obedience,” in order to trace the lines of the biblical narrative of disobedience and obedience, which culminates in Christ’s Torah-fulfilling passion.

Commentary on Philippians: Obedience as Humility

A key text for Aquinas is Philippians 2:8–9: “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. For this reason God also has exalted him, and has given him a name which is above all names.” In his commentary on Philippians Aquinas explores these verses in some detail, and begins by explaining that Paul is commending the humility of Christ as this manifests itself in the mystery of his passion.⁷ He quotes

⁵ Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 3.

⁶ Original justice includes sanctifying grace (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 95, a. 1); “in the state of perfect nature man needs a gratuitous strength superadded to natural strength for one reason, viz. in order to do and wish supernatural good; but for two reasons, in the state of corrupt nature, viz. in order to be healed, and furthermore in order to carry out works of supernatural virtue, which are meritorious” (ST I-II, q. 109, a. 1).

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Super epistolam ad Philippenses lectura*, cap. 2, lect. 2. The idea that Christ’s humility reverses the pride which lies at the heart of original sin is key

Sirach 3:20—"The greater you are, the more you should humble yourself in all things, and you shall find grace before God"—and argues that, since Christ is the greatest of all men inasmuch as he is also God, it follows that it is especially appropriate for him to humble himself.⁸ At this point Aquinas introduces the idea that "the manner of humility and the sign of humility is obedience."⁹ This is the corollary of what is said in the *Summa* about Adam's pride resulting in an inordinateness of will (*inordinatio voluntatis*) which results in disobedience to the divine command.¹⁰ In effect, the sign of humility is obedience, and the sign of pride is disobedience, and, as we shall see, Aquinas equates sin (especially pride) with *inordinatio*, and hence with disobedience, and righteousness (especially humility) with *rectitudo ordinis*, and hence with obedience.

According to Aquinas, the chief characteristic of the proud is that they follow their own will. The proud seek *altitudo*, and it is a characteristic of the one who is "high" that he does not allow himself to be ruled by another, but wishes to rule over others.¹¹ The antithesis of this *superbia* and *altitudo* is *obedientia*, and the fact that Christ is made obedient (*factus est obediens*) serves to demonstrate the perfect *humilitas* of his passion, which his obedience also renders meritorious, inasmuch as "obedience invests our suffering with merit" (*obedientia dat meritum passionibus nostris*).¹² Joseph P. Wawrykow shows that Aquinas understands merit in terms of the divine *ordinatio*—that is, God's ordering of the life of grace in a "sapiential" fashion which "refers to the wisdom of God that formulates a plan for manifesting the goodness of God in the creation."¹³ This divine and sapiential *ordinatio* helps bring about the proper *ordinatio* of the human being both internally (*rectitudo ordinis*) and externally (*ordinatio* towards the goal of eternal life),¹⁴ and merit can be seen as consisting in obedience to the divine commandments inasmuch as the latter denotes both that *rectitudo ordinis*

to Aquinas's reading of Philippians. See Francesca Aran Murphy, "Thomas' Commentaries on Philemon, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philippians," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 177–78.

⁸ *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*: "Modus humiliationis et signum humilitatis est obedientia."

¹⁰ *ST* II–II, q. 163, a. 1, ad 1.

¹¹ *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 2: "quod non reguletur alio, sed ipsa alia regulet."

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: "Merit" in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 180–82.

¹⁴ *God's Grace and Human Action*, 170–71.

which derives from humility and that co-operation with the divine *ordinatio* which orders the will both internally and externally.

In the Philippians commentary, Christ is made obedient “not by his divine will, which is the rule, but by his human will, which is ruled in all things according to his Father’s will.”¹⁵ The idea that Christ allows himself to be ruled by his Father’s will anticipates the discussion about Christ’s subjection to the Father in the *Summa* where Aquinas speaks of “the subjection of subservience, whereby every creature serves God, being subject to his *ordinatio*,”¹⁶ grounding what he calls this “*subiectio obedientiae*” in Philippians 2:8 (“becoming obedient unto death”). This “subjection of obedience” to the divine *ordinatio* needs to be understood in relation to that proper *ordinatio* (*rectitudo ordinis*) of the lower parts of the soul to reason and of reason to God in which original *iustitia* consists,¹⁷ and represents a configuration with God’s sapiential *ordinatio*.¹⁸ By justification, God effectively “re-orders” what has become disordered, bringing about a restoration of this *iustitia* or *rectitudo ordinis*.¹⁹ The obedience in virtue of which Christ is ruled entirely by his Father’s will—that is, the perfect subjection of his will to that of his Father—constitutes Christ as truly just and well-ordered, and is the means by which he merits both for himself and for others.²⁰

Aquinas observes that it is fitting that Christ’s passion is characterized above all by obedience, because Adam’s transgression was one of disobe-

¹⁵ *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 2: “Non voluntate divina, quia ipsa est regula; sed voluntate humana, quae regulata est in omnibus secundum voluntatem paternam.” Aquinas quotes Matthew 26:39: “not as I will, but as you will.” On Christ’s human will, see Paul Gondreau, “The Humanity of Christ, the Incarnate Word,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 266.

¹⁶ *ST* III, q. 20, a. 1: “subiectio servitutis, secundum quod omnis creatura Deo servit, eius ordinationi subiecta.”

¹⁷ *ST* I–II, q. 113, a. 1: “Justice is so-called inasmuch as it implies a certain rectitude of order (*rectitudo ordinis*) in the interior disposition of a human being, in so far as what is highest in humans is subject to God, and the inferior powers of the soul are subject to the superior, i.e. to the reason; and this disposition the Philosopher calls ‘justice metaphorically speaking.’”

¹⁸ Cf. Wisdom 16:24 (“the creature serving you, the Creator”) cited in *ST* III, q. 20, a. 1.

¹⁹ J. Mark Armitage, “A Certain Rectitude of Order: Jesus and Justification According to Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 72 (2008): 45–66. See also Brian Davies, O.P., *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 335–39; Daniel A. Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating, and John Yocum (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 139–58.

²⁰ J. Mark Armitage, “A Certain Rectitude of Order,” 57–66.

dience: "For as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just" (Rom 5:19).²¹ Again, he draws attention to the pattern whereby disobedience leads to sin/injustice and obedience leads to justice. Aquinas perceives that Christ's obedience is comprehensive of both his humility and his *iustitia*. "By obedience," says Aquinas, "we understand every virtue, because a man is just inasmuch as he keeps the commandments of God,"²² and one might almost say that, for Aquinas in his commentary on Philippians, sin equals pride equals disobedience, while virtue equals humility equals obedience. Accordingly, because Christ's fullness of grace, itself a consequence of the hypostatic union, constitutes him as *iustus* from the outset,²³ it follows that his original justice necessarily manifests itself in humble obedience in such a way that the latter prolongs his justice—his *rectitudo ordinis*—throughout his entire mission, culminating in the meritorious obedience of the Cross.

Aquinas explains that the highest form of obedience is displayed "when someone follows the command of another contrary to the movement of his own will."²⁴ The *motus* of the human will tends towards two things—life and honour—and, in dying on the Cross, Christ refuses neither death (in the act of dying for our sins) nor ignominy (inasmuch as death on a Cross is *ignominiosissima*). In the *Summa* Aquinas argues that Adam's sin of *superbia* consisted above all in coveting an inordinate likeness with God, and in relying on himself "in rejection of the divine order of rule" (*contempto divinae regulae ordine*).²⁵ In the Philippians commentary, Christ's acceptance of death and ignominy is, in effect, the precise opposite of Adam's craving *similitudo* with God, for by his humble obedience he accepts the *divinae regulae ordo* and so effects the undoing of Adam's sin of pride and disobedience. Elsewhere Aquinas interprets this re-ordering in terms of the restoration of the *imago Dei*, which was lost

²¹ Cited in *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 2. In the *Summa* Aquinas contends that "man's first sin consisted in his coveting some spiritual good above his measure; and this pertains to pride," but he adds that "[m]an's disobedience to the divine command was not willed by man for his own sake, for this could not happen unless one presuppose inordinateness in his will. It remains therefore that he willed it for the sake of something else. Now the first thing he coveted inordinately was his own excellence; and consequently his disobedience was the result of his pride" (ST II-II, q. 163, a. 1, corpus; ad 1).

²² *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 3: "per obedientiam intelligitur omnis virtus: quia ex hoc est homo iustus, quod mandata Dei custodit."

²³ On Christ's fullness of grace, see ST III, q. 7, aa. 1 and 9.

²⁴ *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 2: "quando sequitur imperium alterius contra motum proprium." Cf ST II-II, q. 104, a. 3.

²⁵ ST II-II, q. 163, a. 2.

by Adam's prideful and disobedient quest for *similitudo*,²⁶ and Romanus Cessario has argued convincingly that (1) original justice can be identified with the perfection of *imago Dei*, (2) sin can be identified with the loss of the divine image,²⁷ and (3) Christ's work of atonement needs to be understood in terms of the restoration of the divine image.²⁸

Having discussed Christ's humility, Aquinas now examines the reward (*praemium*) of this humility, which is *exaltatio et gloria*.²⁹ He is drawing here on Luke 14:11 and 18:14—"Because everyone that exalts himself, shall be humbled; and everyone that humbles himself, shall be exalted"—and Job 22:29—"For he who has been humbled shall be in glory." From this it follows that, since Christ was exalted in virtue of the fact that he humbled himself, we should know that, if we humble ourselves, we too shall be exalted as long as we humble ourselves in obedience to the divine will.³⁰ In the *Summa* Aquinas shows how Christ merited his own exaltation by humbling himself.³¹ He explains that "when anyone by reason of his unjust will ascribes to himself something beyond his due, it is only just that he be deprived of something else which is his due," and that "likewise, when any man through his just will has stripped himself of what he ought to have, he deserves that something further be granted to him as the reward of his just will." In his passion "Christ humbled [*humiliavit*] himself beneath his dignity," and so by the "lowliness" (*humilitas*) of his passion merited *exaltatio*. What Christ merits for himself he merits also on behalf of the members of his mystical body, so Christ's *humilitas* merits *gloria* not only for himself but for all the faithful (Jn 17:10).³²

Christ's humble obedience can be understood not only as merit but also as sacrifice. Aquinas quotes 1 Samuel 15:22—"obedience is better

²⁶ Cf. Joseph P. Wawrykow, *The SCM Press A–Z of Thomas Aquinas* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 101–2. On the *imago Dei* according to Aquinas, see especially D. Juvenal Merriell, C.O., *To the Image of the Trinity: A Study of the Development of Aquinas' Teaching* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990); A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68–72.

²⁷ The *imago Dei* consists in knowing and loving God in imitation of God's knowing and loving of himself: "[M]an is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature; he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves himself" (ST I, q. 93, a. 1).

²⁸ Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Godly Image: Christ and Salvation in Catholic Theology from Anselm to Aquinas* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1990), 181–90.

²⁹ *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ ST III, q. 49, a. 6.

³² ST III, q. 48, a. 1, corpus and sed contra.

than sacrifices: and to hearken rather than to offer the fat of rams"—and observes that "to make an offering from what is external to oneself is a great thing, but to make an offering out of one's own body is greater, and to make an offering out of one's soul and will, which takes place through obedience, is the greatest thing of all."³³ Aquinas makes a similar point in the *Summa* where he quotes Gregory the Great to the effect that "obedience is rightly preferred to sacrifices, because by sacrifices another's body is slain whereas by obedience we slay our own will," and concludes

any other acts of virtue are meritorious before God through being performed out of obedience to God's will. For were one to suffer even martyrdom, or to give all one's goods to the poor, unless one directed these things to the fulfilment of the divine will, which pertains directly to obedience, they could not be meritorious, as neither would they be if they were done without charity, which cannot exist apart from obedience.³⁴

Elsewhere in the *Summa* Aquinas presents sacrifice as a sensible and exterior sign of our interior subjection to God: "[I]t is a dictate of natural reason that man should use certain sensibles, by offering them to God in sign of the subjection and honor due to him [*in signum debitae subiectionis et honoris*]."³⁵ In the commentary on Philippians Aquinas applies these principles in such a way as to portray Christ's sacrifice as a matter of humble obedience (consisting in subjection to God) in virtue of which he reverses Adam's prideful disobedience, establishes in himself the true (that is, obedient, well-ordered, graced) Adamic humanity, and merits exaltation for himself and eternal life for the members of his mystical body.

Commentary on Romans: Obedience as Justice

In his commentary on Romans, Aquinas argues that one way of looking at Christ's death is to see it "as depending on Christ's will to suffer." He explains that "his will . . . was formed unto the taking up of death, since, out of obedience to the Father, 'He became obedient' to the Father 'even unto death' (Phil 2:8), and, out of charity towards men, 'Christ loved us and gave himself up for us' (Eph 5:2)."³⁶ Viewed in this light, says Aquinas,

³³ *Super Philip.*, cap. 2, lect. 3: "offerre de rebus exterioribus est magnum, sed maius si de corpore, maximum autem si de anima et voluntate tua, quod fit per obedientiam."

³⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 104, a. 3.

³⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 85, a. 1.

³⁶ *Super epistolam ad Romanos lectura*, cap. 5, lect. 2: "secundum quod processit ex voluntate Christi patientis, quae quidem voluntas informata fuit ad mortem sustinendam, cum ex obedientia ad patrem, Phil. II, 8: factus est obediens patri usque

“the death of Christ was meritorious and provided satisfaction for our sins.” Merit and satisfaction are the first two of the five soteriological models discussed in *Summa theologiae* III, question 48, the third being sacrifice, which we have already shown to be bound up with the concept of merit. We have said (quoting Joseph Wawrykow) that Christ’s merit “refers to the wisdom of God that formulates a plan for manifesting the goodness of God in the creation,”³⁷ and exactly the same could be said of his work of satisfaction, which, like merit, has to do with God’s sapiential ordination of creation through the loving obedience of Christ. Aquinas explains that “Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offenses of the whole human race . . . because of the exceeding charity from which he suffered.”³⁸ The source of Christ’s merit is likewise his charity,³⁹ and Christ’s passion is in fact a single saving action flowing from charity which may be viewed as merit, inasmuch as it is an act of his will, and as satisfaction, inasmuch as it is an act of his flesh.⁴⁰

It is important at this stage to note that Aquinas does not see Christ’s sacrifice in penal or substitutionary terms. Christ does not offer satisfaction *in place of us*; rather, through his humility and obedience he offers satisfaction in such a way that, incorporated into his mystical body, we participate in his work of satisfaction and sacrifice and merit. Rik Van Nieuwenhove writes:

Christ’s death, which functions as a sign of his utter humility and obedience, atones (*satisfacit*) because of the charity in which he bore it. This “satisfaction” changes us (and our relationship with God), not God as such. Seeing that sin is a turning away from God, through our incorporation in Christ we begin to share in the divine life through faith and charity.⁴¹

Christ’s merit, satisfaction, and sacrifice, grounded as they are in his humility and his loving obedience, have to do with sapiential re-ordering (Wawrykow), image-restoration (Cessario), and Torah-fulfillment (Levering), and Aquinas’s treatment of the *obedientia Christi* in his *Romans* commentary needs to be understood accordingly.

ad mortem, tum etiam ex charitate ad homines, Eph.V, 2: dilexit nos et tradidit se pro nobis.”

³⁷ Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God’s Grace and Human Action*, 57.

³⁸ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2.

³⁹ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 1, obj. 1.

⁴⁰ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 6, ad 3.

⁴¹ Rik Van Nieuwenhove, “‘Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion’: Aquinas’s Soteriology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Van Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow, 291.

Key to Aquinas's line of argument is the insight that it was the *inobedientia* of Adam, which was characterized by the *ratio iniustitiae*, which constituted all human beings as *peccatores* and *iniusti*.⁴² Original sin is coterminous with disobedience and inordinateness,⁴³ and, as Rudi te Velde has shown, humans are reduced by Adam's disobedience to a state of disorder and disharmony in the light of which they are unable to realize that freedom which is intrinsic to what it means to be truly human.⁴⁴ By the same token, it is the obedience of Christ, which bore the *ratio iustitiae*, that constitutes us (by incorporation into his mystical body) as *iusti*, and it is in this sense that we are to understand the insistence in verse 16 [referring to Rom 5:16] that "grace proceeds forth into all men unto justification."⁴⁵ It is axiomatic for Aquinas that that justification which results in a proper *ordinatio* of the lower part of the soul to the higher and of the higher part to God is the effect of grace,⁴⁶ and this grace is in turn the grace of Christ, derived from his passion and accessed by faith and through the sacraments,⁴⁷ in virtue of which the justified participate in Christ's *iustitia* and *obedientia*.⁴⁸

Aquinas asks whether it really is the case that Adam's sin consisted in disobedience rather than pride, and quotes Sirach 10:13 to the effect that "the beginning of every sin is pride."⁴⁹ Aquinas answers that

the first stage of pride consists in a person's unwillingness to be subject to the divine precepts, and this pertains to disobedience. From this it follows that man's first sin appears to have been disobedience, not according to the exterior action, but according to the interior movement of pride, in virtue of which he wills to go against the divine precept.⁵⁰

Genesis 3:17 describes above all else an act of disobedience, which is put right by the obedience of Christ, which consists in his being obedient to

⁴² *Super Rom.*, cap. 5, lect. 5.

⁴³ Original sin "is an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice" (*ST* I–II, q. 81, a. 1).

⁴⁴ Rudi A. te Velde, "Evil, Sin, and Death: Thomas Aquinas on Original Sin," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Van Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow, 157–59.

⁴⁵ *Super Rom.*, cap. 5, lect. 5: "quod gratia procedit in omnes homines in iustificationem."

⁴⁶ *ST* I–II, q. 113, a. 3.

⁴⁷ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 6, ad 2.

⁴⁸ *ST* III, q. 62, a. 1: "[I]t is evident that through the sacraments of the New Law man is incorporated with Christ." The faithful share in all that pertains to his merit (*ST* III, q. 48, a. 1) and satisfaction (III, q. 48, a. 2, ad 1) in virtue of their membership of his mystical body.

⁴⁹ *Super Rom.*, cap. 5, lect. 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

his Father's command (*praecepto patris obediens*), and accordingly accepting death for our salvation (Phil 2:8). The obedience of Christ cancels out the disobedience of Adam, and the *ratio iustitiae* of the second Adam, in which the members of his mystical body participate, cancels out the *ratio iniustitiae* of the first.

Aquinas notes that "this does not contradict what is said elsewhere, namely, that Christ died out of charity, as is clear from Ephesians 5:2, because the fact that he obeyed proceeded out of the love which he bore towards his Father and towards us."⁵¹ (Here, doubtless, Aquinas has in mind Mark 12:30–31 and parallels, in which Jesus summarizes the Law as love of God and neighbour.) He goes on to explain that

by obedience and disobedience [Paul] proves that we were made sinners through one man and were justified through one man, since legal justice, which is the totality of every virtue, is discerned in observance of the precepts of the law, which pertains to the *ratio* of obedience. But legal injustice, which is the totality of every kind of wickedness . . . , is discerned in transgression of the commandments of the law, which pertains to the *ratio* of disobedience.⁵²

From this Aquinas concludes that "it is fittingly said that men are constituted as just through obedience, and as sinners through disobedience."⁵³ Where disobedient Adam introduced the *ratio* of disobedience and constituted men as sinners (that is, "inordinate") in virtue of their legal injustice, Christ, through his obedience to the Father, introduces the *ratio* of obedience and constitutes men as just in virtue of their participation in his legal justice.

Aquinas goes on to quote Romans 6:16—"Do you not know that if of your own will [*propria voluntate*] you offer yourselves to anyone as slaves, you spontaneously [*spontanee*] become slaves of the one whom you obey—either slaves of sin, or else slaves of obedience unto justice?"⁵⁴ Significantly, *propria voluntate* and *spontanee* are not present in the Vulgate text. For Aquinas, the gifts of freedom and instinctive spontaneity are connected with the grace of the Spirit, in which the New Law primarily consists.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.: "Sic ergo convenienter dicitur quod per obedientiam constituuntur homines iusti, et per inobedientiam peccatores."

⁵⁴ *Super Rom.*, cap. 6, lect. 3.: *propria voluntate* and *spontanee* are not present in the Latin, and represent Aquinas's own gloss.

⁵⁵ *ST I–II*, q. 106, a. 1. Cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2, Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 201–11.

The *inordinatio* that follows from original sin is characterized by the loss of a spontaneous obedience of the lower part of the soul to the higher (rational) part and of the higher part to God. The Old Law offers not spontaneous obedience proceeding (by grace) *propria voluntate* but compliance with legislation out of fear of punishment. The outpouring of the Spirit makes possible the kind of spontaneous obedience (equivalent to the *obedientia sine mora* of the Rule of St. Benedict)⁵⁶ which exceeds the capacity of the Old Law,⁵⁷ restoring human beings to the *imago Dei* by enabling them to obey God out of spontaneous love.⁵⁸ Accordingly, obedience, *iustitia*, and *rectitudo ordinis* all find their fullest expression in that spontaneity which is the corollary of right order between the human soul and God.⁵⁹

Aquinas goes on to explain that slavery to sin leads to death (that is, to damnation), and that the slavery of obedience—that is, of obedience to the divine precepts—leads to *iustitia*, and adds that “whoever obeys God is made a slave of this obedience, since, through the habit of obeying, the mind is inclined more and more towards obeying and consequently brings *iustitia* to perfection.”⁶⁰ Aquinas notes that Paul presents sin and obedience as opposites (*satis convenienter obeditionem peccato opponit*), citing Ambrose to the effect that “sin is a transgression of the divine law, and disobedience of the heavenly commandments,” which accords with what was said above about sin being “legal injustice.”⁶¹ This is not to say that sin equals transgression of the Old Law (which is a determination of Divine Law for a specific place and time), but that it equals a transgression of Divine Law itself—that is to say, of that Eternal Law which is a *ratio* of the divine Wisdom.⁶² Where Sirach equates Torah with divine Wisdom, Aquinas equates the Eternal Law in which Torah participates

⁵⁶ *Regula Benedicti* 5:1–4.

⁵⁷ See Daniel A. Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” 148–51.

⁵⁸ See Michael Dauphinais, “Loving the Lord Your God: The *imago Dei* in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 241–67.

⁵⁹ On “spontaneity” and the New Law, see Pedro Rodríguez, “Spontanéité et caractère légal de la loi nouvelle” in *Lex et Libertas, Studi Tomistici* 30, ed. Leo Elders and K. Hedwig (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987), 254–64.

⁶⁰ *Super Rom.*, cap. 6, lect. 3: “Qui vero obedit Deo, efficitur huius obedientiae servus: quia per assuetudinem obediendi, mens eius magis ac magis ad obediendum inclinatur et ex hoc iustitiam perficit.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: “peccatum est transgressio legis divinae et caelestium inobedientia mandatorum.”

⁶² *ST* I–II, q. 93, a. 1. Jean Porter rightly emphasizes the equation of eternal law with divine Wisdom: “Right Reason and the Love of God: The Parameters of Aquinas’ Moral Theology” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Van Nieuwenhove and Wawrykow, 180–86.

with divine Wisdom.⁶³ Aquinas also identifies Eternal Law with the person of the Son,⁶⁴ so that sin-disorder-disobedience is, in effect, nothing other than a transgression of that Eternal Law which Aquinas identifies with the very person of the Son-Word-Wisdom of God. We might add that, in his divinity, Christ himself is the divine Wisdom to whom human reason (including his own human reason) is properly subordinated, while, in his humanity, the lower parts of his soul are duly ordered to the higher rational parts, and the higher rational parts stand in *subiectio* to the divine Wisdom.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Christ in his humanity is subject to himself—to the person of the Son-Word-Wisdom of God (*Christus est servus sui ipsius, et sibi subditus*).⁶⁶ As incarnate Wisdom, he is just, well-ordered, and rational—in the sense that his human reason is sapientially subordinated, subjected, and spontaneously obedient to the *ratio* of the divine Wisdom which he himself incarnates.⁶⁷

Fundamental to his reading of this section of Romans is Aquinas's insight that those who have been slaves of sin become obedient to God "by believing, not as though compelled but from the heart."⁶⁸ Here he refers to the New Law—to "the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given

⁶³ On Sirach, see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 85–86.

⁶⁴ *ST* I–II, q. 93, a. 1, ad 2.

⁶⁵ On the question of Wisdom christology, see Matthew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 31–50; 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), 175–96.

⁶⁶ *ST* III, q. 20, a. 2, sed contra. At first sight, this appears to contradict the sixth of Cyril of Alexandria's twelve anathematizations against Nestorius: "If anyone shall dare say that the Word of God the Father is the God of Christ or the Lord of Christ, and shall not rather confess him as at the same time both God and Man, since according to the Scriptures, 'The Word was made flesh,' let him be anathema." However, Aquinas is saying not that the divine Word is Lord of the human Christ, but that the humanity of the God-man Christ is perfectly subjected (and ordered) to the person of the Word who has assumed and hypostatically united himself to that humanity and who, while remaining a divine person, truly "is" a human being. Discussing the "incarnational 'is,'" Thomas Weinandy writes that "Jesus is the Son of God existing as man" ("Aquinas: God IS Man: The Marvel of the Incarnation," *Aquinas on Doctrine*, 83).

⁶⁷ Cf. *ST* III, q. 46, a. 9: "Christ's passion was subject to his will. But his will was ruled by the divine wisdom which 'orders all things' conveniently and 'sweetly' (Wis 8:1)."

⁶⁸ *Super Rom.*, cap. 6, lect. 3: "scilicet credendo . . . et hoc non coacti, sed ex corde."

through faith in Christ” and which is written on hearts,⁶⁹ which comes through faith in Christ,⁷⁰ which leads to justification,⁷¹ which is obeyed out of love rather than out of fear,⁷² and which is the law of charity (*lex caritatis*) that leads men to perfection by bringing about their *subiectio* to God.⁷³ Aquinas juxtaposes texts from Romans 1:5 (“obedience to the faith, in all nations”) and 10:10 (“with the heart we believe unto justice”) to make the point that obedience to God which proceeds *ex corde* is what leads to *iustitia*. (This obedience, we must reiterate, proceeds from grace, is coterminous with *iustitia*, and results in ordinateness, merit, and subjection to God.) The “effect” of *iustitia* is *sanctificatio*, which manifests itself in good works (*bona opera*),⁷⁴ and leads to the end of eternal life (*vita aeterna*) “which is the end of all the just, who do everything that they do for the sake of possessing eternal life.”⁷⁵ Aquinas adds that “it is also the end of the works themselves which, since they are performed out of obedience to God and in imitation of God, merit eternal life.”⁷⁶ As in the Philippians commentary, so also in the commentary on Romans Aquinas presents us with a just, rightly-ordered, obedient Christ who instantiates the true, grace-filled Adamic humanity in which all the members of God’s New Covenant family (that is, Christ’s mystical body) can participate.

Commentary on Hebrews: Obedience as Learning

In his commentary on Hebrews, Aquinas focuses on the idea of Christ’s obedience as experiential. Aquinas begins by taking Hebrews 5:8—“And whereas indeed he was the Son of God, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.”⁷⁷ Because Christ is God he possesses fulness of knowledge from the moment of his human conception, and so cannot be said to learn in the ordinary sense as he is ignorant of nothing.⁷⁸ However, Aquinas contrasts *scientia . . . simplicis notitiae* (which denotes learning in the sense of moving from ignorance to knowledge) with the *scientia experientiae*.⁷⁹ According to the latter, Christ may be said to have

⁶⁹ *ST* I–II, q. 106, a. 1.

⁷⁰ *ST* I–II, q. 106, a. 1, ad 3.

⁷¹ *ST* I–II, q. 106, a. 2.

⁷² *ST* I–II, q. 107, a. 1, ad 2. The Old Law is the *lex timoris*.

⁷³ *ST* I–II, q. 107, a. 1 (*corpus*).

⁷⁴ *Super Rom.*, cap. 6, lect. 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: “Et etiam ipsorum operum, quae cum ex obedientia Dei fiant et ad Dei imitationem, vitam aeternam merentur.”

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Super epistolam ad Hebraeos lectura*, cap. 5, lect. 2.

⁷⁸ Cf. *ST* III, q. 9, aa. 1–3.

⁷⁹ Cf. *ST* III, q. 9, a. 4.

learned obedience out of what he suffered (*passus*) and experienced (*exper-tus*).⁸⁰ This is a “voluntary” kind of learning, and, in accepting our weakness voluntarily, he “learned obedience” inasmuch as he learned “how burdensome it is to obey, because he obeyed even in the most burdensome and difficult matters, even unto death on the cross.”⁸¹ Aquinas explains that Paul

shows how difficult the good of obedience is, because those who have not experienced obedience and have not learned it in difficult matters, believe that obedience is very straightforward. But in order to know what obedience is, it is necessary to learn to obey in difficult matters, and whoever has not learned to subject himself by obeying does not know how to rule others well. Therefore, although Christ knew by simple recognition what obedience is, he nevertheless learned obedience by experiment from those difficult things which he suffered, namely, through his sufferings and death: by suffering and dying: “By the obedience of one many shall be made just” (Rom 5:19).⁸²

In speaking of a voluntary and learned obedience, Aquinas brings together the twin themes of Christ’s human will and human experiential knowledge to emphasize the freedom of Christ’s obedience, and, one might say, the stark reality of his bodily and psychological suffering.⁸³ Christ learns the true nature of suffering and obedience from genuine and bitter experience, and it is because he gives full recognition to the magnitude and ultimacy of Christ’s passion that Aquinas is able to portray Christ’s learned obedience to the Father as a true, free, human, meritorious, sacrificial *subiectio*.

Aquinas now moves on to Hebrews 5:9—“And being consummated, he became, to all that obey him, the cause of eternal salvation.”⁸⁴ He begins by arguing that, in Christ’s own case, the fruit of his passion is glorification.⁸⁵ He was perfect from the moment of his conception, and the consummation of this perfection is the glorification which he wins in virtue of his passion. Because Christ was perfect, he was able to perfect others, for “it is the nature of a perfect thing to be able to engender its like.”⁸⁶ As Aquinas explains in the *Summa*,

⁸⁰ On Christ’s human knowledge, see the excellent survey in Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*, 31–33; 161–63.

⁸¹ *Super Heb.*, cap. 5, lect. 2.

⁸² *Super Heb.*, cap. 5, lect. 2.

⁸³ Cf. *ST* III, q. 46, aa. 4–8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ As in the commentary on Philippians, this notion looks forward to *ST* III, q. 49, a. 6.

⁸⁶ *Super Heb.*, cap. 5, lect. 2.

grace was received by the soul of Christ in the highest way; and therefore from this pre-eminence of grace which he received, it is from him that this grace is bestowed on others—and this belongs to the nature of head. Hence the personal grace, whereby the soul of Christ is justified, is essentially the same as his grace, as he is the head of the Church, and justifies others.⁸⁷

Christ arrived at that consummation of his perfection which consists in glorification “by the merit of obedience” (*per meritum obedientiae*), and in this regard Aquinas quotes one of his favourite texts on the subject of Christ's obedience from Proverbs 21:28: “[A]n obedient man shall speak of victory” (*vir obediens loquitur victorias*).⁸⁸ In virtue of his learned (and victorious) obedience, which is itself the consequence of his own personal fullness of grace, Christ embodies the true, obedient, justified Adamic humanity, meriting his own perfection, exaltation, and glorification, and communicating this perfection to others by meriting salvation for the members of his mystical body and sharing with them his justifying grace.⁸⁹

Commentary on John: Obedience as Love

The idea of Christ's loving obedience which Aquinas explores in his Romans commentary receives even more in-depth treatment in the commentary on John. Commenting on John 14:31 (“But that the world may know, that I love the Father: and as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I”) he writes: “[I]n the first place the Lord shows that it was not sin that was the cause of his death, and in the second place he shows that the cause was the virtue of obedience and of charity.”⁹⁰ He adds that “two factors moved Christ to accepting death, namely love of God and love of neighbour” (*amor Dei et dilectio proximi*). The fact that Christ obeys the Father's commandments is a sign (*indiciu*m) that he loves him. He has already said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments,” and now he declares that he himself is going to his death precisely in order that the world may know that he loves the Father, adding that

⁸⁷ *ST* III, q. 8, a. 5.

⁸⁸ *Super Heb.*, cap. 5, lect. 2.

⁸⁹ Daniel A. Keating, “Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas,” 144, writes: “Aquinas understands justification in rather broad terms as encompassing various aspects of the New Testament's depiction of our incorporation into Christ.”

⁹⁰ Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, cap. 14, lect. 8: “primo ostendit dominus quod peccatum non fuit causa suae mortis; secundo quod eius causa fuit virtus obedientiae et caritatis.”

he is performing the commandment which his Father gave him. Aquinas explains that “the Father moved him to accept death specifically by obedience, which is caused by love.”⁹¹

Christ’s obedience is presented here as both a consequence and a demonstration of his love for the Father. The Father gave this commandment to Christ not in so far as he is Son of God but in so far as he is Son of Man, and, in order that the world might know that he obeys the Father out of love, Christ bids the disciples rise and go with him “to the place where I am to be handed over, so that you may see that it is not out of necessity but out of charity and obedience [*sed ex caritate et obedientia*] that I die.”⁹² Clearly this is not the obedience characteristic of the Old Law which proceeds from fear, but the obedience of the New Law, the *lex caritatis*, which is written on hearts by the Holy Spirit and which is the fruit of that grace which Christ in his human nature possesses fully and maximally. Romanus Cessario writes:

Christ the priest of the new alliance offers to God the perfect worship of praise. Even so, it is not the sacrifice of his body on the altar of the cross in which this perfect worship mainly consists, but his personal offering of obedience and love. Since the divine will to which Christ is obedient remains identical with the salvific will of God for man’s salvation, Christ’s satisfactory offering opens the way up to salvation. The charity of Christ, “obedient because of his love for the Father,” inaugurates the new covenant of love.⁹³

Analyzing John 15:10 (“If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; as I also have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love”), Aquinas explains that to remain in the Father’s love is nothing other than to keep his commandments.⁹⁴ He goes on to say that Christ demonstrates this by his own *exemplum*, and that the disciples can remain in *his* love by keeping his precepts. (These “precepts” could denote the New Law itself—the grace of the Holy Spirit inscribed on hearts—or else those written aspects of the New Law “that dispose us to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and pertain to the use of that grace.”)⁹⁵ He adds that “the keeping of the commandments is an effect of the divine love, not only of the love by which we love, but also of the love by which

⁹¹ *Super Io.*, cap. 14, lect. 8: “pater movit eum ad mortem suscipiendam, scilicet obedientia, quae ex amore causatur.”

⁹² *Super Io.*, cap. 14, lect. 8.

⁹³ Romanus Cessario, *The Godly Image*, 157.

⁹⁴ *Super Io.*, cap. 15, lect. 2.

⁹⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 106, a. 1.

he loves us.”⁹⁶ Because God loves us, “he moves us and helps us to fulfill his commandments, which cannot be fulfilled except through grace.”⁹⁷

In regard to this last point Aquinas cites 1 John 4:10 to the effect that “charity consists not in our having loved God, but in his having first loved us.” He develops this idea further when he says that “just as the *dilectio* by which the Father loves Christ is the *exemplum* of the *dilectio* by which Christ himself loves us, so also Christ wishes that his own obedience should be an example of ours.”⁹⁸ Christ emphasizes that “he has remained in the love of the Father because, through all things, he kept his commandments,” even to the point of accepting death on a Cross (at this point Aquinas quotes Philippians 2:8). Here Aquinas develops the idea that Christ’s obedience is nothing other than the logical expression of his love for the Father. He presents remaining in the Father’s love through obedience as the goal of Christ’s passion. Christ dies on the Cross out of obedience to the Father specifically in order to remain in his love. Merit proceeds out of charity (most especially, out of love for God inasmuch as he is our last end),⁹⁹ and tends towards a progressive growth in grace and charity whose term is eternal life.¹⁰⁰ Christ’s loving obedience is (as we have seen) meritorious, and merits (and exemplifies) on behalf of the members of his mystical body that justifying grace which will enable them, too, to grow in grace and charity and so merit for themselves the reward of eternal life.

Aquinas suggests that John 17:1 (“These things Jesus spoke, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said ‘Father, the hour is come: glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you’”) is about Christ meriting that his petitions should be heard.¹⁰¹ “Glorify me, Father,” refers to the *praemium*—the reward due to merit.¹⁰² The merit itself is twofold. Firstly, it is the merit of *doctrina*, with regard to which Christ reminds the Father that “I have glorified you,” making the Father known among men and manifesting him by his teaching.”¹⁰³ Secondly, it is the merit of obedience, in regard to which Christ declares “I have finished the work which you gave

⁹⁶ *Super Io.*, cap. 15, lect. 2: “Observatio enim mandatorum est effectus divinae dilectionis, non solum eius qua nos diligimus, sed eius qua ipse diligit nos.”

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: “movet nos et adjuvat ad implendum mandata eius, quae impleri non possunt nisi per gratiam.”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: “Sicut enim dilectio, qua pater diligit eum, est exemplum dilectionis qua ipse diligit nos; ita voluit quod obedientia sua sit exemplum obedientiae nostrae.”

⁹⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 114, a. 4.

¹⁰⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 114, a. 8.

¹⁰¹ *Super Io.*, cap. 17, lect. 1.

¹⁰² Cf. *ST I-II*, q. 114, a. 1.

¹⁰³ On Christ’s *doctrina* (*ST III*, q. 42), see J. Mark Armitage, “Why Didn’t Jesus Write a Book? Aquinas on the Teaching of Christ,” *New Blackfriars* 89 (2008): 337–53.

me to do" (17:4). Aquinas notes that Christ says "that you gave me" (*quod dedisti mihi*) rather than "that you ordered" (*quod iussisti*), and explains that "it is not enough for Christ and for ourselves to be commanded divinely, for whatever Christ has inasmuch as he is human and whatever we ourselves can do is by a gift of God" (*ex dono Dei*).

The point being made here is that Christ himself, who, in virtue of God's sapiential *ordinatio*, possesses the perfection of grace and *iustitia* and *rectitudo ordinis*, obeys the Eternal Law by grace. Of course, the Eternal Law (as has been said) is itself identified with divine Wisdom—that is, with God the Son—and hence with Christ's own divine hypostasis,¹⁰⁴ so Christ's loving obedience represents not only the obedience of *subiectio* to his Father (which we have seen has a sapiential reference), but also the *iustitia* and *ordinatio* of his human will being in perfect alignment and harmony with his divine will (also a sapiential notion).¹⁰⁵ God exalts Christ because he has glorified him in his *doctrina* and because he has lovingly and freely and spontaneously made himself obedient unto death. Christ's merit consists in his obedience and in his doctrine, and the reward is (1) the glorification for which he asks in John 17:1 (the glorification of his true Adamic humanity), and (2) the justifying grace which he shares sacramentally with the members of the mystical body (God's New Covenant family) so that they also may merit eternal life through loving and spontaneous obedience in virtue of the new Law—the grace of the Spirit and the *lex caritatis*—which has been inscribed on their hearts.

ST III, q. 47, a. 2: Obedience as Fulfilment of Torah

In his discussion of "the efficient cause of Christ's passion," Aquinas asks, "Whether Christ died out of obedience?" He begins his answer to this question by invoking the argument from "fittingness," stating that it was very fitting (*convenientissimum*) that Christ should suffer out of obedience (*ex obedientia*).¹⁰⁶ For Aquinas, the concept of *conveniens*, like that of *ordinatio*, has a sapiential reference, and, as Joseph P. Wawrykow has shown, "aims at making manifest the meaning and wisdom of the Christian

The idea of Christ's *doctrina* as meritorious is not a feature of the discussion in the *Summa*.

¹⁰⁴ ST III, q. 3, a. 8: "the Word is a concept of the eternal Wisdom, from whom all man's wisdom is derived. And hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God, as the disciple is instructed by receiving the word of his master. . . . And hence for the consummate perfection of man it was fitting that the very Word of God should be personally united to human nature."

¹⁰⁵ ST III, q. 18, aa. 5–6.

¹⁰⁶ ST III, q. 47, a. 2.

dispensation.”¹⁰⁷ In using the term “fitting” (*conueniens*), accordingly, Aquinas understands that the events and circumstances of Christ’s life reflect the wisdom of the divine *ordinatio* in dealing with the sin of Adam, and render credible and comprehensible the truth about who he is (the second Adam) and what he does (by his obedience instantiating the true Adamic humanity and inaugurating the new creation).¹⁰⁸ In the first place, he says, it was fitting for human justification (*conueniebat iustificationi humanae*) that Christ should die out of obedience, and in this regard he quotes the key text from Romans 5:19—“as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just.” In the second place, it was fitting for reconciling God with human beings (*fuit conueniens reconciliationi Dei ad homines*).¹⁰⁹ Here Aquinas juxtaposes three texts: “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10); “Christ . . . has delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness” (Eph 5:2); and “obedience is better than sacrifices” (1 Sam 15:22). On the basis of these texts Aquinas argues (1) that “the death of Christ was a most acceptable sacrifice to God”; (2) that “obedience is preferred to all sacrifices”; and (3) that it was therefore fitting (*conueniens*) “that the sacrifice of Christ’s Passion and death should proceed from obedience.” Finally, he draws on Proverbs 21:28 (“An obedient man shall speak of victory”) to argue that Christ’s dying out of obedience “was fitting (*conueniens*) to his victory whereby he triumphed over death and its author; because a soldier cannot conquer unless he obey his captain.” (The reference here is to Christ defeating the devil and redeeming humanity from demonic captivity.¹¹⁰) Aquinas concludes, “[S]o the Man-Christ secured the victory through being obedient to God.”

The first of the objections reads: “[O]bedience is referred to a command. But we do not read that Christ was commanded to suffer. Therefore he did not suffer out of obedience.”¹¹¹ Aquinas replies that “Christ received a command from the Father to suffer,” and cites John 10:18 (“I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again. This commandment have I received of my Father”) in support of the fact that the Father has given him a command “of laying down his

¹⁰⁷ Joseph P. Wawrykow, *The SCM Press A–Z of Thomas Aquinas*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Paul Gondreau, “The Humanity of Christ, the Incarnate Word,” 258–60.

¹⁰⁹ Aquinas speaks of *reconciliatio* in *ST* III, q. 49, a. 4, but employs the language of merit, satisfaction, and sacrifice much more frequently when speaking of the work of atonement.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *ST* III, q. 48, a. 4; q. 49, a. 2.

¹¹¹ *ST* III, q. 47, a. 2, obj. 1.

life and of resuming it again” (*ponendi animam et sumendi*).¹¹² Aquinas explains that “because the Old Law was ended by Christ’s death, according to his dying words, ‘It is consummated’ (Jn 19:30), it may be understood that by his suffering he fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law.” Matthew Levering writes:

Aquinas understands Christ to mean that the Old Law has finally been consummated in him. Aquinas then shows how Christ’s perfect act of obedience, flowing from the supernatural grace that infused Christ’s soul at the moment of the hypostatic union, simultaneously fulfills all three aspects of the Old Law.¹¹³

Firstly, “he fulfilled those of the moral order which are founded on the precepts of charity, inasmuch as he suffered both out of love of the Father . . . and out of love of his neighbor.” Secondly, by his passion he “fulfilled the ceremonial precepts of the Law, which are chiefly ordained for sacrifices and oblations, in so far as all the ancient sacrifices were figures of that true sacrifice which the dying Christ offered for us.” Finally, he “fulfilled the judicial precepts of the Law, which are chiefly ordained towards making satisfaction (*ad satisfaciendum*) to those who have suffered injury, since . . . he paid that which he took not away (Psalm 68:5), suffering himself to be fastened to a tree on account of the apple which man had plucked from the tree against God’s command.”¹¹⁴ In dying out of obedience to the Father, then, Christ fulfills the moral precepts by obeying God out of charity, fulfills the ceremonial precepts by offering a sacrifice (as we have seen in the corpus, obedience is the highest form of sacrifice), and fulfills the judicial precepts by making *satisfactio* to God for Adam’s disobedience in acting against God’s commandment—thereby, as Matthew Levering demonstrates, enacting his threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.¹¹⁵ In this he brings to perfection the precepts of the Old Law, which brought about a certain outward subjection to God, but which was unable to effect that inward subjection out of charity which is the consequence of justifying grace.¹¹⁶

The second objection reads as follows: “[A] man is said to do from obedience what he does from necessity of precept. But Christ did not suffer necessarily, but voluntarily [*non ex necessitate, sed voluntarie passus fuit*]. Therefore he did not suffer out of obedience.”¹¹⁷ Aquinas answers,

¹¹² ST III, q. 47, a. 2, ad 1.

¹¹³ Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*, 53.

¹¹⁴ ST III, q. 47, a. 2, ad 1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 66–79.

¹¹⁶ Cf. ST I–II, q. 98, a. 1.

¹¹⁷ ST III, q. 47, a. 2, obj. 2.

"Although obedience implies necessity with regard to the thing commanded, nevertheless it implies free-will with regard to the fulfilling of the precept."¹¹⁸ In other words, in order for Christ to obey the Father it is necessary for him to do what the Father has commanded, but the fact that he chooses to obey comes not from necessity but from free choice.¹¹⁹ Aquinas continues: "[A]lthough his passion and death, considered in themselves, were repugnant to the natural will, yet Christ resolved to fulfill God's will with respect to the same." In this regard he quotes Psalm 39:9 ("I have desired that I should do your will, O my God") and Matthew 26:42 ("If this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, your will be done").¹²⁰

The third objection states that "charity is a more excellent virtue than obedience," but Ephesians 5:2 ("Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and delivered himself up for us") shows that Christ suffered out of charity (*ex caritate passus*), from which it is clear that Christ's passion ought to be ascribed rather to charity than to obedience.¹²¹ Aquinas replies, "For the same reason Christ suffered out of charity and out of obedience; because he fulfilled even the precepts of charity out of obedience only; and was obedient, out of love, to the Father's command."¹²² Here Aquinas picks up on what he has previously said in the commentaries on Romans and on John. Christ's charity is the source of his obedience to the Father, and also its expression, to the extent that his charity and obedience are, in effect, two aspects of the same act of loving *subiectio* and "ordinateness." Christ's *caritas* is nothing other than an act of willing obedience towards his Father, and his obedience towards his Father is a corollary of his *caritas*. Each represents the fulfillment and perfection of the Old Law in the *lex caritatis*. Each fulfills the moral, ceremonial, and judicial precepts of the Old Law. Each flows from Christ's plenitude of grace. Each is a determination of his *iustitia* and of his *ordinatio* conceived in sapiential terms both as internal "ordinateness" (*rectitudo ordinis*) and as external "order" towards his final end. Finally, each functions as merit (meriting glorification for Christ himself and eternal life for the members of his mystical body, God's New Covenant family), as satisfaction (by his own obedience undoing the

¹¹⁸ ST III, q. 47, a. 2, ad 2.

¹¹⁹ Cf. ST III, q. 18, a. 6.

¹²⁰ Matthew is quoting Psalm 39:9. The full verse reads: "I have desired that I should do your will, O my God, and your law should be in the midst of my heart." Christ possesses the New Law inscribed on his heart by the grace of the Spirit.

¹²¹ ST III, q. 47, a. 2, obj. 3.

¹²² ST III, q. 47, a. 2, ad 3: "eadem ratione Christus passus est ex caritate, et obedientia, quia etiam praecepta caritatis non nisi ex obedientia implevit; et obediens fuit ex dilectione ad patrem praecipientem."

effects of Adam's disobedience), and as sacrifice (a sensible sign of Christ's subjection to God whereby he instantiates the true Adamic humanity).

Christ's Salvific Obedience

Aquinas presents Christ's work of atonement as consisting in a freely willed and spontaneous obedience to the will of the Father, which, proceeding out of his fullness of grace, is nothing other than an expression of perfect love (reflecting *lex caritatis* as opposed to *lex timoris*). Grounded in *humilitas*, Christ merits glorification for himself and eternal life for the members of his mystical body, makes satisfaction for sin, and offers a sacrifice by which he acknowledges his *subiectio*—his *servitium sanctum*—to the Father. Christ's obedience undoes the effects of the disobedience of Adam, reintroducing that *ordinatio* or *rectitudo ordinis* by which is understood both the proper subordination of the lower parts of the soul to reason and of reason to God (that is, the *imago Dei*; the true, rightly-ordered, grace-filled Adamic humanity), and the ordering of human beings to their last end in line with God's sapiential *ordinatio* of the universe (that is, the re-ordering of a cosmos disordered by Adam's sin by means of a new creation). Finally, his free, spontaneous, and loving obedience to the Father represents the final fulfillment of the Old Law—which is itself a determination of the Eternal Law, which Aquinas identifies with divine Wisdom. In obeying his Father “even unto death,” Christ fulfills Torah, incarnates divine Wisdom, and undoes the inordinatio introduced by Adam's disobedience, thus bringing to perfection God's sapiential plan for the restoration of the *imago Dei* and the redemption of the cosmos.

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