

Religion and Election: Aquinas on Natural Law, Judaism, and Salvation in Christ

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The Religion of Mary and Jesus

SHOULD WE WISH TO UNDERSTAND the religion of Mary of Nazareth and of her only child, modern historical scholarship offers us a clear path of inquiry. Mary and her son were Jews, living and practicing their religion in the land of Israel in the last years of the Second Temple. The traditional, biblically mandated cultic life of the Jewish people still flourished, and at the same time, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots offered competing normative accounts of day-to-day Jewish existence. We can get a grip on the religious life and practice of Mary and Jesus, to the extent that such a grasp is available to us, by using the evidence we have to reconstruct their religious and broader social environment. That done, we can then view Mary and Jesus as more or less typical inhabitants of this environment, the shape of their religious lives as more or less typical for Jews of the late Second Temple period.

If we follow this path of inquiry, the text of the New Testament is one possible source of evidence for the religious life Jesus and Mary led. Depending on what one makes of the historical reliability of the various documents contained in the New Testament, and depending on what one takes to be a correct interpretation of those documents, the historical scholar may find Jesus, in particular, to be a more typical or a less typical practitioner of Second Temple Judaism. Broadly speaking, the less historical reliability the interpreter attributes to the texts of the New Testament, the more the interpreter is likely to regard Jesus, and *a fortiori* Mary, as typical Jews of their time. Conversely, the more histor-

ical reliability one attributes to the New Testament texts, the less one is likely to see Jesus, and perhaps Mary, as typical Jews of the Second Temple. Jesus becomes “a marginal Jew,” in the phrase of the Catholic biblical scholar John Meier.

Either way, though, modern historical scholarship mandates that we understand the religion of Mary and Jesus within the limits established by the best available historical reconstruction of the Jewish religious world in which they lived. What we can understand to be a realistic religious option within the world of late Second Temple Judaism has to govern what we can reasonably believe to have been the religion of these two individual Jews. We can understand the religion of Mary and Jesus by understanding the Judaism of their time and place, giving the picture color and nuance by adding whatever reliable evidence of their individual words and deeds we think the New Testament offers us.

What if we approached the matter the other way around? We might, that is, take the unique individuality of Jesus and Mary as the key to understanding their religion, their own practice of the Judaism of their time. If we take our knowledge of Jesus and Mary as individual persons only from what we regard as the historically reliable evidence available from the New Testament texts, the results are likely to be the same as when we start from our historical knowledge of Second Temple Judaism. What, though, if we were to take our knowledge of Jesus and Mary as particular persons from what Catholic faith, on the basis of the New Testament, believes to be true of them?

In that case we would, for example, see as basic to our understanding of the religion of Jesus the fact that this human being is true God, his humanity hypostatically united to and existing in the person who is God the eternal Son. Similarly we would see as basic to our understanding of the religion of Mary the fact that she is without sin from the first moment of her existence, and that she possesses the fullest measure of grace God has given to a created person. Thinking about the religion of Mary and Jesus from this vantage point does not, of course, require us either to reject or to ignore historically warranted claims about what either of them said and did, or about the religious world in which they lived. But the results of the inquiry are likely to be quite different when we take Catholic teaching about Mary and Jesus to be basic than when we take as basic an historical reconstruction of Second Temple Judaism.

My purpose here is to search out the results of this alternative path of inquiry into the religion of Mary and Jesus. To put the aim in a different way, I will seek a primarily theological, as distinguished from

a primarily historical, understanding of the religion—the Jewishness—of Mary and Jesus. My chief interlocutor in this undertaking will be Thomas Aquinas. Thomas is helpful on this score, in part because his rich account of the virtue of religion gives us a lot to go on in thinking theologically about the Judaism and the Jewish identity of Mary and Jesus. In our context, he is also helpful just because he does not share many of the assumptions we are likely to bring to the task. Whether or not we end up agreeing with him on any particular point, St. Thomas can give us critical leverage on two matters of great importance to contemporary Catholic theology.

In the first place, he helps us, perhaps surprisingly, to understand the deep theological significance of the Jewishness of Mary and Jesus. As Thomas sees it, God incarnate and his mother could only be Jews. What makes them to be Jews, in particular the election of Israel and the cultic life of the Jewish people, is essential to who they are, to their being the Mother of God and the incarnate Word of God. Appreciating the Jewishness of Mary and Jesus is therefore essential for understanding the Christian message about God become flesh, his redemptive mission, and the place of his mother in it. The religion of Israel—the Old Testament—and not a universal religiosity belonging to human nature or natural law, gives us the needed background against which the gospel of Christ becomes intelligible and plausible. In the process of spelling this out, Aquinas confronts us, secondly, with the need to think in a fresh way about the abiding place of the Jewish religion and the Jewish people in the saving purposes of God.

The Virtue of Religion: Overview

As Aquinas uses the term, “religion” orients us to God, and to God alone. The first thing to be asked about religion is whether it “consists solely in being ordered to God,” and the first thing to be said about it is yes: religion, in fact, orders those who have it or do it to God alone.¹ This insistence that we find “religion” where, and only where, human beings are rightly ordered to God serves as the cornerstone

¹ *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) II-II, q. 81, prooem.: “utrum religio consistat tantum in ordine ad Deum.” However we understand the etymology of the term, Aquinas observes in reply (*ibid.*, a. 1, resp.), “religion, properly speaking, involves being ordered to God” (“religio proprie importat ordinem ad Deum”). All translations are my own. Latin quotations from the *ST* are from *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Summa theologiae*, 3rd ed. (Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 1999), and my English translations are based on this text. I am grateful to my graduate assistant, Mitchell Kennard, for his considerable assistance in preparing this essay for publication in *Nova et Vetera*.

upon which Aquinas will construct an elaborate concept of religion, its manifold interior and exterior acts, and its countervailing vices. Religion belongs under the heading of justice, as its first “potential part.” As such, religion is the virtue that gives to God what is due to him, as every part of justice in some way gives what is due to another.² What the rational creature owes to God is worship (*cultus* or *latría*). This worship is the free and reverent submission of body, mind, and heart to God in devotion, prayer, adoration, and sacrifice, in the offering of first fruits, tithes, and vows. “Religion” is the disposition to engage in all these acts, each of which “professes the divine excellence,” the surpassing goodness of God as creator and ruler of all things.³ Worship is due to God alone, however, not simply as the “unfailing source” of all that the creature is and has, “but also as the one to whom our choices ought to be assiduously directed as our ultimate end, the one whom we negligently cast away by sin, and whom we ought to recover by believing and by professing our faith.”⁴ Religion just is this *protestatio fidei*.⁵

“Religion” so conceived clearly orients the person who has it not simply to “a god,” “some god,” or “whatever everyone calls ‘god.’”⁶ Religion is a virtue, specifically a moral virtue, and like any moral virtue, it gets its unique nature and content from the end or goal at which it aims.⁷ The *finis* of religion cannot simply be whatever a person

² On religion as a potential part of justice, see *ST* II-II, q. 80, a. 1.

³ See *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 3, ad 2: “all the acts of religion have in common that “through them all, a human being professes the divine excellence and his own subjection to God” (“per omnes homo protestatur divinam excellentiam et subiectionem sui ad Deum”); and the *corpus* of the same article: “Moreover, it pertains to religion to exhibit reverence to the one God for one reason, namely insofar as he is the first principle of creation and of the government of things” (“Ad religionem autem pertinet exhibere reverentiam uni Deo secundum unam rationem, inquantum scilicet est primum principium creationis et gubernationis rerum”). Cf. *ibid.*, a. 4, resp.

⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 1, resp.: “Ipse enim est cui principaliter alligari debemus, tanquam indeficienti principio; ad quem etiam nostra electio assidue dirigi debet, sicut in ultimum finem; quem etiam negligenter peccando amittimus, et credendo et fidem protestando recuperare debemus.”

⁵ Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad 1: Religion “is not faith, but the profession of faith by exterior signs” (“[R]eligio non est fides, sed fidei protestatio per aliqua exteriora signa”).

⁶ “[Q]uidquid . . . apud omnes dicitur Deus” (*ST* II-II, q. 85, a. 1, resp.); more on this will follow below.

⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, resp.: “God is related to the virtue of religion not as matter or object, but as end” (“Deus non comparatur ad virtutem religionis sicut materia vel obiectum, sed sicut finis”). There are some subtleties here; see the discussion below of “formal” and “material” objects.

takes to be “god,” or whatever she looks to for help and guidance, or whatever she takes to be of highest importance. Human beings, after all, frequently submit mind, heart, and body to existents, real or imagined, besides the God to whom alone we owe this submission. We worship false gods, offering to them adoration and sacrifice that in justice are owed to another, and only to him. By offering our worship to anything or anyone other than the God to whom alone it is due, we commit a profound injustice. Obviously no unjust submission and reverence can be an act of the *virtue* of religion. Just because it is a virtue, religion orders the human being toward the true God, the only God there is: “Divine worship . . . ought to be shown to the supreme uncreated God alone.”⁸

“The supreme uncreated God” is, as it happens, the Holy Trinity, and only he. Having the virtue of religion and rightly offering divine worship thus requires the ability to identify “the supreme uncreated God” correctly as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In fact, Aquinas considers it a serious objection to the unity of the habit of religion that there are three divine persons, to each of whom we presumably owe a distinctive act of devotion, a particular protestation of his surpassing excellence. On the contrary, Thomas replies, a single act of devotion will do. But religion is a unitary habit with a single act not because it aims at God in some way other than as the Trinity of persons he is, but because the three persons themselves create and rule the world by a single act (a single act, that is, undertaken by the three—*opera ad extra indivisa sunt*). As a result, “we can serve them”—and no one else—“by a single religion,” that is, by a single disposition or habit.⁹

We can reach the same conclusion by bearing in mind that religion is a virtue. The presence of a virtue implies success in the acts that the virtue enables to take place. Virtues can never lead us astray; in one way or another, they orient those who possess them toward the good. “A virtue is a habit that is always disposed toward the good.”¹⁰ The good

⁸ ST II-II, q. 94, a. 1, resp.: “[D]ivinus cultus . . . [d]ebet autem exhiberi soli summo Deo increato.” See also ST II-II, q. 85, a. 2, resp., and, for a considerable elaboration of this point, *Summa contra gentiles* [hereafter, SCG] III, ch. 120: “latriae cultus soli uni summo Deo debetur” (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium: seu Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3 vols, ed. C. Pera et al. [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1961], no. 2939; cf. no. 2926. Paragraph numbers in references to SCG are from this edition).

⁹ ST II-II, q. 81, a. 3, ad 1: “[T]res personae divinae sunt unum principium creationis et gubernationis rerum, et ideo eis una religione servitur.”

¹⁰ ST I-II, q. 55, a. 4, resp.: “[V]irtus autem est habitus semper se habens ad bonum.” Cf. *ibid.*, a. 3, resp.: “The virtue of a thing is spoken of as ordered to

towards which the virtue of religion disposes us is “the supreme uncreated God,” under the aspect of “the one to whom our will ought to be assiduously directed as our ultimate end.”¹¹ In order to succeed—in order to be a virtue—“religion” must itself either include or in some fashion presuppose the ability to identify the supreme uncreated God correctly. To this God alone the reverent submission of divine worship may justly be offered. And so, resources sufficient to distinguish the true God from all the other candidates for worship on offer among human beings are necessary for the virtue of religion.

It is no wonder, then, that Thomas sees an intimate connection between religion and faith. More precisely, the habit of religion is tightly bound up with the theological virtue of faith, the faith whose act is to believe what God alone, as first truth, can teach us about himself. This faith, not coincidentally, holds true what God teaches about himself in Scripture rightly interpreted by the Church. The virtue of faith “holds to the articles of faith for only one reason: for the sake of the first truth, proposed to us in Scripture rightly understood according to the doctrine of the Church. Anyone who falls away from this reason [for holding the articles true] entirely lacks [the virtue of] faith.”¹² In the nature of the case, this faith is strictly supernatural; it cannot be arrived at by any natural effort of mind or will, but can only be given by God. “When a human being assents to the truths of faith, he is raised above his nature. . . . therefore assent, which is the principal act of faith, is from God moving him inwardly by grace.”¹³

The habit of religion is not exactly the same as the habit of faith. Faith knows the most intimate truths about God, embracing them on the authority of God, who is truth itself, while religion offers God the worship owed to him, and does so precisely out of reverence for God. So religion depends on faith in just the sense in which means depend on—derive their character as genuine means from—the end to which they are means. By the habit of faith, we locate or identify the God to whom worship is truly owed, and by the habit of religion

the good” (“[O]portet quod virtus cuiuslibet rei dicatur in ordine ad bonum”).

¹¹ ST II-II, q. 81, a. 1, resp. (note 4 above).

¹² ST II-II, q. 5, a. 3, ad 2: “[O]mnibus articulis fidei inhaeret fides propter unum medium, scilicet propter veritatem primam propositam nobis in Scripturis secundum doctrinam Ecclesiae intellectis sane. Et ideo qui ab hoc medio decidit totaliter fide caret.”

¹³ ST II-II, q. 6, a. 1, resp.: “Quia cum homo, assentiendo his quae sunt fidei, elevetur supra naturam suam, oportet quod hoc insit ei ex supernaturali principio interius movente, quod est Deus. Et ideo fides quantum ad assensum, qui est principalis actus fidei, est a Deo interius movente per gratiam.”

we reverently offer to just this God the worship justice requires. “God is not related to the virtue of religion as its matter or object, but as its end. Therefore religion is not a theological virtue, whose object is the ultimate end [itself], but a moral virtue, which has to do with the means to this end.”¹⁴

In all this, we can see clearly a basic difference between the way Thomas deploys the concept “religion” and the way we ourselves are likely to do so. For us, it has become second nature to use the term “religion” descriptively. We may disagree about how to define religion, or indeed whether there is much use in trying to define it precisely, but in any case, we use the term to collect a wide array of phenomena, of practices, beliefs, and communal ways of life. We may make judgments about the truth or falsity of beliefs we classify as religious, and we may assess the moral value of particular religious practices. Or we may refrain from such judgments. Either way, we regard decisions about truth or goodness in matters religious to be quite separate from our recognition that they ought to be counted as religious matters.

Aquinas, by contrast, evidently uses the term “religion” in a robustly normative way. To classify an act or practice as religious is to judge that it orients the person who does it to the triune God, the one true God, as her final end, that it springs from supernatural faith in (and so from true beliefs about) this God, and that it serves justice by offering to this God the worship that is inherently his due from the rational creature. “Religion” does not simply name a class of dispositions and practices of indeterminate value; it connotes excellence. The term names, in other words, a virtue. Where this virtue is present, the “supreme uncreated God” is rightly worshipped. Where it is absent, a countervailing vice must in some degree be present. This is not an arbitrary negative stipulation about other ways of worship—your worship is a vice because it is not mine. It goes with the normative use of the term “religion.” The grammar of “virtue” requires this: since virtue is a needed orientation to some good, where a virtue is absent, so is the rational creature’s orientation to that particular good. And this absence is, by definition, vice.¹⁵ Aquinas’s covering term for the vices opposed

¹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, resp.: “Deus non comparatur ad virtutem religionis sicut materia vel obiectum, sed sicut finis. Et ideo religio non est virtus theologica, cuius obiectum est ultimus finis, sed est virtus moralis, cuius est esse circa ea quae sunt ad finem”; see note 7 above.

¹⁵ This is assuming that the good in question is in fact needed—viz., that a human being *ought* to be oriented to that good. This clearly obtains in the case of religion, since the good at which this virtue aims is the triune God, the

to religion is “superstition.”¹⁶ The most obvious of the many cases is idolatry, in which “divine worship is shown to that to which it ought not to be shown,” to anyone or anything save “the supreme uncreated God alone.”¹⁷

There is no need to choose between these two uses or meanings of “religion,” but it will pay large dividends to keep them straight. Aquinas notes this by distinguishing between descriptive and normative uses of “latria,” or worship. If we take the term “latria” descriptively to refer to “any human act pertaining to the worship of [a] god,” then “latria” can be applied to idolatry in the same sense in which it applies to true religion. But if we take the term normatively, as Aquinas usually does, then it refers to a virtue, which, as such, “includes in its very definition that divine worship is shown to the one to whom it ought to be shown.” In this sense, *latria* “is simply the same thing as religion,” rather than being a class to which religion and idolatry equally belong.¹⁸

highest good and final aim of all human life, and indeed of all creatures. There can also be goods to which a person *may* be oriented but need not be. The absence of an orientation to this sort of good can be a vice, but it can also be a sign that the person is simply not engaged with this sort of good. Appreciating the unearthly beauty of the symphonies of Anton Bruckner is a virtue, and deliberate aversion to them a manifest vice. But one might simply have no attitude toward them at all, not having heard them, or not having acquired enough of an ear for orchestral music to apprehend the good that one is hearing. Since it involves no deliberate aversion from a needed good, this sort of inability to appreciate Bruckner cannot be counted as a vice, however great a misfortune it is for those who are subject to it.

¹⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 92, a. 1, resp.: “Superstition is a vice contrary to religion by excess, not that it offers more in the way of divine worship than true religion, but because it offers divine worship either to whom it ought not, or in a way it ought not” (“[S]uperstitio est vitium religioni oppositum secundum excessum, non quia plus exhibeat in cultum divinum quam vera religio, sed quia exhibet cultum divinum vel cui non debet, vel eo modo quo non debet”).

¹⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 1, resp.: “[A]d superstitionem pertinet excedere debitum modum divini cultus. Quod quidem praecipue fit quando divinus cultus exhibetur cui non debet exhiberi. Debet autem exhiberi soli summo Deo increato”; cf. note 8 above.

¹⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2: “[N]omen latriae dupliciter accipi potest. Uno modo potest significare humanum actum ad cultum Dei pertinentem. Et secundum hoc, non variatur significatio huius nominis latria, cuicumque exhibeatur, quia illud cui exhibetur non cadet, secundum hoc, in eius definitione. Et secundum hoc latria univoce dicitur secundum quod pertinet ad veram religionem, et secundum quod pertinet ad idololatriam. . . . Alio modo accipitur latria prout est idem religioni. Et sic, cum sit virtus, de ratione eius est quod cultus divinus exhibeatur ei cui debet exhiberi. Et secundum hoc latria aequivoce dicitur de latria verae religionis, et de idololatria.”

How then do we come to possess and to exercise the virtue of religion—to offer worship solely to the one to whom it ought to be given, and in the way it ought to be given?

If we are to be religious, we will need both the interior capacity or disposition to undertake the manifold acts of religion and the precepts to guide our worship—a liturgical or ceremonial law to specify the exterior acts the worship by embodied beings needs in order to be *latria* of the one true God rather than idolatry. Nature can provide neither of these. Both the virtue of religion and the rules for worship must be given by God, beyond the gift of nature and nature's capacities.

That the interior virtue of religion has to be a supernatural gift is already clear from the dependence of religion on the theological virtue of faith. Aquinas is, in any case, explicit that only a person who has supernatural faith—indeed, faith formed by charity—can exercise the virtue of religion. “The theological virtues, namely faith, hope, and charity . . . by their own command, cause the act of religion, which undertakes various operations as ordered to God.”¹⁹

This only stands to reason, since religion is concerned with those acts of devotion and submission that serve as means to the ultimate end of human life, and this end, as Aquinas insists from the outset, is beyond the capacities of nature as such.²⁰ Thus, St. Thomas can sometimes speak of faith as the source or origin (*principium*) of the virtue of religion: “Faith is the cause and source of religion. For no one would choose to worship God unless he held by faith that God is the creator, governor, and rewarder of human acts.”²¹ At other times, he speaks with equal directness of charity as the *principium* of religion: “That a human being gives himself over to God by cleaving to him in a kind of spiritual union belongs first of all to charity. That a human being gives himself over to God by doing the works of divine worship belongs first of all

¹⁹ ST II-II, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1: “Virtutes autem theologicae, scilicet fides, spes et caritas, habent actum circa Deum sicut circa proprium obiectum. Et ideo suo imperio causant actum religionis, quae operatur quaedam in ordine ad Deum.”

²⁰ ST I, q. 1, a. 1, resp.: “Man is ordered to God as to an end that exceeds the comprehension of reason, according to Isaiah 64:4: ‘Apart from you, O God, eye has not seen what things you have prepared for those who love you’” (“[H]omo ordinatur ad Deum sicut ad quendam finem qui comprehensionem rationis excedit, secundum illud Isaiae 64[4], ‘oculus non vidit Deus absque te, quae praeparasti diligentibus te’”).

²¹ “[F]ides est religionis causa et principium: non enim aliquis eligeret cultum Deo exhibere, nisi fide teneret Deum esse creatorem, gubernatorem, et remuneratorem humanorum actuum” (*Super Boetium De Trinitate* 3, 2, c [Leonine ed., vol. 50 (1992), 111.162–112.166]).

to religion, but ultimately to charity, which is the source of religion.”²² There is no problem to be solved here, no need to choose between faith and charity as the source of religion. All three theological virtues must be present in order for the virtue of religion to be present. Possession of the theological virtues is, in other words, a necessary condition for possession of the moral virtue of religion. “Religion is a profession of faith, hope, and charity, which are the first beginning of our ordering to God.”²³

Neither are the precepts of religion, the laws needed to direct human cultic practice to its proper end and so distinguish it from idolatry, available to us by the exercise of our natural powers. For this, there are several reasons, of which the first is, once again, the vocation of humanity to God as supernatural end. “Because the human being is ordained to the end of eternal blessedness, which exceeds the measure of our natural capacity . . . it was necessary that, beyond both natural and human law, the human being be directed to his end by a divinely given law.”²⁴ Sin aggravates the situation, adding malice, weakness, concupiscence, and ignorance to nature’s inherent inadequacy for its supernatural end.²⁵ But it neither alters nor creates the underlying need for a divinely given law—not least a cultic law—in order that we might attain our final end.

Apparently Aquinas knows nothing of what will later be called “natural religion.” To be sure, “natural reason dictates that the human being do something out of divine reverence. But natural reason does not dictate that he do precisely this or that. This must be instituted by divine or human law.”²⁶ At its best, human law aims only at “the

²² ST II-II, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1: “[A]d caritatem pertinet immediate quod homo tradat seipsum Deo adhaerendo ei per quandam spiritus unionem. Sed quod homo tradat seipsum Deo ad aliqua opera divini cultus, hoc immediate pertinet ad religionem, mediate autem ad caritatem, quae est religionis principium.”

²³ ST II-II, q. 101, a. 3, ad 1: “[R]eligio est quaedam protestatio fidei, spei et caritatis, quibus homo primordialiter ordinatur in Deum.”

²⁴ ST I-II, q. 91, a. 4, resp.: “[Q]uia homo ordinatur ad finem beatitudinis aeternae, quae excedit proportionem naturalis facultatis humanae . . . ideo necessarium fuit ut supra legem naturalem et humanam, dirigeretur etiam ad suum finem lege divinitus data.”

²⁵ See, e.g., *Super Gal. 3*, lec. 7 (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 8th ed., vol. 1 [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1953], no. 165). Paragraph numbers in all references to Thomas’s *Lecturae* on Paul are from this Marietti edition.

²⁶ ST II-II, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3: “[D]e dictamine rationis naturalis est quod homo aliqua faciat ad reverentiam divinam, sed quod haec determinate faciat vel illa,

temporal tranquility of the state.” A cultic institution that aims at eternal felicity must be established by God.²⁷

The Virtue of Religion: Questions

Can the Virtue of Religion be Acquired?

Among the distinctive features of St. Thomas’s moral theology is his claim that there are moral virtues infused directly by divine action, and not only those acquired by habituation from our own actions. In addition to the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, infused moral virtues are necessary, he argues, for human beings to reach a supernatural end. Since the final end of human life is beyond the reach of created nature and its powers, it is beyond the reach of the acts those natural powers can by themselves produce and of the acquired habits those acts can engender. If morally virtuous acts (of justice, for example) can contribute to the attainment of our ultimate end—as surely they can—then the virtues that elicit those acts must themselves, he reasons, be supernatural gifts. Otherwise, we have to deny either that acts of justice and the other moral virtues can be perti-

istud non est de dictamine rationis naturalis, sed de institutione iuris divini vel humani.”

²⁷ ST I-II, q. 98, a. 1, resp.: “[A]lius finis legis humanae, et alius legis divinae. Legis enim humanae finis est temporalis tranquillitas civitatis. . . . Finis autem legis divinae est perducere hominem ad finem felicitatis aeternae.” All laws, whether human or divine, aim at the common good, that is, the good of the community subject to the law. But there are different kinds of communities, requiring different kinds of laws. For the common life of human beings with one another, human laws suffice, but for the common life of human beings with God, divine law is necessary. See ST I-II, q. 100, a. 2, resp.: “Human law is ordered to one kind of community, and divine law to another. Human law is ordered to civil community, which is that of human beings with one another. . . . But divine law is ordered to the community of human beings with God, in either the present or the future life. Therefore, divine law proposes precepts concerning all matters by which human beings are well ordered to sharing life with God” (“Est autem alius modus communitatis ad quam ordinatur lex humana, et ad quam ordinatur lex divina. Lex enim humana ordinatur ad communitatem civilem, quae est hominum ad invicem. . . . Sed communitas ad quam ordinatur lex divina, est hominum ad Deum, vel in praesenti vel in futura vita. Et ideo lex divina praecepta proponit de omnibus illis per quae homines bene ordinantur ad communicationem cum Deo”). “Divine law” here means a network of precepts made known to us by God, beyond what natural law contains or human reason could discover. See ST I-II, q. 91, a. 4, resp. (note 24 above).

nent to the attainment of beatitude, or that the beatitude they aid us in attaining is truly supernatural. We avoid such unfortunate recourse by granting that the moral virtues, including religion (as a part of justice), can be infused, and not just acquired. “The virtue that orders a human being to the good as measured by divine law and not by human reason cannot be caused by human acts, whose source is reason, but must be caused in us by divine operation alone. Thus Augustine, defining this kind of virtue, includes in its definition ‘that which God works in us without us.’”²⁸

Later medieval theology was divided over the notion of infused moral virtues. John Duns Scotus influentially held that there was no need to posit virtues of this sort. They merely add a redundant layer of complexity to our picture of human action and the attainment of beatitude; moral theology is therefore better off without them. Scotus’s arguments against requiring infused moral virtues are imbedded in his treatment of the distinctions (or lack thereof) among the virtues, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the beatitudes, and in his discussion of the connections among the virtues.²⁹ With characteristic

²⁸ ST I-II, q. 63, a. 2, resp.: “Virtus vero ordinans hominem ad bonum secundum quod modificatur per legem divinam, et non per rationem humanam, non potest causari per actus humanos, quorum principium est ratio, sed causatur solum in nobis per operationem divinam. Et ideo, huiusmodi virtutem definiens, Augustinus posuit in definitione virtutis, ‘quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur’” (cf. a. 3, resp.). “Measured by divine law” means “ordered to the ultimate end of human life,” while “measured by reason” means “ordered to the goods of this present life.” Cf. *De virtutibus in communi* a. 10, ad 8: “Infused temperance seeks the mean in a different respect than does acquired temperance. For infused temperance seeks the mean as measured by divine law, which orders [us] to the ultimate end, but acquired temperance takes its mean as measured by inferior rules, ordered to the goods of this present life” (“[A]lia ratione requirit medium temperantia infusa quam temperantia acquisita. Nam temperantia infusa exquirat medium secundum rationes legis divinae, quae accipiuntur ex ordine ad ultimum finem; temperantia autem acquisita accipit medium secundum inferiores rationes, in ordine ad bonum praesentis vitae,” in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Quaestiones disputatae*, 10th ed., vol. 2 [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1965], 736b). On the background to Thomas’s view of infused moral virtues and the debates preceding him, see Artur Michael Landgraf, “Die Erkenntnis der Übernatürlichen,” in *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, vol. 1i (Regensburg: Pustet, 1952), 141–201, esp. 161–83.

²⁹ See *Ordinatio* III, d. 34, nos. 24–30, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Scotistic Commission (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950–), 10:187–90 (hereafter, Vat.), and d. 36, nos. 101–13 (ibid., 10:261–9). For a complete translation of these two distinctions of the *Ordinatio* (though one not based directly on the Vatican edition), see Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, ed.

reserve, he proposes that “one can say, without making it an unqualified assertion, that the only habits necessary in this life are the intellectual, moral, and theological virtues,” of which only the last are infused.³⁰ With equally characteristic rigor, though, he argues that “it does not seem necessary to posit infused moral virtues alongside the acquired [moral] virtues in those who have, or can have, the acquired ones.”³¹ The infused virtue of charity is not only necessary, but sufficient, for attaining the final end at which all human acts aim, blessedness in God, and infused faith is likewise both necessary and sufficient for locating the end. Charity and faith therefore suffice to raise any human act (of justice, temperance, and so forth) to the ultimate perfection of which that act is capable. “The end of all [acts], which they cannot have in virtue of their own nature or kind, is sufficiently fixed by the inclination of charity, and their manner or measure is sufficiently fixed by infused faith.”³² An intermediate layer of infused moral virtues is needless.

Aquinas and Scotus agree that human acts, of whatever sort, can reach their ultimate end only when joined with charity and that charity also suffices to raise any human act to its final end. This is central to Aquinas’s claim that there is no true virtue without charity, and that charity is the form of all the virtues. “Without charity,” he observes, “an act can be good with respect to the kind of act it is, but it cannot be perfectly good, because it lacks the needed ordering to the ultimate end.”³³ Given charity, though, “the acts of all the other virtues are ordered to the ultimate end. In this sense charity gives form to the

William A. Frank (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 237–274.

³⁰ *Ordinatio* III, d. 34, no. 24: “[P]otest dici (sine tamen assertione) quod non sunt necessarii in via nisi illi habitus qui sunt virtutes intellectuales, morales et theologicae” (Vat., 10:187.139–41; Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 240).

³¹ *Ibid.*, d. 36, no. 109: “[N]on videtur necessitas ponendi alias virtutes morales (infusas) quam acquisitas in iis qui habent eas acquisitas vel habere possunt” (Vat., 10:265.746–266.749; Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 272).

³² *Ibid.*: “[F]inis omnis, quem non possunt habere ex specie sua, sufficienter determinatur ex inclinatione caritatis, modus autem vel medium sufficienter determinatur per fidem infusam” (Vat., 10:265.744–746; Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 271–272). “Modus . . . vel medium” here is close to what Aquinas will call the “formal object” of a habit or act.

³³ *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 7, ad 1: “[S]ine caritate potest quidem esse aliquis actus bonus ex suo genere, non tamen perfecte bonus, quia deest debita ordinatio ad ultimum finem.” Thus, “there can be no genuine virtue without charity” (“nulla vera virtus potest esse sine caritate” [*ibid.*, resp.]).

acts of all the other virtues.”³⁴ Despite the sufficiency of charity for attaining the last end, though, Thomas insists that only infused virtues are productive of acts that charity can raise to the level of meriting beatitude.³⁵ This is, indeed, the chief point of claiming that there must be infused as well as acquired moral virtues. If charity can perfect the acquired virtues and their acts so as to fit the agent for beatitude—as Scotus argues it can—then there is no need for infused moral virtues.³⁶

From this it is plain that the virtue of religion can only be infused and cannot be acquired. So St. Thomas, at least, sees the matter. Religion requires charity; the infused virtue of charity is a necessary condition for possessing the virtue of religion in the first place. And charity is sufficient both for us to have the virtue of religion (since all the infused virtues are given along with charity) and for the virtue of

³⁴ ST II-II, q. 23, a. 8, resp.: “[P]er caritatem ordinantur actus omnium aliarum virtutum ad ultimum finem. Et secundum hoc ipsa dat formam actibus omnium aliarum virtutum.”

³⁵ ST I-II, q. 65, a. 3, resp.: “Charity . . . is the source of every good work that can be ordered to the ultimate end. Therefore it is necessary that all the moral virtues, by which the human being fully carries out each different kind of good work, be infused together with charity” (“[C]aritas, inquantum ordinat hominem ad finem ultimum, est principium omnium bonorum operum quae in finem ultimum ordinari possunt. Unde oportet quod cum caritate simul infundantur omnes virtutes morales, quibus homo perficit singula genera bonorum operum”). Conversely, “moral virtues of this [infused] kind cannot exist without charity” (ST I-II, q. 65, a. 2, resp.: “[H]uiusmodi virtutes morales sine caritate esse non possunt”).

³⁶ The need (or not) for infused moral virtues remained a subject of vehement controversy well into early modern theology. Here, as on a number of other matters, Thomists (eventually including Jesuits, Carmelites, and others, as well as Dominicans) were ranged against Scotists (typically Franciscans) in often highly intricate, and sometimes bitter, argument. Already in the late Middle Ages, John Capreolus (d. 1444) defended St. Thomas’s view against the criticisms of Scotus and others; Cardinal Cajetan (d. 1534) later did the same at less length. There is an English translation of the section of John Capreolus’s *Defensiones* that treats this question in *On the Virtues*, trans. Kevin White and Romanus Cessario, O.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 299–376. For Cajetan, see (among others) his commentary on ST I-II, q. 63, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 6:409–410). Scotist ripostes were numerous and forceful. See, e.g., John Punch (Pontius or Poncius, d. 1661), *Commentarii theologicii quibus Io: Duns Scoti questiones . . . elucidantur, & illustrantur*, vol. 4 (Paris: Simeon Piget, 1661), 386–92, 506–518 (reprinted in the Wadding-Vivès edition of Scotus, vol. 15 [Paris: Vivès, 1894], 482–93, 701–25), and Angelo Volpi (Angelus Vulpes, d. 1647), *Sacrae theologiae summa Ioannis Duns Scoti . . . et commentaria*, pt. 2, vol. 3 (Naples: Lazarus Scorigium, 1635), 110–114 (disp. 118, a. 3).

religion to attain, in its way, the final end of human life: God under the aspect of the one to whom we owe the highest honor and the surrender or subjection of our whole self. A virtue we can have only if we have charity, and of which charity makes use in attaining the ultimate end of human life, is for St. Thomas an infused virtue by definition. So religion, for St. Thomas, is by definition an infused virtue, a supernatural gift. Whatever may be the case with the other moral virtues and their acts, only they can possess the virtue of religion and undertake its acts who are in a state of grace, living in friendship with God. For St. Thomas, in other words, the virtue of religion is possible only among the baptized, whether by water, desire, or blood—that is, only among Christians.

It might be objected that all the moral virtues require charity for their perfection and the attainment of the ultimate end, yet genuine (if imperfect) moral virtues can be acquired, and not only infused. So it is in other cases; why not in the case of religion?³⁷

In Thomas's lexicon, infused moral virtues aim at the ultimate good for human beings and require charity, while acquired moral virtues aim at a proximate good and do not require charity. If we divide up the moral virtues in this way, then in many cases, there can be both infused and acquired virtues concerned with the same sort of thing, virtues, that is, of the same genus (but not in every case).

Justice, for example, is concerned with what we owe to another. The welfare of the country or society in which we live is a proximate good, and in justice we owe a genuine debt to the state. Acquired justice is, or includes, the disposition to pay this debt as a penultimate good. Courage, or fortitude, concerns what we fear and what we may venture in the face of what we fear. Courage, the virtuous disposition to act for the greater good in the face of our fears (say, in military service to our country), can likewise be acquired. Religion, as we have seen, concerns the honor and subjection we owe to God alone as the supreme good. What, then, would *acquired* religion be? Acquired virtues

³⁷ Dispositions to seek what Aquinas calls proximate or particular goods, such as the welfare of one's country, are clearly virtues, even if they lack the perfection that comes from charity. "If a particular good is a genuine good, for example the preservation of the commonwealth, or something of this kind, then [the disposition that seeks it] will be a genuine virtue, but an imperfect one, since it does not aim at the final and perfect good" (*ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 7, resp.: "Si vero illud bonum particulare sit verum bonum, puta conservatio civitatis vel aliquid huiusmodi, erit quidem vera virtus, sed imperfecta, nisi referatur ad finale et perfectum bonum").

are ordered to proximate or penultimate ends. But in this case, there can be no proximate or penultimate end. There can be, obviously, no proximate good to which we are ordered as the supreme good, no proximate source of our life to which we are ordered as the total cause of our existence, no penultimate guide in our lives to which we are ordered as the providential governor of all that is. Religion is simply the disposition to offer to God what we owe in justice to him alone. While there can be an acquired justice with regard to creatures, there can be no acquired justice—religion—with regard to God. What we owe to God alone cannot, naturally, be offered rightly to anyone save God alone. We can and do offer to countless others besides God alone what we owe only to him, but to do so is not the act of an acquired virtue that rightly honors as God some penultimate good. It is the vice of idolatry, acquired by our own effort, as all vices must be.

The doctrinal and theological motivations for finding an acquired virtue of religion in Aquinas are not medieval, but distinctively modern. The Second Vatican Council firmly established as Catholic teaching the universal availability of salvation through Christ (in *Gaudium et Spes* §22, for example) and the presence, real if partial, of spiritual truth and goodness in non-Christian religions (especially in *Nostra Aetate*). These doctrinal developments did not come out of nowhere, but were the fruit of long reflection and debate, reaching back to early modernity and the Church's formative encounters with the native peoples of the new world and the traditional religions of Asia.

Though it cannot claim a similarly explicit doctrinal mandate, modern Catholic theology has also been widely concerned to find a natural and universal, or at least universally available, human religiosity. This universal human religious inclination, so the argument goes, can serve as the background the Christian message must have in order to be intelligible and plausible to those who hear it, the soil the Gospel needs in order to grow.

On both counts, Thomas has naturally been a frequent recourse. In apologetics, fundamental theology, soteriology, or the theology of religions, there has been a potent motive for seeing in this long discussion of religion an acquired, and not only an infused, virtue.

Arguments to these ends can take many forms, but the basic strategy is to root the acquisition of religion in the natural human desires for truth, goodness, and (perhaps especially) happiness. Using the resources native to his intellect and will, every human being who has the use of these powers can acquire what Thomas calls a *cultus*, or what we call a religion. It may be the only *cultus* available to him in his social context,

or he may choose among several available religions in quest of the one most conducive to his happiness. Vicious cultic practices may be acquired in this way (the Nuremberg rallies, for example), but it is quite possible to acquire virtuous practices as well, which genuinely aim at human happiness. The disposition to engage in such practices constitutes an acquired virtue of religion. Even by an acquired religion, a person begins to offer God the honor and subjection all creatures owe him as their ultimate beginning and end. An acquired religion can thus inaugurate a human being's movement toward God as last end. Christianity perfects this movement and, at the same time, rightly appeals to the acquired religion in order to exhibit its own supreme attractions.

Whatever the theological merits of positing a naturally available virtue of religion along these lines, this notion is not, I think, to be found in the teaching of St. Thomas. Seen in light of his distinction between infused and acquired virtues and his account of charity's relation to the rest of the virtues, Thomas's whole elaborate discussion of "religion" in questions 81–100 of the *Secunda secundae* of the *Summa* concerns only an infused virtue. There can, of course, be an acquired *cultus* in Thomas's view, but (by definition) it will lack infused faith and charity. As a result, it will fail to honor "the supreme uncreated God alone," but will instead offer the honor and submission due only to God to someone or something else. It will be a vice, not an act of the virtue of religion.

Our tendency to conflate the descriptive and normative uses of the term "religion" contributes to confusion at this point. For us, a descriptive use of "religion" is second nature, and it leads us to apply the term much more widely than Aquinas usually does. When we go on to view "religion" as essentially a good (here in agreement with Aquinas), the way is open to seeing a genuine virtue wherever "religion" is found. And so we may assume that Aquinas's questions on religion are basically talking about a naturally accessible virtue, real but imperfect and looking to be brought to fulfillment by the Gospel and infused charity. Thomas, though, deliberately distinguishes these two uses of "religion" and makes it clear that he usually employs the normative one. Countless forms of worship that we (and occasionally Thomas himself) describe as "religion" are not, from the normative point of view afforded by his account of religion and its place among the virtues, practices attesting to a real if imperfect virtue of religion. For him, they belong not to religion at all, but to superstition and idolatry.

Scotus's view of the virtues, in fact, comports much better with the idea of an acquired virtue of religion than St. Thomas's does and

would more readily serve the theological motives that make the idea seem necessary than would Thomas's own. For Scotus, infused charity can perfect naturally available virtues and their acts, drawing them up to the ultimate end of human life. This includes, at least in principle, many kinds of *cultus* or religiosity naturally available apart from Christian faith and baptism, and virtuous as far as they go.³⁸ For Aquinas it does not. Charity perfects the acts of infused virtues, which require charity itself and, so, are not naturally available apart from Christian faith and baptism.

These observations raise important and difficult questions about whether, and in what ways, Aquinas may see salvation as available to non-Christians. That Aquinas (or Scotus, for that matter) lived in a world that saw considerably fewer ways to be a "non-Christian" than we do, and in which "non-Christian" often had connotations quite different than it is likely to have for us, compounds the difficulty.³⁹ My purpose here is not to decide these questions, but to make a more limited point. However salvation may be available to non-Christians for St. Thomas, it will not come to them by perfecting a naturally available virtue of religion. On his view, whatever we make of non-Christian religions, we cannot see them as instances or developments of natural human virtue. And since there cannot be an acquired virtue of religion, no human *cultus* can be a naturally available good serving as background for the intelligibility or attractiveness of Christianity.

Can Grace Perfect Natural Religion?

The idea of an acquired virtue of religion finds much of its theological appeal in the thought that it can be perfected or completed by the Gospel and the grace the Gospel brings. Seen as an inchoate movement toward God open to any human being, an acquired religious disposition offers both a theological reason for finding value, including a kind of saving value, in non-Christian religions and an explanation for why grace and charity are, nonetheless, necessary if naturally available human religiosity is to attain its true goal. Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it (the one Thomistic axiom, perhaps, that no Catholic theologian today would think to deny). It may thus seem

³⁸ Whether Scotus himself leaves room for worship or other religious practices among naturally available virtuous acts susceptible to perfection by charity is, of course, another matter, which I will not pursue here.

³⁹ On this, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., "Saint Thomas et les non-chrétiens," *Revue thomiste* 106 (2006): 17–49.

inescapable that a naturally available religiosity provide the basis on which Christian proclamation and supernatural faith in the Gospel can build, the religious “nature” upon which the grace of faith, hope, and charity must work in order to perfect it.

For Aquinas, though, even if there could be an acquired virtue of religion, grace and charity could not perfect it. The religion that contributes to our attainment of God would still have to be infused, so it is pointless to posit an acquired virtue of religion. This conclusion stems from the logic of Aquinas’s distinction between infused and acquired virtues, and so is worth tracing from its source.

Thomas’s idea that moral virtues can be infused as well as acquired depends on the claim that an infused moral virtue differs in kind (in species, as he puts it) from the eponymous acquired virtue. Infused temperance, for example, is a different virtue from acquired temperance.⁴⁰ Similarly, infused justice will be different in kind—a different justice—than any we can acquire by our own acts, and infused religion would be different in kind from religion gained by habituation from our own acts (if there were such a thing). This rules out the thought that the infused virtue of religion is one and the same as a naturally available virtue now perfected by grace and charity. Infused moral virtues are not more intense and complete realizations of those that can be acquired, but rather, for Thomas, make up a distinct family of virtues with different objects and different acts from any that an acquired virtue can have or undertake. Temperance is his standard example of this distinction in kind. “[I]nfused temperance assigns due measure to the desire for tactile delights in a different way than acquired temperance. . . . hence they do not have the same act.”⁴¹

We have already seen that, for Thomas, infused and acquired virtues differ both in their causes (divine action, human action) and their ends (the ultimate good, proximate goods). But when it comes to virtues of the same genus—roughly, those concerned with the same class of goods to be pursued and evils to be avoided—the clearest way of distinguishing the infused from the acquired is by reference to their different “formal objects.” Thomas’s use of the term “object” may suggest an entity of some sort, a particular with which human acts and capacities can be engaged. That is in fact what he means when he

⁴⁰ See *ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 4, resp.

⁴¹ *ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 4, ad 2: “[A]lia ratione modificat concupiscentias delectabilium tactus temperantia acquisita et temperantia infusa . . . unde non habent eundem actum.”

speaks of a “material object,” but a “formal object” is not an entity or particular as such. Rather, it is an aspect or feature that brings the entity within the purview of a human act or capacity. The formal object of the power to see, for example, is color. Anything could be the material object of sight, as long as it has the feature of being colored; in virtue of being colored, entities, whether men, donkeys, or stones, fall within the range, the “formal object,” of the human power of sight.⁴²

The matter of a moral virtue is desire; specifically, in the case of temperance, the desire elicited by what we can touch or taste. This common “material object” defines the genus, as it were, of temperance, of which the acquired and infused virtues are different species. As a moral virtue, temperance’s formal object is the virtuous mean in accord with which practical reason modifies and shapes the desires of touch and taste, and the actions stemming from them, so as to avoid both excess and defect. At just this point, infused temperance has a different formal object from acquired temperance, and so is a different virtue. The mean for tactile desire discerned by human reason is not the same as the mean imposed by divine law. When it comes to food, for example, reason bids us to eat the right amount to keep up the strength and health of our body, whereas “the norm of divine law requires that a person ‘chasten his body and bring it into submission’ (1 Cor 9:27) by abstinence from food and drink and other things of this sort. Thus, it is obvious that infused and acquired temperance differ in kind, and the same goes for the other [moral] virtues.”⁴³

⁴² ST I, q. 1, a. 3, resp.: “Est enim unitas potentiae et habitus consideranda secundum obiectum, non quidem materialiter, sed secundum rationem formalem obiecti, puta homo, asinus et lapis conveniunt in una formali ratione colorati, quod est obiectum visus.”

⁴³ The whole passage runs as follows: “Habits are distinguished in kind . . . according to the specific and formal characters of their objects. Now, the object of any given virtue is the good considered in some particular matter, as the object of temperance is the good in respect of the pleasures connected with tactile desire. The formal character of this object comes from reason, which establishes a mean in these desires, whereas the material character of the object belongs to the desires themselves. Now, it is clear that the mean imposed on these desires by the rule of human reason is different in character from the mean imposed by divine rule. For instance, in the consumption of food, the mean established by human reason is that the consumption of food should not harm the health of the body or impede the act of reason, whereas the norm of divine law requires that a person ‘chasten his body and bring it into submission’ (1 Cor 9:27) by abstinence from food and drink, and other things of this sort. Thus, it is obvious that infused and acquired temperance differ in kind, and the same goes for the other [moral] virtues” (ST I-II, q. 63,

As the example of temperance makes plain, infused and naturally acquired virtues oriented to the same matter are not only different in kind, but can be opposed to one another. Regular fasting to the point of hunger enacts the infused virtue of temperance, instilling as it does a proper disregard for this passing world and encouraging the temperate soul to long for eternal, imperishable goods. By the standard of acquired temperance, this degree of self-denial is not the virtuous mean in what delights our taste, but a want of proper care for the welfare of one's own body. Conversely the three square meals per day commended by acquired temperance can, in the light of the infused virtue, be an excess amounting to gluttony. "What civil [acquired] virtue regards as excessive is, according to infused virtue, rightly measured—for example that a human being fasts and voluntarily offers herself up to death in defense of the faith."⁴⁴

St. Thomas's reference to martyrdom here helps to explain why acquired moral virtues cannot, as he divides the matter up, be completed by or transformed into infused ones. The virtue disclosed by martyrdom is fortitude, or courage. In fact, martyrdom is the chief or supreme act of this virtue, the act that reveals fortitude at its highest pitch, in its purest and most paradigmatic form. "Regarding fortitude [is] to be considered . . . its principal act, namely martyrdom."⁴⁵

If martyrdom is its chief act, then the fortitude under discussion

a. 4, resp.: "[H]abitus distinguuntur specie uno modo . . . secundum speciales et formales rationes obiectorum. Obiectum autem virtutis cuiuslibet est bonum consideratum in materia propria, sicut temperantiae obiectum est bonum delectabile in concupiscentiis tactus. Cuius quidem obiecti formalis ratio est a ratione, quae instituit modum in his concupiscentiis, materiale autem est id quod est ex parte concupiscentiarum. Manifestum est autem quod alterius rationis est modus qui imponitur in huiusmodi concupiscentiis secundum regulam rationis humanae, et secundum regulam divinam. Puta in sumptione ciborum, ratione humana modus statuitur ut non noceat valetudini corporis, nec impediatur rationis actum, secundum autem regulam legis divinae, requiritur quod homo 'castiget corpus suum, et in servitutem redigat' (1 Cor. 9:27), per abstinentionem cibi et potus, et aliorum huiusmodi. Unde manifestum est quod temperantia infusa et acquisita differunt specie, et eadem ratio est de aliis virtutibus").

⁴⁴ *In III Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 4, ad 2: "[A]liquid superfluum secundum virtutem civilem est moderatum secundum virtutem infusam, sicut quod homo ieiunet, et se voluntarie morti offerat propter defensionem fidei" (*Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, vol. 3, ed. M. F. Moos, O.P. [Paris: Lethielleux, 1933], 1031[no. 77]).

⁴⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 123, prooem.: "Circa fortitudinem autem considerata sunt tria: primo quidem, de ipsa fortitudine; secundo, de actu praecipuo eius, scilicet de martyrio; tertio, de vitiis oppositis."

here, the third of the four cardinal virtues to which Thomas devotes the bulk of the *Secunda secundae*, is a virtue only a Christian can possess. This virtue elicits as its principal act, after all, what only a Christian can do. The martyr is willing to die for the highest truth—God as he makes himself known to Christian faith—and the highest justice, precisely that divine justice or righteousness, Aquinas observes, which comes to us through faith in Christ.⁴⁶ The act of martyrdom requires not only the divinely given virtue of faith, but also the virtue of charity. Just as the various acts of religion presuppose, and ultimately are elicited by, not only faith and hope, but also charity, so also the supreme act of courage is, in the end, an act of infused charity.⁴⁷ In fact, it is the most perfect act of charity, the supreme and paradigmatic act of Christian virtue. Out of love for the God in whom she believes and the neighbor whom she serves, the martyr freely gives up what is most dear to her, as to each of us, in this world—her own life—rather than depart from faith and justice. “An act of virtue can be considered with respect to what first of all moves it, which is the love of charity. . . . Among all virtuous acts, martyrdom most of all exhibits the perfection of charity. . . . [A]mong all human acts martyrdom is the most perfect in kind, since it is a sign of the greatest charity. As John 15[:13] says, greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 124, a. 2, ad 1: “Gratuitous fortitude strengthens the soul of man in the good of divine justice, which is ‘through faith in Jesus Christ,’ as is said in Romans 3:22. Thus martyrdom is related to faith as the end in which one is strengthened, but to fortitude as the habit that elicits the act” (“[F]ortitudo gratuita firmat animum hominis in bono iustitiae Dei, quae est per fidem Iesu Christi, ut dicitur Rom. 3[:22]. Et sic martyrium comparatur ad fidem sicut ad finem in quo aliquis firmatur: ad fortitudinem autem sicut ad habitum elicentem”). On God as formal object of faith under the aspect of first truth (*veritas prima*), see (among others) *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 1. I discuss this point in some detail in my essays “Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Aquinas and Luther on Deciding What is True,” *The Thomist* 63.1 (1999): 1–48, and “Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian,” *The Thomist* 53.3 (1989): 353–402.

⁴⁷ On the way the acts of religion depend on infused faith and charity, see above, [6]–[7].

⁴⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 124, a. 3, resp.: “An act of virtue can be considered with respect to what first of all moves it, which is the love of charity. . . . Among all virtuous acts, martyrdom most of all exhibits the perfection of charity, since the degree of a person’s love for a thing is demonstrated by the dearness of that which he despises for its sake or by the odiousness of that which he chooses to suffer for its sake. But it is evident that, among all the goods of the present life, man loves life itself most, and on the other hand he hates death more than anything, especially when it is accompanied by the sufferings of bodily torment, from fear of which even brute animals ‘abstain from the greatest pleasures,’ as Augus-

There can be an acquired virtue of fortitude because, unlike religion, fortitude does not have the ultimate end as its sole possible aim. Acquired courage will be different in its formal object and its end from the infused virtue of fortitude, which is Thomas's main concern. Not moved by faith and charity, it will be a partial and imperfect fortitude, but still a genuine virtue ordered to a real good. Neither this acquired virtue nor its act, however, will be perfected by Christian faith and charity. Rather, the two will coexist in the same breast, acts and virtues different in kind from one another.

The common matter of fortitude, whether acquired or infused, is whatever arouses fear in us or, at the opposite extreme, audacity or daring. The formal object of fortitude will thus be the mean between cowardice and recklessness; fortitude will hold fear in check and moderate daring.⁴⁹ Acquired or "civil" fortitude, therefore, has as its formal object firmness or perseverance in what Aquinas calls "human justice."⁵⁰ Its end will be the common good, in particular the peace, of the *respublica* or society to which one belongs, and its chief act will be readiness to die in the just cause of the *respublica*, especially in battle.⁵¹ The formal object of infused fortitude, by contrast, is perseverance in

tine says (in the book *83 Questions*). And on account of this, it is clear that, among all human acts, martyrdom is the most perfect in kind, as the sign of the greatest charity, according to John 15[:13]: 'greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends' ("[P]otest considerari actus virtutis secundum quod comparatur ad primum motivum, quod est amor caritatis. . . . Martyrium autem, inter omnes actus virtuosos, maxime demonstrat perfectionem caritatis. Quia tanto magis ostenditur aliquis aliquam rem amare, quanto pro ea rem magis amatam contemnit, et rem magis odiosam eligit pati. Manifestum est autem quod inter omnia alia bona praesentis vitae, maxime amat homo ipsam vitam, et e contrario maxime odit ipsam mortem, et praecipue cum doloribus corporalium tormentorum, quorum metu etiam bruta animalia 'a maximis voluptatibus absterrentur,' ut Augustinus dicit, in libro Octoginta trium Quaest. Et secundum hoc patet quod martyrrium inter ceteros actus humanos est perfectior secundum suum genus, quasi maximae caritatis signum, secundum illud Ioan. 15, 'maiores caritatem nemo habet quam ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis'"). On the respective roles of charity and courage in bringing about the martyr's act, see also *ibid.*, a. 2, ad 2: charity is the "first and principle motive" (*primum et principale motivum*) of martyrdom, and necessary (as in the case of any virtuous undertaking) for the act to be meritorious, and so attain God as last end. Apart from charity there can be no genuine martyrdom: "sine caritate non valet" (cf. 1 Cor 13:3).

⁴⁹ See *ST* II-II, q. 123, a. 3, resp.

⁵⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 124, a. 2, ad 1: "[F]ortitudo civilis firmat animum hominis in iustitia humana."

⁵¹ See *ST* II-II, q. 123, a. 5, resp. and ad 3; q. 124, a. 5, ad 3.

divine truth, the secrets of his inmost life that God makes known to us through faith in Christ and in divine justice, imparted to us through faith.⁵² Its end is *protestatio* of this faith, a witness to others of the truth that is in Christ and, with that, the upbuilding of the divine *respublica*, the community of those who are “fellow citizens of the saints and of the household of God” (cf. Eph 2:19).⁵³ Its chief act, as we have seen, is martyrdom. Aquinas sums up the matter: “The cause of martyrdom is twofold: the honor of God, and the salvation of the neighbor.”⁵⁴

Graced and civil fortitude can coexist. This is among the basic points of Thomas’s insistence that infused and acquired moral virtues differ in kind and not simply in degree.⁵⁵ But the infused virtue and its acts are

⁵² ST II-II, q. 124, a. 5, resp.: “The martyrs are called witnesses because, by their bodily sufferings unto death, they give testimony to the truth—not to just any truth, but to the truth which is according to godliness, which was made known to us through Christ; hence they are called martyrs of Christ, that is, his witnesses” (“[M]artyres dicuntur quasi testes, quia scilicet corporalibus suis passionibus usque ad mortem testimonium perhibent veritati, non cuicumque, sed veritati quae secundum pietatem est [cf. 1 Tim. 6:3, Tit. 1:1], quae per Christum nobis innotuit; unde et martyres Christi dicuntur, quasi testes ipsius”). On faith as knowledge of the innermost secrets of God, see *Super Ioan.* 15, lec. 3: “Now God reveals his secrets to us by making us partakers of his wisdom” (“Deus autem faciendo nos participes suae sapientiae, sua secreta nobis revelat”) (*Super S. Thomae Aquinatis Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 5th ed. [Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1952], no. 2016; Paragraph numbers in all references to Thomas’s *Lecturae* on John are from this Marietti edition); and ST I, q. 1, a. 6, resp. On the justice peculiar to faith, see the text cited in note 46 above.

⁵³ Thus, an infused virtue differs from its acquired counterpart (if there is one) not only by having a different formal object, but by having a different, and immeasurably higher, end. “In this way the infused moral virtues, by which human beings are rightly ordered to being ‘fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,’ differ in kind from the acquired virtues, by which a human is rightly ordered to human affairs” (ST I-II, q. 63, a. 4, resp.: “Et per hunc etiam modum differunt specie virtutes morales infusae, per quas homines bene se habent in ordine ad hoc quod sint ‘cives sanctorum et domestici Dei’ [Eph. 2:19]; et aliae virtutes acquisitae, secundum quas homo se bene habet in ordine ad res humanas”). At this point, the logic of the distinction between acquired and infused virtues is the same as that between natural or human law and divine law. Cf. the texts cited in note 27 above.

⁵⁴ *Super II Tim.* 2, lec. 2: “Duplex autem est causa martyrii, scilicet propter divinum honorem, et salutem proximi” (Marietti, vol. 2, no. 52).

⁵⁵ One way by which Thomas argues that infused and acquired virtues must be different in kind is by observing that the adult, who approaches the font with virtues already acquired, receives in baptism the same full panoply of infused virtues as the infant who has not yet been able to acquire any. This baptismal infusion does not alter the acquired virtues, but it gives the newly reborn adult

not the perfection or intensification of the acquired ones. Martyrdom is not a more perfect way of dying for one's country. Dying for the earthly *respublica* is not martyrdom at all, but a different kind of act with a different end; no matter how virtuous and just, it will never become martyrdom.

So it is with devotion, prayer, sacrifice, and the other acts of the virtue of religion. Since they depend on the infused virtues of faith and charity, sacrifice and the acts allied to it can no more be the work of an acquired virtue of religion than martyrdom can be the work of acquired courage. Even if, counterfactually, there could be an acquired virtue of religion, this virtue and its acts of prayer, sacrifice, and so forth would not be augmented or perfected by the infused virtue of religion that comes with baptism.

Rather, these two, the religion infused with baptism and a hypothetical virtue acquired by practice, would coexist like infused and acquired fortitude. The Christian would be the practitioner of two religions: the worship of the triune God and whatever *cultus* of whatever deity he had acquired from his natural instincts and his environment. He would offer prayer and sacrifice to the triune God according to that God's revealed law and stemming from the infused virtue of religion, and he would offer prayer and sacrifice to the gods of his tribe, class, or *civitas* according to local custom and as acts of the acquired virtue of religion. Thomas, of course, does not distinguish these two *cultus* as infused religion and acquired religion, but as infused religion and false religion, or idolatry. If we think there needs to be a real distinction between infused and acquired moral virtues, then religion, as we have seen, can be numbered only among those infused.

An act of civil fortitude can be the *occasion* for martyrdom, but this should not be mixed up with the idea that the infused virtue or its act completes or perfects the acquired one. Take, for example, St. Thomas More. He willingly died, we may suppose, both for the good of his

moral virtues of a higher kind, with which his previously existing acquired virtues can continue to coexist. Cf. *In III Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 4, sc 2: "Two forms of the same kind cannot be in one and the same subject. But an infused virtue [can] exist together with an acquired virtue, as is obvious in the case of an adult who approaches baptism with acquired virtue, and receives no fewer infused virtues than a child. Therefore acquired virtue and infused virtue differ in kind" (Moos, 1027 [no. 55]: "[D]uae formae ejusdem speciei non possunt esse in uno subjecto. Sed virtus infusa est simul cum virtute acquisita, ut patet in adulto qui habens virtutem acquisitam ad baptismum accedit, qui non minus recipit de infusis quam puer. Ergo virtus acquisita et infusa differunt specie").

country (“I am the king’s good servant”) and out of love for Christ and his Church (“but God’s first”). On Aquinas’s analysis, these are not one and the same act of fortitude looked at in two different ways, but two distinct acts of fortitude undertaken by the same agent. Dying for one’s country does not become an act of martyrdom because it is the act of a Christian, of a person living in charity.⁵⁶ Nor does one and the same act of dying for one’s country mutate, when charity takes hold, into a deed of a different kind, becoming no longer an act of mere civil courage, but the far more perfect act of martyrdom. There is no eliminating the difference between the end of acquired fortitude (the good of a human community) and the end of infused fortitude (the good of the *civitas Dei*). Having different ends, their acts must differ in kind, and *a fortiori* in number.⁵⁷

Speaking of the possible causes of martyrdom, Aquinas observes that any “human good can be rendered divine, if it is referred to God.” The well-being of the earthly *respublica* and the virtue that seeks its well-being even under the threat of death are “human goods.” These human goods are “referred to God” when they are brought under the regime of faith and charity, which know God as first truth and love him as last end. Such goods do not cease to be “human,” a limited, penultimate end and an acquired virtue, when they are thus “referred to God.” This is not what Aquinas means by “rendered divine.” But

⁵⁶ Thus, Aquinas observes, the Church does not venerate as martyrs Christians who die in the just cause of their country. See *ST* II-II, q. 124, a. 5, obj. 3.

⁵⁷ Some complexities lurk here that space prevents us from pursuing. A fuller account of this matter would need to consider Thomas’s complex theory of the human act, and in particular of how acts are individuated. Among the distinctions that structure his theory is that between elicited and commanded acts, e.g., willing to walk and actually walking (for a succinct account of this distinction, see *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; on its structural significance, see *ST* I-II, q. 6, proem.). One could employ this distinction to say that St. Thomas More laid down his life only once. Giving his life is, in one very basic sense, a single act—say, the act of putting his neck on the block, or more broadly of accepting death under the circumstances of his time and place. But, on Aquinas’s account, it is a single act commanded by two different virtues, namely, acquired fortitude and infused fortitude. Each of these virtuous habits, moreover, elicits its own characteristic act, an initial interior willing: civil fortitude, the act of willing to accept death for the good of the *respublica*; infused fortitude, the act of willing to die out of love for Christ, as a witness to faith in him and his saving justice. In the terms familiar from contemporary moral philosophy, Aquinas’s view seems close to saying that a martyr like Thomas More undertakes one and the same act for two irreducibly different reasons, and out of two irreducibly different motives.

when “referred to God,” these human goods can be the cause of—that is, the occasion for—an act of an entirely different order, one beyond the reach of any “human” ability. They might, perhaps, then become a cause for the Christian to lay down his life out of love for God and his other friends.⁵⁸

Religion and Natural Law

At one point in his discussion of religion and its acts, Aquinas appears to blur his own distinction between infused and acquired virtues. He holds that natural law teaches us of the need to offer sacrifice to God and that it belongs among the dictates of natural reason that “the human being use various sensible realities, offering them to God as a sign of the subjection and honor we owe to him.”⁵⁹ Sacrifice is among the chief acts of the virtue of religion; it visibly embodies that interior submission to and reverence for God in which *religio* itself consists. Like all the cultic acts of religion, sacrifice may rightly be offered only to the true God—*solī summo Deo*.⁶⁰ Every human being, moreover, is under obligation to offer sacrifice, since this obligation belongs to the law of nature and, consequently, is binding on all.⁶¹

What nature enjoins is always good and right as far as it goes. From this it seems to follow that every human being is in a position to offer right sacrifice to the true God, regardless of whether she knows anything of the cultic law God has in fact given to guide the worship of his chosen people. God requires this of us all by way of the natural law, so surely it must be possible for all of us to do it. Some, of course, may fail to fulfill this obligation of nature, but all have in their nature and their human environment resources sufficient to fulfill it. “Those who are under the law are required to offer certain specific sacrifices according to the precepts of the law. Those who were not under the

⁵⁸ The quoted phrases are from *ST* II-II, q. 124, a. 5, ad 3: “[B]onum reipublicae est praecipuum inter bona humana. Sed bonum divinum, quod est propria causa martyrii, est potius quam humanum. Quia tamen bonum humanum potest effici divinum, ut si referatur in Deum, potest esse quodcumque bonum humanum martyrii causa secundum quod in Deum refertur.” On “referatur in Deum” as coming to be “sub mandato caritatis,” see *ST* I-II, q. 100, a. 10, ad 2.

⁵⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 85, a. 1, resp.: “[E]x naturali ratione procedit quod homo quibusdam sensibilibus rebus utatur, offerens eas Deo in signum debitae subiectionis et honoris.”

⁶⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 85, a. 2, resp.; *SCG* III, ch. 120 (especially no. 2926). See note 8 above.

⁶¹ *ST* II-II, q. 85, a. 4, sc: “[S]acrificium offerre est de lege naturae. . . . Ad ea autem quae sunt legis naturae omnes tenentur.”

law were required to undertake outward actions for the divine honor according to the customs of those among whom they lived, but were not bound specifically to one action or another.”⁶²

Some contemporary readers of Thomas, especially those motivated by the apologetic worries to which I have already alluded, will see in these passages on sacrifice ample proof that Thomas does think there is a virtue of religion naturally available to all, since by nature all have enjoined on them an obligation to engage in one of the primary acts of religion.

So one might think, if these passages were read in isolation from the rest of what St. Thomas says about the virtue of religion. But when they are seen in that broader light, the matter becomes rather less straightforward. In fact, it is hard to see how we could square this way of reading Thomas’s claim that natural law imposes an obligation to offer sacrifice with his claims that the virtue of religion can only be present where there is supernatural faith and charity and that infused virtues differ in kind from those that can be acquired, even when they deal with the same matter. These claims, as we have seen, categorically rule out an acquired virtue of religion and, thereby, the idea that any act of the virtue of religion, including sacrifice, could be accomplished by the application of our natural powers in our natural and social surroundings.

It may be, of course, that Thomas is simply inconsistent at this point, that the empirically universal human penchant for offering sacrifices to gods has led him down a path opposed to the one he laid out in his treatment of the distinction between infused and acquired virtue and of the dependence of the moral virtues on charity. Traditionally, Thomists have not fled from the thought that Thomas might be inconsistent. In fact, they have drawn up long lists of apparent inconsistencies in the text of Thomas, most notably the enumeration of more than 1,200 *dubia* and responses compiled by Peter of Bergamo and included in his *Tabula Aurea* (first published 1475). The purpose of these lists was to locate difficulties in the hope of confronting them and resolving them. Perhaps we can do that here.

In this case, the appearance of contradiction depends on the assumption, in reading Thomas on sacrifice and natural law, that whatever

⁶² ST II-II, q. 85, a. 4, resp.: “[I]lli qui sunt sub lege, tenentur ad determinata sacrificia offerenda secundum legis praecepta. Illi vero qui non erant sub lege, tenebantur ad aliqua exterius facienda in honorem divinum, secundum condecetiam ad eos inter quos habitabant: non autem determinate ad haec vel ad illa.” Cf. *ibid.*, ad 1.

belongs to natural law is universally accessible to human reason. Natural law requires every human being to offer sacrifice to the one true God. Every human being, on such an assumption, must therefore be capable of knowing this binding obligation and fulfilling it. So it must be possible to acquire the disposition to offer right sacrifice to God—that is, the virtue of religion. Yet Aquinas seems to deny this.

Aquinas, however, does not share this high view of the epistemic availability of nature, and in particular of the natural law. It represents a characteristically modern take on our knowledge of the natural, vigorously advocated by Locke and others on moral as well as epistemological grounds. Modernity, in fact, seems to see the very ideas of nature and natural law as inherently epistemic. What belongs to nature or natural law is what can be known to be universal among human beings or to be universally recognized among human beings as morally binding (hence the increasing despair in late modernity over the very ideas of human nature and natural law).

For Thomas, this epistemic optimism about nature and natural law is unwarranted and excessive, not only in view of sin and its epistemic effects (a topic I will touch on only briefly below), but in view of the mind's natural way of grasping moral principles and acting on them. As he sees it, natural law is not an epistemic concept. What belongs to natural law is not what is empirically universal (or universally recognized), but what human nature inclines us to desire or seek, and so what human reason, the *differentia* that specifies our animal nature, requires or “dictates” is to be done or to be avoided.⁶³ This is clearly a normative, rather than a descriptive, idea of natural reason, and so of natural law. What belongs to the natural moral law may be very widely, even universally, exemplified, but that is not what *makes* it part of the natural law. A moral precept, in Thomas's terms, belongs to natural law because it is not simply compatible with natural reason (as, for example, all human positive law ought to be), but at least indirectly required by it. Since the notion of natural law is not inherently epistemic—access

⁶³ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 3, resp.: “To the law of nature belongs everything to which a human being is inclined according to his nature. Now each thing is inclined naturally to an operation that is suitable to it according to its form, as fire is inclined to give heat. Hence, since the rational soul is the proper form of a human being, there is in every human being a natural inclination to act according to reason” (“[A]d legem naturae pertinet omne illud ad quod homo inclinatur secundum suam naturam. Inclinatur autem unumquodque naturaliter ad operationem sibi convenientem secundum suam formam, sicut ignis ad calefaciendum. Unde cum anima rationalis sit propria forma hominis, naturalis inclinatio inest cuilibet homini ad hoc quod agat secundum rationem”).

to the law is not built into what makes it either natural or binding—it makes perfectly good sense to ask how we know the natural law and to answer, as Aquinas does, that different parts of the natural law are known in different ways.

This is decisive for understanding Aquinas on sacrifice as an obligation belonging to natural law. When he considers, for example, “the moral precepts of the old law” (that is, the Decalogue), Aquinas begins by asking whether these belong without remainder to “the law of nature.” They do, he replies, in the sense that they all in fact follow from the first principles of practical reason (beginning with “good is to be sought and evil avoided”) and that we acknowledge these first principles by nature.⁶⁴ But how do we *know* that the moral precepts making up the Decalogue follow from the first principles of practical reason, and so belong to the natural law?

Diversimode is Thomas’s reply. In some cases, what we are to do (or not) is immediately obvious “to the natural reason of every human being,” for example, that murder or theft are not to be done. But we should not expect the same epistemic clarity with regard to every moral precept. Much of the content of “the natural law” is not directly accessible to us; it has to be taught. When it comes to our relations with other human beings, we often need the direction of those who are wiser and more experienced in moral matters than us to teach us, for example, that we should honor our elders. And when it comes to “divine things,” we have to be taught by God himself, educated by divine teaching concerning even our natural obligations to him. Idolatry, for example, is against the natural moral law. But we need God to teach us not to do it—that we should not make images and worship them.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, resp.: “Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum. Et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae.”

⁶⁵ ST I-II, q. 100, a. 1, resp.: “[Since] every judgment of human reason is derived in some way from natural reason, it is necessary that all the moral precepts belong to the law of nature, though in different ways. For there are some things that the natural reason of every human being immediately and of itself judges is to be done or not to be done: e.g. ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘You shalt not kill, You shalt not steal.’ Precepts of this kind belong to the law of nature absolutely. And there are some things that, after more careful consideration, are judged to be obligatory by the wise. These belong to the law of nature, but in such a way that they require the sort of teaching by which the young are instructed by the wise: e.g. ‘Stand up in the presence of a gray head,’ and ‘honor the elderly person,’ and the like. But there are some

The most basic precept of natural law concerning sacrifice might, then, be of the kind obvious enough to be known by all, or it might be of the kind requiring instruction to be known. To my knowledge, Thomas is not explicit about this either way. He characterizes the content of this precept, however, as follows: “Natural reason dictates to man that he be subject to some superior, because he is aware of his own deficiencies, on account of which he needs to be helped and guided by a superior. Whatever that may be”—whatever, in other words, human beings may look to for help and guidance they cannot themselves provide—“this is what everyone calls ‘God.’”⁶⁶ Nature further inclines us to exhibit our subjection to the superior whose help we seek, to honor what we look to for ultimate guidance in a way suited to our embodied nature.⁶⁷ And so we have natural reason’s dictate that we offer sacrifice to whatever it is upon which we pin our last hope. “The offering of sacrifice is a matter of natural right.”⁶⁸

As Thomas sees it, the precept that bids us to offer sacrifice to a superior is not immediately given to us, but comes as a conclusion inferred from prior premises. We therefore have good reason to think that it cannot be among those contents of natural law obvious enough to be available without instruction, whether human or divine. But let

things such that, in order to make a judgment about them, human reason needs divine instruction, through which we are taught about divine things: e.g. ‘You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any likeness; nor shall you take the name of your God in vain’” (“[O]mne autem rationis humanae iudicium aequaliter a naturali ratione derivatur; necesse est quod omnia praecepta moralia pertineant ad legem naturae, sed diversimode. Quaedam enim sunt quae statim per se ratio naturalis cuiuslibet hominis diiudicat esse facienda vel non facienda, sicut ‘honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam,’ et, ‘non occides, non furtum facies.’ Et huiusmodi sunt absolute de lege naturae. Quaedam vero sunt quae subtiliori consideratione rationis a sapientibus iudicantur esse observanda. Et ista sic sunt de lege naturae, ut tamen indigeant disciplina, qua minores a sapientioribus instruantur, sicut illud, ‘coram cano capite consurge,’ et ‘honora personam senis,’ et alia huiusmodi. Quaedam vero sunt ad quae iudicanda ratio humana indiget instructione divina, per quam erudimur de divinis, sicut est illud, ‘non facies tibi sculptile neque omnem similitudinem; non assumes nomen Dei tui in vanum’”).

⁶⁶ ST II-II, q. 85, a. 1, resp.: “[N]aturalis ratio dictat homini quod alicui superiori subdatur, propter defectus quos in seipso sentit, in quibus ab aliquo superiori eget adiuvari et dirigi. Et quidquid illud sit, hoc est quod apud omnes dicitur Deus.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.: “[N]aturalis ratio dictat homini secundum naturalem inclinationem ut ei quod est supra hominem subiectionem et honorem exhibeat secundum suum modum.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.: “Et ideo oblatio sacrificii pertinet ad ius naturale”

us assume for purposes of argument that the precept to offer sacrifice is universally obvious. Even so, awareness of the precept is no guarantee that we will correctly identify the superior to whom we ought to look for ultimate help and guidance. That superior is the triune God, who, under the aspect of true source, guide, and goal of our whole existence, alone ought to receive the sacrifice nature inclines us to offer.⁶⁹ Subjection to any other superior as ultimate source and goal is unowed (*indebitum*)—that is, unjust and, so, vicious.⁷⁰ As Aquinas observes, though, Scripture teaches that such undue subjection is pervasive, at least among the nations: “All the gods of the gentiles are demons” (Ps 95[96]:5), and “The gentiles offer sacrifice to demons, not to God” (1 Cor 10:20).⁷¹ It is quite possible, in other words, to follow nature’s inclination and the corresponding precept yet aim our sacrifice at someone or something other than the triune God. Otherwise, idolatry would be impossible, which, as Thomas explains in detail, it obviously is not.

Natural law requires us to offer sacrifice to a superior, but it does not tell us who that superior is or what sacrifices are required to honor him. For that, we need his own instruction. Thomas is explicit about this: “The offering of sacrifice belongs to natural law in a general way, which is why everyone agrees about it. But the determination of which sacrifices are to be offered depends on human or divine institution, which is why people differ about it.”⁷² “Determination” is a technical term here. In Aquinas’s lexicon, a *determinatio* is a command or precept that is not contained in the law itself (here the natural law), even implicitly, but rather is added to it. Such additions are indispens-

⁶⁹ ST II-II, q. 85, a. 2, resp.: “The soul offers itself in sacrifice to God as the source of its creation and the end that makes it blessed. Moreover, according to the true faith, God alone is the creator of our souls, as stated in the *prima pars*. Likewise, the beatitude of our soul consists in him alone, as stated above. Therefore, just as we ought to offer spiritual sacrifice to the supreme God alone, so too ought we to offer exterior sacrifices to him alone” (“Anima autem se offert Deo in sacrificium sicut principio suae creationis et sicut fini suae beatificationis. Secundum autem veram fidem solus Deus est creator animarum nostrarum, ut in primo habitum est. In solo etiam eo animae nostrae beatitudo consistit, ut supra dictum est. Et ideo sicut soli Deo summo debemus sacrificium spirituale offerre, ita etiam soli ei debemus offerre exteriora sacrificia”).

⁷⁰ SCG III, ch. 120 (no. 2940): “[I]ndebitum est quod latraie cultus alteri exhibetur quam primo rerum principio.”

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² ST II-II, q. 85, a. 1, ad 1: “[O]blatio sacrificii in communi est de lege naturae, et ideo in hoc omnes conveniunt. Sed determinatio sacrificiorum est ex institutione humana vel divina, et ideo in hoc differunt.”

able because they specify the way general precepts are actually to be carried out in practice. The binding force or value of these “determinations” depends, naturally, on the authority of the one who makes them.⁷³ Since the urge to offer sacrifice to gods is universal, every human community will have its *determinationes* as to what right sacrifice consists in. But only God himself can give us the determinations above and beyond natural law by which he, and not human idols, may be offered right sacrifice. A cultic law that succeeds in reaching him must be given by him.⁷⁴ Indeed these cultic *determinationes* themselves will be the means by which he enables his people to identify him as the superior to whom alone sacrifice is due.⁷⁵

We reach the same conclusion by attending to the way Thomas characterizes the aim of the natural inclination to offer sacrifice: “Whatever it may be, this is what everyone calls ‘God.’” In its widest use (“*apud omnes*”), the referent of the term “God” (its supposition, in the language of medieval logic) is whatever human beings may in fact hope will give them the highest kind of help and direction. Human beings pin this hope on all kinds of things. Whatever a given individual or society looks to in this way is, *apud omnes*, its “god.” “What everyone calls ‘God’” is simply “some superior,” as Thomas puts it (note 66 above), believed by some community or individual to be the best source of help and direction, and so to be the right recipient of sacrificial offerings. Thomas’s view is clearly not that, in naturally seeking superior help and direction, everyone finds (or at least can find) the one true God to whom they apply the correct name (“*Deus*”) and to whom each offers sacrifice in his own way. That would be to read this text as though it said, “Natural reason dictates to man that he be subject to some superior. . . . *et hoc est Deus*—and this is God.” But Thomas deliberately speaks not of God, but of the *term* “God,” not in its specifically Christian, but in its most widespread, and correspondingly indiscriminate, use—*hoc est quod apud omnes dicitur Deus*, “this is what everyone calls ‘God.’”

⁷³ On “determinatio” in this sense, see, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 95, a. 2, resp., and q. 104, a. 1, resp.

⁷⁴ As we have already seen. Cf. notes 26–27 and 65 above.

⁷⁵ Thomas makes a parallel argument regarding the penitential dictate of natural reason, which includes a precept that a person repent of the evils that he has done (see *ST* III, q. 84, a. 7, resp.; obj. and ad 1). There are also important differences between the two cases. In the first place, the need for a God-given “determination” of our natural tendency to penitence is, like the act of repentance itself, consequent upon sin, while we would need a divine *determinatio* of our inclination to offer sacrifice even if we had not sinned.

So, when Aquinas holds that natural reason enjoins us to “use various sensible realities, offering them to God as a sign of the subjection and honor we owe to him” (note 59 above), he does not mean that anyone who obeys nature’s inclination to offer sacrifice thereby succeeds in worshipping the one true God, as though the only way of failing to offer sacrifice to the true God is not to offer sacrifice at all. He means, rather, that anyone who follows the natural law on this score succeeds in offering sacrifice to “what everyone calls ‘God’”—that is, to whatever the person or community offering the sacrifice believes they should pin their highest hopes on. About this, of course, individuals and communities are frequently mistaken. Their gods need not even exist to be offered sacrifice, let alone need to be, however indirectly, the one true God. Quoting Augustine, Thomas asks rhetorically, “Who ever thought that sacrifice is to be offered except to one whom he knows, or at least supposes, or imagines, to be God?”⁷⁶

Human nature thus inclines us to seek help from a nature greater than our own and to offer sacrifice to that nature. Such sacrifice is unjust, however, if given where it is not owed, unless offered to the supreme God alone, the Holy Trinity, from whom we must have instruction if we are to succeed in making sacrifice to him. Aquinas plainly pictures a situation in which nature and natural reason impose moral obligations on us that nature itself is impotent to meet.⁷⁷ For

⁷⁶ ST II-II, q. 84, a. 1, ad 1: “Quis vero sacrificandum censuit nisi ei quem Deum aut scivit, aut putavit, aut finxit?” The quotation is from St. Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* X, ch. 4. Similarly, see also, SCG III, ch. 120 (no. 2926): “No one supposes that sacrifice should be offered to someone unless because she judges that it is God—or feigns this judgment” (“[S]acrificium autem nullus offerendum censuit alicui nisi quia eum Deum aestimavit, aut aestimare se finxit”).

⁷⁷ So, I think, we ought to read Thomas’s remark that even those who are not instructed by God (who are not “under the law”) are “held” (*tenetur*) to do something suitable “in the divine honor” (ST II-II, q. 85, a. 4, resp.; note 62 above). Nature inclines us to this, and reason requires it, but neither nature nor reason has, without further divine aid, the resources to accomplish it.

God might, of course, instruct human beings regarding right sacrifice in other ways than by the gift of an explicit cultic law. Thomas thinks this in fact happened in the period before the call of Abraham and the deliverance of the “old law” to Moses. On this, see ST I-II, q. 103, a. 1, resp.: “Since, even before the law, there were certain outstanding human beings empowered with a prophetic spirit, it should be believed that they were led by a divine instinct—a private law, as it were—to worship God in a certain definite way” (“[Q]uia etiam ante legem fuerunt quidam viri praecipui prophetico spiritu pollentes, credendum est quod ex instinctu divino, quasi ex quadam privata lege, inducerentur ad aliquem certum modum colendi Deum”). How far this

much modern moral philosophy, especially in a Kantian vein, this is not simply disturbing, but impossible. The free rational agent can have no real moral obligation save one she is genuinely capable of fulfilling. Awareness of the obligation, moreover, must be inseparable from the capacity to fulfill it. Otherwise we forfeit the possibility of coherently affirming either human freedom or moral obligation to which freedom is subject.

Here we no doubt have a deep disagreement between classic Christian understandings of what it is to be human and some modern, and culturally potent, philosophical alternatives. Each side in this disagreement correctly sees in the other what it must regard as impossible and ruinous of human flourishing. Once again my aim is not to address this large issue, but only to point out the clarity with which St. Thomas takes sides on it. Human nature is made for a good that it cannot achieve on its own, but only with the constant help of the good it seeks, the triune God himself. To think we ought to do only—have an obligation to do only—what nature enables us to do is not the way to our true good, but rather deprives us of it. The law of nature concerning sacrifice is simply a case in point.

The Virtue of Religion and the Apologetic Aspirations of Modern Theology

In modernity, Protestant and Catholic theology alike habitually sought to exhibit the intelligibility and attractiveness of faith in Christ by appeal to a religiosity that lay at the heart of all human life or human nature. This effort to justify the existential availability (though not, strictly speaking, the truth) of Christian faith to modern humanity took countless conceptual forms, sometimes self-consciously revisionist, sometimes deliberately traditional, and often a mix of the new and the old. Whatever its conceptual garb, the notion of human religiousness that was supposed to do this work needed to express deep and ineradicable human yearnings, and do so, crucially, in such a way that modern Western humanity could readily see its true self, its own ultimate longings, in the conceptual mirror the theologian held up to

cultic instruction by way of prophecy might extend, in Thomas's view, beyond the time the Mosaic law was given and the people to whom it was given I will not try to decide here. Thomas's low estimate of worship outside the explicit knowledge of divine cultic law—that is, of gentile worship—gives reason to suppose that he does not take what we would think of as an optimistic view on this score (see notes 102–103 below). In any case, such instruction would not fall under the heading of “natural law,” which is our present concern.

its gaze. That mirror was, again and again, a robust description of “religion” (though sometimes not under that name).

At the same time, of course, a theologically useful notion of religion had to depict modern humanity’s deepest desires in such a fashion that only the Christian God, revealed in Christ as proclaimed by the Christian community, could finally and completely satisfy those desires. Christianity, after all, claims that Jesus Christ has unique and universal significance. He is, in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s nicely turned phrase, “redeemer alone and for all,” or as Karl Rahner puts it, he is “the absolute savior.”⁷⁸ So, the religious feature of human nature or human existence that enables us, on this view, to grasp Jesus’ significance must likewise be universal and, above all, must make a descriptively plausible claim to universality. The apologetic task modern theology often set for itself was thus delicate, and its practitioners regularly accused one another of failing to carry it out coherently. The theologian had to describe human religious need in a way that was existentially evocative, yet without any question-begging appeal to the particular content of Christian faith itself. At the same time, he had to show that faith in Christ satisfies this general human need in a uniquely adequate and obvious way.

A notion of basic human religiosity that can do this delicate work has one essential task to perform. It must locate the most basic conceptual content of universal human religious need. Thus armed, the theologian can go on to exhibit the special attractiveness (or as it was often put, the “meaningfulness”) of Christianity by matching up the Christian story and Christian doctrine with this prior description of bedrock human longing.

Here the theologian has to be able to say, in general but content-laden terms, what would fulfill or satisfy our religious need should we actually come across it in experience. The meaningful content of any empirical religion, in other words, has to stem from, or at least be immediately recognizable to, our native religiosity. Schleiermacher furnishes a familiar example. If being religious means having an innate “God-consciousness” that we desire to find enhanced or perfected, then an actually existing religion can only be meaningful for us insofar as it promotes our God-consciousness and we can perceive that it does this. To the extent that Jesus as proclaimed by the Church does not

⁷⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §11.4, trans. H. R. Macintosh et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); for Rahner, see (among others) *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 205, 280–1, 298–301.

promote a more robust God-consciousness in us in the most complete and satisfying way, he and the Church's proclamation will be unintelligible to us. More precisely, they will be *religiously* unintelligible or meaningless to us. We could understand the claim that Jesus is the redeemer or savior "alone and for all"—that is, we could grasp the concepts in which the claim is made. But, as the claim failed to answer to our basic religious desires, it would hold no inherent attraction for us, and we could not recognize it as a genuine religious possibility.

Terms like "meaningful" and "intelligible" often have this distinctive use in modern theology. Their sense is not simply the familiar one of sounds or inscriptions to which we can assign a determinate meaning and so regard as part of a language. Rather, they connote attraction. What is religiously "meaningful" or "intelligible" is not only what has a meaning, but what any human being can recognize, with due attention to her own nature and experience, as the content of her deepest longings. Absent this correlation with human religiosity, we may understand a ritual and belief system—that is, be able to assign a correct meaning to its words and gestures—and we may have a keen interest in understanding it. But like the classical scholar's meticulous reconstruction of the religion of republican Rome or Geertz's thick description of the Balinese cockfight, it will not, on this account of things, describe a world we are actually drawn to inhabit. We may grasp its meaning, but it will not be "meaningful"—existentially available to us.

In this apologetic picture, an initiative from God's side has to answer our underlying religious questions and fulfill our religious longings in the form of a revelation, salvation-historical action or kindred notions. God's saving deeds are likely to be historically particular, as Christianity clearly maintains that they are, and as such they will not be universally accessible, but will require instruction at the hands of a particular historical community (thus the Church's proclamation of Jesus). Their religious meaningfulness, though, cannot likewise require particular communal instruction, but must already be accessible to us from our universal and inherent religiosity. Or as the point is often put in modern Catholic theology, religious claims, even those expressed in the most basic Catholic teachings, will be merely "extrinsic" to us unless they answer to an intrinsic need, a natural desire that we not only have, but at some level are already aware that we have. We do not need God to teach us what our deepest needs are; that would be fatal "extrinsicism." God alone answers our religious needs, but of the needs themselves nature has to teach us.

St. Thomas does hold that human nature has a religious aspect or feature that, since it belongs to nature itself, is universal among human beings. As we have seen, he thinks of this universal human religiosity as a “natural inclination” to be subject to a superior and to express that subjection outwardly in acts of sacrifice. Differently put, human beings “sense by a kind of natural instinct that they are obligated to show reverence to God in their own way, since he is the source of their existence and of every good.”⁷⁹ This inclination or instinct is a natural desire to serve a superior to whom we owe the good we are and have. Like any natural desire or inclination, it can only be satisfied by attaining the single end for which the triune author of nature gave it, in this case to serve the author of nature himself. An inclination is not a virtue; it can be misused and misdirected, as this one is when we subject ourselves to what we only imagine is the author of all our good. In any case, Thomas does not think we have any virtues by nature.⁸⁰ As Thomas sees it, in a rational creature, natural inclinations need virtues to perfect them, since virtues consistently give rise to acts that attain the good at which the inclination just inchoately aims.

Some natural inclinations can be perfected by acquired virtues, in which case the inclination itself can be thought of as the “seed” or “beginning” of the corresponding virtue.⁸¹ But this is not so with the natural inclination to religion. Here we have “a kind of natural instinct” to seek a good wholly beyond the reach of nature itself. Aiming at the cult of the Holy Trinity, the supreme good from whom actually comes all we are and have, nature can reach its goal only by the gift of this good, by the infused virtue of religion. What Thomas says of natural inclination or desire and the infused moral virtues in general applies with particular clarity to the way the infused virtue of religion perfects the natural inclination to serve God as our last end. “In God’s generosity, human beings are ordered to a supernatural good, namely, eternal glory. The seeds of the virtues [that are in us by nature] cannot bring about virtues adequate (*proportionatae*) to this end. Hence the virtues that order our life to this end must be caused by the one who gave us the inclination to it, that is, by the grace of God.”⁸²

⁷⁹ SCG III, ch. 119 (no. 2914): “Hic etiam Dei cultus religio nominatur . . . quodam naturali instinctu se obligatum sentit ut Deo suo modo reverentiam impendat, a quo est sui esse et omnis boni principium.”

⁸⁰ On this last point, see, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

⁸¹ Here too, see *ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 1, resp., and *In III Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qas. 3–4.

⁸² *In III Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 3, sol. (Moos, 1030 [no. 69]): “[S]eminaria virtutum quae sunt in nobis, sunt ordinatio voluntatis et rationis ad bonum nobis

Our inclination to offer sacrifice to the most high, though natural, needs divine instruction to be enacted in a way that begins to attain its natural aim. This follows, as we have seen, from the very idea of a natural inclination to, or desire for, a supernatural end. In this case no amount of help from society or circumstance will enable nature to identify its aim and act to realize it. Sin introduces ignorance and malice, turning the natural inclination to serve the source of all our good to unnatural and unowed ends. Even apart from sin, though, nature is impotent to supply its own cultic precepts, and thus to draw out the content of its own most basic religious aspiration. For this, it needs the gift of divine teaching, regardless of the state in which it may exist.

Aquinas's comments on natural and divine law as they pertain to marriage are instructive here. Unlike the inclination to offer sacrifice, the inclination to marry (once) and to raise children belongs to nature, he argues, in such a way that it can yield its own precepts and be rightly regulated by human as well as divine law. The inclination to marry pertains, in other words, to the connatural end of human nature and not, at least not intrinsically, to its supernatural end. Since, unlike the other acts of nature, procreation concerns the common good of humanity and not only the good of the individual, God has provided for its right ordering by his own explicit instruction and by practical reason, by both divine and human positive law. "Those matters that pertain to generation need, more than others, to be ordered by both divine and human law."⁸³ Still, sin can so obscure nature's inclination that precepts deeply against nature can be seen by whole societies as natural, as the content of nature's law. Concubinage, for example, has been widely regarded as a licit use of the natural inclination to bring forth children, even though it is against the law of nature. "Among the nations, the natural law was in many ways shrouded in darkness. Hence, they did not regard going to a concubine as evil, but everywhere treated fornication as though it were licit."⁸⁴ The law or social precept

connaturale. Cum autem sit homo ex divina liberalitate ordinatus ad quoddam bonum supernaturale, scilicet aeternam gloriam; ex praedictis virtutum seminariis non possunt virtutes causari fini praedicto proportionatae. Unde oportet virtutes quae vitam nostram ordinant ad finem illum, ex eo causari, ex quo est nobis inclinatio in finem illum. Hoc autem est per Dei gratiam." See, more briefly but to the same effect, *ST* I-II, q. 63, a. 3, obj. and ad 3.

⁸³ *SCG* III, ch. 123 (no. 2965): "Unde, cum lex instituatur ad bonum commune, ea quae pertinent ad generationem, prae aliis oportet legibus ordinari et divinis et humanis."

⁸⁴ *In IV Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 3, qa. 1, ad 1: "[I]n gentibus quantum ad multa lex naturae obfuscata erat; unde accedere ad concubinam malum non reputabant;

that sanctioned this practice, Aquinas goes on to argue, “stemmed not from the instinct of natural law, but from this very darkness into which the gentiles had fallen, not giving God the glory due to him, as Romans 1 says. As a result, where the Christian religion has prevailed, this law has been extirpated.”⁸⁵

In contrast to marriage, the natural inclination to be subject to a superior not only benefits from direct divine instruction, but requires it. Since it concerns the attainment of our supernatural end, humanity’s religious “instinct” cannot generate effective precepts on its own. The moral laws that successfully order human *cultus* to the one end nature seeks must stem directly from God. Nature’s inclination itself is inherently incapable of giving rise to them, just as nature is, in general, incompetent to provide what is needed for the attainment of its supernatural end. What Aquinas says of the aid rendered by divine law to our natural inclination to reproduce, where nature itself can instruct us, applies *a fortiori* to our inclination to offer sacrifice, where it cannot. “If [the laws directing an inclination] are divine, they not only make explicit the instinct of nature, but also make good a deficiency in natural instinct, just as those matters that are divinely revealed exceed the capacity of natural reason.”⁸⁶ If God gives a cultic law, this law will

sed passim fornicatione quasi re licita utebantur” (*Opera omnia*, vol. 7, part 2 [Parma: Fiacadori, 1852–1873], 971a [hereafter, Parma]). Aquinas elsewhere notes the widespread acceptance of theft or despoliation, “as among the Germans” (*sicut apud Germanos olim*), to make the same point (*ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 4, resp.; cf. a. 6, resp.). The inability of nature to illumine the darkness induced by sin is, in fact, pervasive and not limited to any one area of human conduct. See *In III Sent.* d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, sol.: “At the time of natural law,”—that is, before and apart from the call of Abraham and the gift of the law to Moses—“many, despite the light of natural reason, fell into the worst errors of idolatry and into the most abominable works. . . . When the habit of sins grew strong, the natural law was truly darkened in many, so that by that time it did not seem to be sufficient for the direction of the human race” (Moos, 25–26 [nos. 71 and 73]: “[T]empore legis naturae multi, lumine naturalis rationis non obstante, in pessimos errores idolatriae prolapsi sunt, et in nefandissima opera. . . . invalescente consuetudine peccatorum, lex naturalis adeo tenebrata est in pluribus, ut jam non videretur ad regimen humani generis sufficere”). Aquinas says much the same elsewhere; see, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 98, a. 6, resp.

⁸⁵ *In IV Sent.* d. 33, q. 1, a. 3, q. 1, ad 2: “[E]x praedicta obscuritate, scilicet in quam ceciderunt gentiles, Deo debitam gloriam non reddentes, ut dicitur Rom. 1, lex illa processit, et non ex instinctu legis naturae; unde praevalente Christiana religione lex illa extirpata est” (Parma, 971a).

⁸⁶ *SCG* III, ch. 123 (no. 2965): “Si autem divinae sunt, non solum instinctum naturae explicant, sed etiam defectum naturalis instinctus suppleunt: sicut ea quae divinitus revelantur, superant naturalis rationis capacitatem.”

draw out for nature the proper content and aim of its own desire to offer sacrifice, a matter on which, unlike marriage, nature is unable to become explicit on its own. In so doing, divine law will make good nature's otherwise unavoidable deficiency when it comes to the precepts guiding the cultic acts to which it inclines.

Because nature cannot yield laws that guide sacrifice to its true end, worship is even more subject to sinful abuse and misdirection than marriage. As a result, the instinctive human tilt toward *cultus* needs the twofold direction of divine law even more than does the urge to reproduce. Divine law, here, will not only supply guidance to wayward nature, but make good nature's inherent inability to find the right direction on its own, the inability of which sin makes such devastating use. Or as Thomas puts it, divine law will here need to "correct" natural law in two different ways. "[T]he written law [divine positive law contained in Scripture] is said [in the *Glossa ordinaria*] to be given for the correction of the law of nature, either because the written law supplies what is lacking in the law of nature, or because in some matters, the law of nature has been corrupted in the hearts of some people to such an extent that they judged to be goods what are naturally evils, and such corruption lay in need of correction."⁸⁷

Thomas's vision of the good accomplished by divine law runs in clear parallel to his view of the good accomplished by divine grace. Sanctifying grace, as readers of Thomas know, confers a twofold benefit. Grace at once elevates human nature so as to make it capable of attaining the immediate vision of God as its last end and heals the wounds nature inflicts upon itself by sin. By this gift, God empowers us to reach him as supernatural end, though this attainment is inherently beyond the capacities of created nature, and at the same time remedies our self-caused inability to attain even the good within nature's reach.⁸⁸ The former effect of sanctifying grace we would need even apart from sin; the latter we need only because of sin.

⁸⁷ ST I-II, q. 94, a. 5, ad 1: "[L]ex scripta dicitur esse data ad correctionem legis naturae, vel quia per legem scriptam suppletum est quod legi naturae deerat, vel quia lex naturae in aliquorum cordibus, quantum ad aliqua, corrupta erat intantum ut existimarent esse bona quae naturaliter sunt mala; et talis corruptio correctione indigebat."

⁸⁸ See (among others) ST I-II, q. 109, a. 9, resp.: By "a certain habitual gift [viz., sanctifying grace] . . . corrupted human nature is healed, and that healed human nature is, moreover, raised up to undertake works that merit eternal life, which exceed the capacity of nature" ("aliquod habituale donum . . . natura humana corrupta sanetur; et etiam sanata eleuetur ad operandum opera meritoria vitae aeternae, quae excedunt proportionem naturae").

Though less commonly noted, divine law in its own way confers the same twofold benefit. The precepts God reveals both correct nature when it has gone astray by sin from goods within nature's grasp (as in the case of marriage) and directs nature to the good beyond its inherent grasp, which it can only reach under the guidance of God himself (as in the case of religion, and especially of sacrifice). That law, as well as grace, should have these twin effects should not surprise, since they are the two parallel and mutually necessary means by which God brings about the return of the rational creature to him who made the creature from nothing. "The exterior principle moving us to the good is God, who both instructs us by law and helps us by grace."⁸⁹ As Thomas sees the matter, it is not that we know what to do by nature and just need the help of God (grace) to do it. We need the help of God to know what to do, to give us the cultic law that will actually enable us to begin attaining him as supernatural end.

These considerations are decisive for our assessment of the claim that, in Thomas's view, natural human religiosity makes faith in Christ intelligible and meaningful. His account of natural law and sacrifice gives us scant reason to attribute this view to him. But in any case, it is out of keeping with his basic assumptions about the relationship between nature and grace. The law that enables us to attain the triune God as our last end by offering him the devotion, adoration, and sacrifice he is in justice due can no more be natural than the grace and virtue we need to attain him. God himself must give it, beyond what nature can provide; in Thomas's division of the subject, it must fall under the heading of divine law, not natural law.

Our argument so far yields three conclusions about the virtue of religion, the precepts that guide its right exercise, and natural human religious inclination. We need to bear these conclusions in mind if we are to grasp the full import of Thomas's theology of Jewish election.

(1) If there is a religion, in the sense both of interior virtue and of cultic practice, whose conceptual content we need to have in hand in order to understand the meaning and significance of Jesus and the Church's proclamation about him, that religion cannot be natural. Both as to interior virtue and external precept, it will have to be a gift of unowed divine generosity, beyond the reach of nature even apart from sin. In particular, the conceptual content of that religion, its teachings and precepts, will have to come to us in the form of explicit divine

⁸⁹ ST I-II, q. 90, prooem.: "Principium autem exterius movens ad bonum est Deus, qui et nos instruit per legem, et iuvat per gratiam."

instruction, the content of which nature will be able neither to know in advance nor to change once given, since it comes as supernatural gift. Nature inclines us to embrace these teachings and precepts once they are given and understood, but nature can do no more. In particular, it cannot guarantee access to those teachings and precepts.

(2) If there is a religion, or a human religiosity, in virtue of which the Church's proclamation of Jesus is intelligible and meaningful, that religion or religiosity need not be universal. It will be present where, but only where, God has issued explicit religious instruction, not least cultic instruction, and seen to it that this instruction is embraced. Since the correct conceptual content for our natural religious instinct, the teachings and precepts that will actually lead our natural inclination to its goal, cannot come from nature itself, but must come from God's generosity, we cannot assume (in the manner of much modern theological apologetics) that they will be at least implicitly present wherever human nature is present. Rather, we will have to look and see what God has done, what religious instruction, if any, God has actually issued, and to whom. The intelligibility and meaningfulness of faith in Christ will be present just to the extent that this instruction has been given and understood.

(3) God has not extended the religious instruction presupposed by faith in Christ to all humanity; it is not universal, to be found wherever human religious inclination is found. God has, in fact, instituted a religion by which he may be rightly worshipped, drawn close to, and attained as last end, all by way of anticipating what is to happen in Christ. Remarkably, though, God has not instituted this religion among all peoples, among humanity in general. He has, instead, drawn a bright line between one people and all the rest of the nations. He has elected Israel, and given Israel the law by which he may be worshipped—the true religion. To the extent that any is needed, the conceptual content that makes the Gospel intelligible and desirable stems not from nature or nature's desire, but from the election of Israel. It is not universal, but highly particular, both as to the content of its teaching and precepts and the people to whom they are given.

Christians, of course, may sometimes find in the past or present values of their own or other gentile cultures various signs of what they have received in Christ and of its preparation in Israel. So, among the early Christians the art of the catacombs could depict Jesus arrayed as a distinguished Roman, and early Christian apologetics could see in the notion of a universal *Logos* common among pagan philosophers a

pointer to the divine Word that spoke to Israel and is now incarnate for our salvation. Not all such gestures at the enculturation of the Gospel are equally successful. But in any case, they fall well short of suggesting divinely willed gentile religions that pave the way for Christ. In the catacombs, Jesus might be crowned with a laurel wreath, but as the New Testament already makes clear, the early Christians saw the *religion* of the Romans not as a gift from God, but as the abode of demons.

If carried out consistently, the post-Enlightenment apologetic strategy we have been considering not only encourages, but requires, those who follow it to bypass the election and the religion of the Jewish people as matters of inherent significance for Christian faith. Theologians who follow this strategy need not reject the election of the Jews outright, as was regularly done by liberal Protestantism.⁹⁰ The usual Catholic approach in modernity has not been to deny the election of Israel and the unique divine mandate of her religion, but rather to ignore them. The hope was to draw a straight line of intelligibility and meaningfulness between universal human religiosity and the particulars of Christian teaching. But if Aquinas is right, there is no such line to be drawn.

The Election of Israel

Aquinas has a remarkably strong view of the election of Israel, in some ways a view more radical, in fact, than that of some contemporary theologians who are ready to dismiss patristic and medieval theology in their entirety as hopelessly “supersessionist.” Among medieval theologians, he is not at all alone in this, but it is his way of thinking about Jewish election that has recently drawn the most attention.⁹¹ The

⁹⁰ So Schleiermacher, e.g., cannot entirely hide his disgust at the “fetishism” of the Jews, who continue to believe that they are God’s chosen people, when an enlightened religious sensibility recognizes that the idea of God favoring one human clan over another is not simply wrong, but inconceivable, since it ascribes to God what he cannot have—a particular spatial location, roughly coextensive with that of the Jewish people themselves. See *Christian Faith*, §8.4.

⁹¹ See Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014); Richard Schenk, *Die Deutung vorchristlicher Riten im Frühwerk des Albertus Magnus*, Lectio Albertina 15 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2014); Schenck, “Views of the Two Covenants in Medieval Theology,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 4.4 (2006): 891–915; Bruce D. Marshall, “Christ and Israel: An Unsolved Problem in Catholic Theology,” in *The Call of Abraham: Essays on the Election of Israel in Honor of Jon D. Levenson*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Joel S. Kaminsky (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 330–350; Jean-Miguel Garri-

forgoing account of “religion” indicates that, for Thomas, the election of Israel is not simply an unexpected shaft of light in the darkness before *Nostra Aetate*, a perhaps inexplicable “outlier,” not only in traditional Catholic thinking about the Jews, but even in his own theology. On the contrary, for Thomas, the election of Israel is a soteriological prime number, a truth about the divinely willed economy of salvation that cannot be reduced to anything more basic, and one that belongs among the fundamental structural elements of the economy as a whole.

Of Thomas’s teaching on this score there are many important aspects that we can only mention here: Jewish election is not merely spiritual, but “carnal,” inherently tied to fleshly descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; this election is a promise of eschatological salvation to Israel according to the flesh; and it is permanent and unfailing—irrevocable, following Romans 11:29. So much so, in fact, that Aquinas applies to his own Christian contemporaries Paul’s warning for the gentile Christians at Rome: they endanger their very salvation if they fail to stand in awe before the mystery of Israel’s election, and treat the Jews—even though they have rejected Christ—as those who have been abandoned by God. One might object to Paul’s teaching about Israel’s abiding election in Romans 11:29, he observes, on the ground that the hostility of the Jews toward the gospel has voided their election and excluded them from salvation, even though “they were once most dear [to God] on account of the patriarchs.” Aquinas is curt: “The Apostle says this is false.”⁹² And he warns, commenting on Romans 11:25, “Ignorance of *this* mystery would be damnable for you.”⁹³

gues, *Le peuple de la première Alliance: Approches chrétiennes du mystère d’Israël* (Paris: Cerf, 2011); Steven C. Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews: Insights into his Commentary on Romans 9–11* (New York: Paulist, 2008); and Matthew W. Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

⁹² *Super Rom.* 11, lec. 4: “Opposing this, someone opposing might say that, even though the Jews were once most dear [to God] on account of the patriarchs, nevertheless the hostility that they show to the gospel prevents their future salvation. But the Apostle says this is false. . . . It is as if he said: that God gives something to certain people or calls certain people is ‘without repentance,’ because God does not repent of this” (no. 924: “Posset enim aliquis obviando dicere quod Iudaei, et si olim fuerint charissimi propter patres, tamen inimicitia, quam contra Evangelium exercent, prohibet ne in futurum salventur. Sed hoc Apostolus falsum esse asserit. . . . quasi dicat: quod Deus aliquid aliquibus donet vel aliquos vocet, hoc est ‘sine poenitentia,’ quia de hoc Deum non poenitet”).

⁹³ *Ibid.*: “Sed ignorantia huius mysterii esset damnosa vobis” (Merietti ed., no. 913; my emphasis). This need not be taken to mean that every Christian who

Our present concern, though, is specifically with Israel's cultic life, its relation to Israel's election, and the difference it makes that this life was lived by the Jews Mary and Jesus.

Israel's divinely mandated worship and prayer aims at her sanctification. The holiness of the Jewish people has, in turn, two deeper purposes. One is to mark, in a clear and public way, the distinction of God's elect people from the nations. The other is to form this people as the holy stock from whom Christ will one day come, to provide a womb of sanctity from which the redeemer of Jew and gentile alike can be born. If you like, think of these—election and Christ—as each in its own way the final cause of Israel's sanctification, a twofold telos. We need to say a little about each.

Liturgical sanctification and election

Israel's election requires visible signs of her distinction from the nations. As Aquinas sees it (following, of course, a long tradition), a special place among these belongs to circumcision. By this, each generation of Jews makes a public avowal (*protestatio*) of its separation from the surrounding sea of unbelief and thereby imitates the faith of Abraham, who was the first to “mark himself off” from the unbelieving nations to worship the one true God who elected him and his descendants forever.⁹⁴ For

fails to appreciate the mystery of Israel's election may be charged with culpable (still less damnable) ignorance. The *Lectura* on Romans that has come down to us probably stems from Thomas's teaching in the Dominican *studium* at Naples during the last two years of his life. On this, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: *The Person and His Work*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 252–54. The “vos” to whom he addresses this sharply worded remark would, in the first instance, be those in formation to be preachers and teachers in the Church (as would have been true in his other teaching assignments as well, e.g., in Paris). Thomas does not expect the lay faithful (many of whom would have been illiterate) to have explicit knowledge of the Christian mysteries matching that of their teachers: “Explicitness of belief is not equally necessary for salvation in all cases, since the leaders [of the Church], whose duty it is to teach others, are bound to believe explicitly more things than are the others” (*ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 6, ad 1: “[E]xplicitio credendorum non aequaliter quantum ad omnes est de necessitate salutis, quia plura tenentur explicito credere maiores, qui habent officium alios instruendi, quam alii”). Ignorance that would be damnable in those who, from their study of *sacra doctrina*, ought to know better might not even be blameworthy in others: “If in [the subtle matters of faith] some fall short because they are uneducated, they are not to be held responsible for this” (*ibid.*, ad 2: “[S]i in talibus ex simplicitate deficiant, non eis imputatur”).

⁹⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 5, ad 1: “Because Abraham was the first who separated himself from unbelievers, departing from his home and his kindred, he was

Aquinas, circumcision has particular importance as a “sensible sign” needed to unite God’s chosen people in a publicly visible way, marking them as adherents of one and the same religion.⁹⁵ But he also interprets other Jewish practices, including the Levitical dress code—the prohibition against mixing wool and linen—as divinely instituted and public signs that Israel is set apart from all other peoples.⁹⁶ In fact, God gives the whole of the “old law” and his “other special benefits” to Israel in order to support her election by giving shape and content to her distinction from the gentiles.⁹⁷ This goes in particular for what Thomas calls the ceremonial and judicial commandments. These govern Israel’s worship of God (the ceremonial precepts) and her civil life (the judicial precepts), the Israelite’s relationship to God and his neighbor.⁹⁸ Israel’s whole way of life, her *singularis conversatio*, is to be a testimony not only that she, alone among the nations, has been chosen by God, but that she alone worships him by following his instructions for right sacrifice.⁹⁹ To the “ceremonial” precepts Aquinas devotes particularly

the first to receive circumcision. . . . In order that this avowal and imitation of the faith of Abraham might be made secure in the hearts of the Jews, they received the sign in their flesh” (“[Q]uia Abraham fuit primus qui se ab infidelibus separavit, exiens de domo sua et de cognatione sua, ideo ipse primus circumcisionem accepit. . . . Et ut haec protestatio, et imitatio fidei Abrahæ, firmaretur in cordibus Iudæorum, acceperunt signum in carne sua”).

⁹⁵ ST III, q. 70, a. 2, ad 2: “The faithful people was to be gathered together by some sensible sign; this is necessary in order for human beings to be united in any sort of religion” (“Populus autem fidelium congregandus erat aliquo signo sensibili: quod est necessarium ad hoc quod homines in quacumque religione adunentur”).

⁹⁶ ST I-II, q. 102, a. 6, ad 6: “The Lord willed that his people be distinguished from other peoples not only by the sign of circumcision in their flesh, but also by a definite distinction of dress” (“[V]oluit Dominus ut populus eius distingueretur ab aliis populis non solum signo circumcisionis, quod erat in carne, sed etiam certa habitus distinction”).

⁹⁷ On the “beneficia specialia,” see ST I-II, q. 98, a. 4, resp.; q. 102, a. 4, ad 10, and q. 105, a. 2, sc. For a list and discussion of God’s special benefits to the chosen people, see *Super Rom.* 9, lec. 1 (nos. 743–747) and note 108 below.

⁹⁸ See ST I-II, q. 99, aa. 2–4.

⁹⁹ ST I-II, q. 101, a. 4, resp.: “The ceremonial precepts are ordered to the worship of God. . . . Moreover, this worship consists especially in sacrifices, which are offered up to the honor of God” (“[C]eremonialia praecepta ordinantur ad cultum Dei. . . . Ipse autem cultus specialiter consistit in sacrificiis, quae in Dei reverentiam offeruntur”). The elect people as a whole and her ministers in particular are consecrated to God, and we ought to consider “their unique way of life, by which they are distinguished from those who do not worship God; and to this pertain the observances, for instance, in matters of food, clothing, and other things of this kind” (“[E]orum singularis conversatio, per quam

extended and detailed attention, as had others before him, including Alexander of Hales, John of la Rochelle (in the *Summa Halensis*) and Robert Grosseteste. The articles Thomas devotes to the analysis of the ceremonial precepts of Israel's cultic law and its abiding significance are in fact the longest in the entire *Summa theologiae*.¹⁰⁰

The Jewish people are chosen not only to live apart from the nations, but to live close to God. The proximate purpose of the law is Israel's own sanctification, her intimacy with the holy God. This begins with the worship of the true God and the rejection of idolatry, which by itself separates Israel from the nations. "It was by reason of the divine cult that they were called the people of God, the ones who served him and were obedient to his precepts."¹⁰¹ It is not the case, for Aquinas, that Israel worships the one true God in the ways he has commanded while the nations worship the same God in other ways, according to their natural lights. Worship apart from the cult enjoined by God upon his elect people—apart, that is, from Israel's ceremonial law—is always idolatry. About this, Aquinas is repeatedly explicit. "The rites of the gentiles were repudiated as entirely illicit and were always forbidden by God."¹⁰² While Israel was "espoused" to God from the beginning, the gentiles can share in this intimacy with God—they can be his beloved bride (*uxor*) rather than an idol's harlot—only with the coming of Christ, and not before. In fact, the religion of the gentiles before the coming of Christ, and indeed apart from the faith of the Church in any place and time (to which Israel, in Thomas's view, also belongs), is demonic: "Until the gentiles were espoused to Christ in the faith of the Church, they were corrupted by the devil in idolatry."¹⁰³

distinguuntur ab his qui Deum non colunt, et ad hoc pertinent observantiae, puta in cibis et vestimentis et aliis huiusmodi"). On this last point, see notes 102 and 103 below.

¹⁰⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 102, aa. 3–6.

¹⁰¹ *Super Rom.* 9, lec. 5 (no. 799): "[E]rat divinus cultus, ratione cuius dicebantur populus Dei, quasi ei servientes et eius praeceptis obedientes."

¹⁰² *ST I-II*, q. 103, a. 4, ad 1: "Nam gentilitatis ritus repudiabatur tanquam omnino illicitus, et a Deo semper prohibitus." *ST I-II*, q. 105, a. 2, ad 10: "God was worshipped by that people alone, whereas all other nations were corrupted by idolatry" ("[I]n solo populo illo Deus colebatur, omnibus aliis populis per idololatriam corruptis"). The Jews "served God, when all the other nations were serving idols" (*Super Rom.* 9, lec. 1 [no. 744]: "Deo serviebant, omnibus aliis gentibus servientibus idolis"). See notes 77 and 99 above.

¹⁰³ *In IV Sent.* d. 27, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 3, sol." "Just as there is one faith of the ancients and of the moderns, so also there is one Church; hence, those who served God in the time of the synagogue belonged to the unity of the Church in which

Conversely, nature is powerless to secure Israel's liturgical sanctification, and thus her election, at least under the conditions of sin. This requires the manifold cultic precepts of the divine law, which direct Israel's worship to her electing God and away from idols. The "ceremonial law" enables the children of Abraham to exercise genuine *latría* and stays their corporate hand from the idolatry into which they would otherwise fall, obliterating their distinction from the rest of sinful humanity. For Aquinas, the narrative sequence of the book of Exodus bears witness to the need for divine cultic law to secure Israel's distinction from the idolatrous nations. Among its benefits, the ceremonial law "drew human beings away from sacrifices to idols. For this reason the precepts concerning sacrifices were not given to the Jewish people until after they had fallen into idolatry by adoring the molten calf. These sacrifices were instituted so that a people always ready to offer sacrifice might offer their sacrifices to God rather than to idols."¹⁰⁴

Thus, the gentiles before the coming of Christ "were entirely alienated from God."¹⁰⁵ Idolatry—gentile worship—is not partial and inadequate devotion to the true God, but in fact worship with some other aim, real or imagined. "Whoever believes that God is something which he is not . . . does not worship God, because he does not know God, but something else. . . . For this reason the Lord said [to the Samaritan woman], 'You worship what you do not know' [Jn 4:22]. That is, you do not worship God because you do not know him. You worship instead the product of your own imagination, whereby you lay hold of

we serve God. . . . Jer 3[:20], Ezek 16[:8, 32], and Hos 2:2 explicitly mention the betrothal of the synagogue; hence she was not [God's] concubine, but his wife. . . . [But] until the gentiles were espoused to Christ in the faith of the Church, they were corrupted by the devil in idolatry" (Parma, 935: "[S]icut est una fides antiquorum et modernorum, ita una Ecclesia; unde illi qui tempore synagogae Deo serviebant, ad unitatem Ecclesiae, in qua Deo servimus, pertinebant. . . Hierem. 3, Ezech. 16, Oseae 2, 2, ubi expresse fit mentio de desponsatione synagogae; unde non fuit sicut concubina, sed sicut uxor. . . gentilitas priusquam a Christo desponsaretur in fidem Ecclesiae, corrupta fuit a Diabolo per idolatriam").

¹⁰⁴ ST I-II, q. 102, a. 3, resp.: "[D]e causa caeremoniarum circa sacrificia potest assignari ratio alio modo, ex hoc quod per huiusmodi homines retrahebantur a sacrificiis idolorum. Unde etiam praecepta de sacrificiis non fuerunt data populo Iudaeorum nisi postquam declinavit ad idololatriam, adorando vitulum conflatilem, quasi huiusmodi sacrificia sint instituta ut populus ad sacrificandum promptus, huiusmodi sacrificia magis Deo quam idolis offerret." Cf. *In III Sent.* d. 37, a. 5, qa. 1, sol. (Moos, 1251[no. 88]), and, from a different angle, ST I-II, q. 98, a. 4, resp.

¹⁰⁵ *Super Rom.* 4, lec. 3 (no. 364): "[E]rant omnino alienati a Deo."

something [else] as though it were God.”¹⁰⁶ In reflecting on the election of Israel and Israel’s intimacy with God, Thomas evidently takes particular care to underline the point that there is no natural religion or religiosity, no middle term between the Jewish virtue of religion and the gentile vice of idolatry. Israel, God’s elect, is holy as the nations are not and, *post lapsum*, cannot be.

The ceremonial law and the holiness Israel acquires by practicing it are, of course, pure gifts of God, the fruit of his unmerited generosity, which begins with Abraham himself.¹⁰⁷ But out of God’s electing love were given to the Jews under the law gifts from which, Aquinas does not hesitate to say, the gentiles were simply excluded.¹⁰⁸ To deny them these special privileges would be to ignore the scriptural testimony to their election.¹⁰⁹ All the benefits Israel receives have their root in the privilege of God’s electing love itself, “from which love the gentiles were certainly excluded in former times,” that is, under the old law.¹¹⁰ The Jews were the friends of God (*quasi amicis*), and God opened up to

¹⁰⁶ *Super Ioan.* 4, lec. 2: “Unde quicumque credit Deum esse aliquid quod non est, puta corpus, vel aliquid huiusmodi, non adorat Deum, quia nescit eum, sed aliquid aliud. . . . ideo dicit Dominus ‘vos adoratis quod nescitis’; idest, non adoratis Deum quia nescitis ipsum, sed phantasiam vestram, qua aliquid apprehenditis ut Deum” (no. 603). Aquinas here cites Eph 4, which speaks of gentile vanity and ignorance of God. On this passage, he elsewhere comments that God is not responsible for gentile ignorance of him, since he has revealed himself to all through the things that he has made (Rom 1:19f.). Rather, gentile ignorance of God stems from “the blindness of their own hearts” (Eph 4:18). *Super Eph.* 4, lec. 6: “And it is rightly called ‘blindness,’ since, from created reality, they were not able to attain to a knowledge of the creator” (no. 234: “Et vere dicit ‘caecitatem’ eo quod ex creaturis non poterant venire in notitiam creatoris”).

¹⁰⁷ *ST I-II*, q. 98, a. 4, resp.: “It is plain that the patriarchs received the promise, and the people descended from them received the law, by gratuitous election alone” (“[P]atet quod ex sola gratuita electione patres promissionem acceperunt, et populus ex eis progenitus legem accepit”), citing Dt 4:36–7.

¹⁰⁸ *Super Rom.* 9, lec. 5: “The gentiles were strangers to the three goods that most stood out among the Jews” (no. 799: “[A] tribus bonis quae in Iudaeis eminebant, gentiles erant alieni”). The “three goods” here are divine worship, electing love, and liberation from original sin.

¹⁰⁹ See, especially, Rom 3:1–2 (“What advantage has the Jew?”), which Thomas links to the high Deuteronomic view of Jewish election. Cf. *Super Rom.* 3, lec. 1 (no. 247), and *ST I-II*, q. 105, a. 1, ad 1.

¹¹⁰ To the Jews belonged the “privilegium dilectionis. . . . in eo scilicet quod eis multa beneficia inducentia ad specialem gratiam praestabat, a qua quidem dilectione gentiles olim erant exclusi” (*Super Rom.* 9, lec. 5 [no. 799], again referring to Eph 4).

them the secrets of his own heart, as friends do. For this reason, following Romans 3:2, the oracles of God were entrusted to them alone.¹¹¹

God's election of Israel, like all divine *electio*, has its root in God's *dilectio*, his spontaneous love. The love God has for the Jews, as for anyone else, is wholly gratuitous. It has no regard for the achievements or failings of the elect, for any preexisting merit or demerit on their part.¹¹² But God's electing love results in a definite preference of one over another, the bestowal of goods on this people instead of the rest.¹¹³ There is no injustice in this, since the goods God gives to the Jews—the saving goods in particular—are owed to no one.¹¹⁴ But if you want to know why God chose the Jews for their unique role in salvation history, Augustinian caution is in order: “Why he draws one and not another it is better not to judge, unless you want to err.”¹¹⁵ This is what God has done, and all concerned, gentiles and Jews alike, have to accept it as such.

Liturgical sanctification and Christ to come

Israel's worship, and thus her holiness, is not only for the sake of her own abiding election from among the nations, but also for the sake of Christ—so that Christ may come. Getting a sense for just how Israel's cultic life and holiness open the way for the advent of Christ will help us understand why, in worshipping an incarnate God, we ourselves can only worship a God who is, now and forever, a Jew. It will also help us

¹¹¹ *Super Rom.* 3, lec. 1: “Above all the Jews have the advantage that ‘the oracles of God are entrusted to them’ [Rom 3:2], as to friends” (no. 250: “[P]raecipue amplius est Iudaeis ‘quia eloquia Dei sunt tradita illis,’ quasi amicis”).

¹¹² God elects “in that by his spontaneous will God himself forechose one [here, Jacob] over the other [Esau], not because he was holy, but in order that he might be holy” (*Super Rom.* 9, lec. 2: inquantum ipse Deus spontanea voluntate unum alteri prae[e]legit, non quia sanctus erat, sed ut sanctus esset” [no. 759]); cf. *ST* I, q. 23, a. 4.

¹¹³ *Super Rom.* 9, lec.: “We speak of ‘election’ when by the good that [God] wills for one, he prefers that one to another” (no. 763: “‘Electio’ autem dicitur secundum quod per bonum quod [Deus] alicui vult, eum alteri praeferit”).

¹¹⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 98, a. 4, ad 2: “When [goods] are given because of a debt, there can be respect for persons. . . . But God confers saving benefits upon human beings because of his grace. Hence, he is not a respecter of persons if he confers [these benefits] upon some above others” (“[A]cceptio personarum locum habet in his quae ex debito dantur. . . . Salutaria autem beneficia Deus humano generi confert ex sua gratia. Unde non est personarum acceptor si quibusdam prae aliis conferat”).

¹¹⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 98, a. 4, resp. (citing Augustine, *Tractatus in Ioannem* 26.2): “Quare hunc trahat et illum non trahat, noli velle diiudicare, si non vis errare.”

see how Israel's life with God, not least her cultic life, constitutes the particular human religiosity needed to grasp what happens in Christ, providing the conceptual content that enables us to understand his saving entry into and departure from this world.

That Jesus was a Jew and lived as one it never occurs to Aquinas to doubt. Jesus "numbers himself among the Jews" by owning a share in the worship of Israel's God (Jn 4:22).¹¹⁶ In fact, the Samaritan woman recognizes him as a Jew by his obedience to the law regarding fringes in Numbers 15:37–41, and Aquinas thinks it a serious issue (against Chrysostom) that Jesus, as a Jew, might sin by getting close enough to a Samaritan to ask for water.¹¹⁷ As God incarnate, he is Lord of the law, but Jesus nonetheless accepts circumcision and the other obligations of the law in order to make it clear that he is really a Jew, "a brother of the Jews."¹¹⁸ But what difference, exactly, does being an Israelite make to who Jesus is?

We can get some purchase on the question by recalling the anti-Nestorian character of Thomas's Christology (or its deeply Cyrillian cast, which comes to the same thing). Scripture attributes, without distinction, whatever is rightly said of God to this human being and whatever is rightly said of this human being to God.¹¹⁹ "Without distinction," when Scripture claims, for example, that "The Lord of glory"—that is, God the Son—"was crucified" (1 Cor 2:8), "crucified" is said of God, and, conversely, "is God" is said of the human being who was crucified.¹²⁰ "The Lord of glory" and "the human being who was crucified" do not have two referents, but one. So, if this sentence is true—as, given the source, it must be—there can be only one person,

¹¹⁶ *Super Ioan.* 4, lec. 2: "And he numbers himself among the Jews, because when it comes to his people, he also was a Jew" (no. 604: "Et connumerat se Iudaeis, quia et Iudaeus erat secundum gentem").

¹¹⁷ *Super Ioan.* 4, lec. 1: "Christ was a Jew. . . the woman knew that he was a Jew from his dress" (no. 572: "Christus iudaeus erat. . . . Cognoscebat autem mulier Christum esse iudeum ex habitu"). For the disagreement with Chrysostom, see *Super Ioan.* 4, lec. 1 (no. 574).

¹¹⁸ *In IV Sent.* d. 1, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 3, sol. (Moos, 51 [no. 241]): "So that he might show himself a brother of the Jews, in order that they might not have just cause for driving him away" ([U]t fratrem Iudaeorum se ostenderet, ne haberent iustam occasionem ipsum repellendi"). There are, of course, several other reasons why the incarnate God accepts it as fitting to be "born under the law."

¹¹⁹ SCG IV, ch. 39 (no. 3771): "Scriptura Sacra indistincte quae sunt Dei homini illi attribuat, et quae sunt illius hominis Deo."

¹²⁰ See *Super I Cor.* 2, lec. 2 (no. 92).

hypostasis, and supposit in Christ, one subject, not two.¹²¹ Moreover, this subject is, and can only be, the eternal person of the Word. Thus, God the Son or Word *is* the human being Jesus, and conversely.¹²²

For Aquinas then, everything that belongs to the human being Jesus, all that he is, does, and undergoes as a human being, belongs to God, in the person of the Son. The Nestorian penchant in Christology wants to drive a wedge, whether large or small, between God and the human being Jesus. What belongs to this human being does not really, or does not quite, belong to God. On Thomas's account, the Nestorian impulse fails to follow Scripture's way of speaking about Christ, its radical identification of God the Son with the human being Jesus. On account of the Incarnation, everything about the human being Jesus makes a difference to who Christ is, in the most basic sense: it makes a difference to who the eternal Word himself is, *secundum quod homo*.

According to the logic of Thomas's anti-Nestorian (Ephesian and Chalcedonian) Christology, then, God himself is now and forever a Jew: the human being Jesus is a Jew; this human being is God; therefore God is a Jew. How *big* a difference this makes, though, is another matter. According to the logic of Thomas's Christology, after all, God also has toes and ear lobes, but these do not seem like especially *important* characteristics of the incarnate Word. Does Thomas make any more of the fact that the incarnate Word is a Jew than of the fact that he has ear lobes?

Thomas's claim that the Jews were elected by God so that Christ could be born from a holy people sheds light on this. The eternal Word became a human being by taking flesh from Adam's stock, as Aquinas several times observes.¹²³ But it would be out of place, to say the least, for God to be born of an idolatrous people that has forsaken him to worship what its own hands have made. Whatever belongs to the particular human nature that God the Word assumes belongs, in Thomas's view, to God himself. So if Christ were born outside of the

¹²¹ SCG IV, ch. 39: "Only in this way," Aquinas argues, "can we save what the scriptures hand down concerning the Incarnation. . . . He of whom both [kinds of predicate] is said must be one and the same" (no. 3771: "Hoc enim solum modo salvari possunt ea quae in Scripturis circa Incarnationem traduntur. . . . oportet unum et eundem esse de quo utraque dicantur"). Therefore the two natures in Christ must be united "according to one hypostasis and one supposit" (ibid.: *secundum unam hypostasim et suppositum unum*).

¹²² "Homo" is predicated "truly and properly" (*vere et proprie*) of "Deus," "just as of Socrates and Plato" (ST III, q. 16, a. 1, resp.: *sicut de Socrate et Platone*).

¹²³ ST III, q. 4, a. 6; q. 31, a. 1.

holy people Israel, God himself would be born of idolatrous flesh, and the eternal Son would be raised up as an idolater, devoted to what has eyes and yet sees not, rather than to the Father who sent him. This, as Thomas likes to put it, would be “unfitting.”

Just as the people from whom the savior of all was to be born had to be holy, so this savior, the supremely holy one, could only be a Jew. Holiness and salvation come from knowledge and worship of the true God. If the incarnate Word is to be the source (*principium*) and cause of salvation, he must take his flesh from that people among whom alone the true God is known and worshipped. But “only the Jews had true knowledge of God, because it was to be that salvation would come forth from them. Just as the source of health must be healthy, so the source of salvation . . . must have the true knowledge of God.” For this reason, salvation is, and can only be, “from the Jews” (Jn 4:22).¹²⁴

Moreover, the particular woman from whom Christ is born, the one from whom the Father’s only-begotten takes the total reality of his flesh, needs herself to be sanctified by a greater privilege of grace than any other (purely) human being. But this is a holiness available only in Israel. The fullness of grace cannot, presumably, be given to a woman who kneels in the temples of idols—that is, to a gentile. A gentile could not know from whom this grace came, what it was, or what to do with it. The angel’s greeting would not be “troubling” to her (Lk 1:29), but wholly unintelligible. “It is reasonable to believe that she who gave birth to ‘the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,’ should receive greater privileges of grace than all others. Hence, we read in Luke 1:28 that the angel said to her, ‘Hail, full of grace.’”¹²⁵

Christ needs a Jewish mother not only because he needs a mother who is holy, but also because he needs specifically Jewish flesh. Only this flesh, as the economy of salvation has actually unfolded, can

¹²⁴ *Super Ioan.* 4, lec. 2 (commenting on John 4:22): “Thus, since the source and cause of salvation, viz., Christ, was to come from them, according to Genesis 22:18 . . . it was necessary that God be known in Judah” (no. 605 : “Ideo vera notitia de Deo habebatur solum a Iudaeis, quia futurum erat quod salus ex Iudaeis proveniret; et sicut principium sanitatis debet esse sanum, ita principium salutis, quae habetur per Dei veram cognitionem et verum cultum, oportet veram cognitionem de Deo habere: et ideo, quia ex eis principium salutis et causa, scilicet Christus, provenire debebat, secundum illud Gen. 22:18 . . . oportet Deum notum esse in Iudaea”).

¹²⁵ *ST III*, q. 27, a. 1, resp.: “Rationabiliter enim creditur quod illa quae genuit ‘unigenitum a patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis,’ prae omnibus aliis maiora gratiae privilegia accepit, unde legitur, Luc. 1[:28], quod Angelus ei dixit, ‘ave, gratia plena.’”

receive and possess the holiness that the incarnate Word must have. The savior of sinners cannot himself be a sinner, but must “obtain supreme innocence.” To this end there ought to be a continuous sequence of righteous people who mediate holiness “from the first sinner all the way to Christ” and who visibly radiate signs of the perfect holiness to come.¹²⁶ Only so can God the Son take flesh from fallen Adam, thereby to redeem all who have Adam’s flesh and at the same time take, as he must, flesh set apart from idolatry and ignorance of God. The election of Abraham guarantees the continuing availability of holy flesh and fixes its public signs.

This tradition of sanctity culminates in Mary, who is elected from within Israel to be the mother of God, as Israel is elected from among the nations to be the holy people among whom alone such a mother could be. Chosen for this purpose, Mary alone mediates Jewish flesh, and thus human holiness, to Jesus, and so to God the Son.¹²⁷ Mary’s election, therefore, has to concentrate all the holiness of Israel in her person. God never elects without preparing those whom he chooses for the purpose he gives them.¹²⁸ For the purpose of being the mother of God, Mary is elected to perfect sanctification, or, looked at the other way around, to complete sinlessness. So she must be, “since she has a unique intimacy with Christ, who receives flesh from her. As is said in 2 Corinthians 6[:15], ‘What has Christ to do with Belial?’”—that is, with idolatry, the gravest of all sins.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *ST* III, q. 4, a. 6, ad 3: “Christus . . . quasi summam innocentiae obtinens, conveniens fuit ut a primo peccatore usque ad Christum perveniretur medi-antibus quibusdam iustis, in quibus perfulgerent quaedam insignia futurae sanctitatis.”

¹²⁷ *ST* III, q. 35, a. 4, ad 1: “Christ is not from the Jews except through the Blessed Virgin” (“Non autem est [Christus] ex Iudaeis nisi mediante Beata Virgine”).

¹²⁸ On the election of Mary, see *ST* III, q. 27, a. 4, resp.: “God prepares and disposes those whom he elects for some purpose so that they are able to fulfill it, according to 2 Cor. 3:6: ‘Who has made us able ministers of the New Testament.’ Now, the Blessed Virgin was divinely elected to be the mother of God. Therefore, there can be no doubt that God, by his grace, made her able to do this, according to the words spoken to her by the angel: ‘You have found grace with God: behold, you will conceive,’ etc.” (“[I]llos quos Deus ad aliquid eligit, ita praeparat et disponit ut ad id ad quod eliguntur inveniantur idonei, secundum illud II Cor. 3[:6]: ‘idoneos nos fecit ministros novi testamenti.’ Beata autem virgo fuit electa divinitus ut esset mater Dei. Et ideo non est dubitandum quod Deus per suam gratiam eam ad hoc idoneam reddidit, secundum quod Angelus ad eam dicit, ‘invenisti gratiam apud Deum, ecce, concipies,’ et cetera”).

¹²⁹ *ST* III, q. 27, a. 4, resp.: “[Q]uia singularem affinitatem habuit ad Christum,

Being an Israelite makes, it seems, a radical difference to who Christ is. The Word could not become gentile flesh. Jesus Christ could not be God incarnate at all unless he was a Jew, unless his mother was a Jew and they both practiced with supreme holiness, in the way appropriate to each, the Jewish religion.

Of course the necessity here is conditional; it is a matter of what Thomas calls suitability or fittingness (*convenientia*), rather than of what could not under any circumstances be otherwise. In Thomas's lexicon, the difference Israel makes to Christ's human origin is a matter of necessity *ex suppositione*, and not of necessity *simpliciter*.¹³⁰ But it was far more fitting for the Word of God to receive his flesh from a Jewish woman than in any other way.¹³¹ In the same way, it was more fitting for God to become incarnate as the climax of a deliberate preparation by way of election, law, and prefigurative cult, than at the remote beginning of human affairs.¹³² *Convenientia* is the tightest connection one could wish for here, and Thomas regards it as most fitting that Christ be an Israelite, that he take his human origin from this people elected in order to carve out a holy space in creation for his coming.

Understanding Salvation in Christ

Not only is the saving flesh of God incarnate from Israel. The totality of his redemptive work takes its form from Israel—or, in the terms we have already used, gets its conceptual content from Israel's life with

qui ab ea carnem accepit. Dicitur autem II Cor. 6: 'Quae conventio Christi ad Belial?' On the gravity of idolatry, see *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 3.

¹³⁰ For an important example of this distinction, see *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2, resp.

¹³¹ *ST* III, q. 31, a. 4, resp.: "While the Son of God could have assumed human flesh formed from whatever matter he wished, it was nonetheless eminently suitable that he receive flesh from a woman" ("[L]icet Filius Dei carnem humanam assumere potuerit de quacumque materia voluisset, convenientissimum tamen fuit ut de femina carnem acciperet").

¹³² *Super Gal.* 4, lec. 2: "For, since he that was to come was great, it was fitting that human beings be made ready for his coming by many signs and many preparations" (no. 201: "Quia enim magnus est qui venturus erat, oportebat et multis indicii et multis praeparationibus homines ad adventum eius disponi"). Cf. *ST* III, q. 1, a. 5, resp.: "Nor was it fitting that God should become incarnate immediately after sin. . . on account of the dignity of the incarnate Word, for on Gal. 4:4, 'when the fulness of the time had come,' a gloss says: 'The greater the judge who was coming, the longer was the series of heralds who ought to have come before him'" ("[N]on . . . statim post peccatum conveniens fuit Deum incarnari. . . . Tertio, propter dignitatem ipsius verbi incarnati. Quia super illud Gal. 4[:4], 'ubi venit plenitudo temporis,' dicit Glossa, 'quanto maior iudex veniebat, tanto praeconum series longior praecedere debebat'").

God, especially her cultic life. The saving action and passion of Jesus, all that God the Son did and suffered in the human nature he assumed, comes as the fulfillment of Israel's whole law and history.¹³³ As St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "everything happened to this people as a figure" of what was to come in Christ (Vulg.: "Omnia in figura contingebant illis"). The entire *cultus* of this people "was a figure of the mystery of Christ, so that everything they did [in worship] figuratively anticipated what belongs to Christ."¹³⁴ Not only Israel's worship, though, but her whole existence (*totus status*) pointed in complex detail to what would unfold in Christ for the salvation of the world.¹³⁵ The content-laden figurative significance of Israel's history reaches all the way down to the scripturally narrated details of her wars and daily life. "Even the wars and exploits of this people have a mystical meaning, and not the wars and exploits of the Assyrians or the Romans, even though the latter are more celebrated among men."¹³⁶ Just this law and just this history prefigured the salvation Jesus was to accomplish in the Paschal mystery. It is for the sake of the incarnate God's redemptive mission as a whole, and not only for his existence in our flesh, that God has distinguished Israel from the nations.

Here, basic Christological considerations again come into play. The Father's Word does not assume universal human nature into the unity of his person (human nature in general) but an individuated (though not yet subsisting) human nature with determinate properties. The eternal

¹³³ In the language of *ST* III, q. 27, prooem., "quae filius Dei incarnatus in natura humana sibi unita fecit vel passus est."

¹³⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 6, resp.: "Cultus autem legis figurabat mysterium Christi, unde omnia eorum gesta figurabant ea quae ad Christum pertinent; secundum illud I Cor. 10[:11], 'omnia in figuram contingebant illis.'"

¹³⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 104, a. 2, resp.: "The whole existence of that people, who were directed by these precepts, was figurative, according to 1 Cor. 10:11: 'Everything happened to them as a figure'" ("[T]otus status illius populi, qui per huiusmodi praecepta disponebatur, figuralis erat; secundum illud I ad Cor. 10[:11], 'omnia in figuram contingebant illis'"); *ibid.*, ad 2: "The whole existence of that people had to be prophetic and figural" ("[O]portuit totum illius populi statum esse propheticum et figuralem"; this way of putting the point comes from Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22.24, which Thomas invokes several times). On Israel's whole life as a figure of Christ, see also *ST* I-II, q. 100, a. 12, resp.; q. 103, a. 1, resp.; and III, q. 27, a. 2, sc. However, all the doctrines and precepts of the New Testament are already taught in the Old, "sub figura" (*ST* I-II, q. 107, a. 3, ad 1; cf. ad 2).

¹³⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 104, a. 2, ad 2: "[E]tiam bella et gesta illius populi exponuntur mystice; non autem bella vel gesta Assyriorum vel Romanorum, quamvis longe clariora secundum homines."

Verbum assumes (and so actualizes) human nature, Aquinas says, “in atomo” (borrowing the term from John of Damascus).¹³⁷ This suggests that Israel’s particular history, and especially the determinate features of her cult, is necessary in order to prepare the holy human “atom” that God will assume. The Son of God, Thomas observes in commentary on Hebrews 2:16, took into full personal unity with himself “not an ideal human nature, but one individuated and not further divisible, from the seed of Abraham.”¹³⁸ The matter that God will assume already has to be shaped in a particular fashion, suitable for the saving mission he will undertake. It not only has to be Jewish matter, flesh descended from the patriarchs, but flesh shaped by the Jewish people’s communal history of love and obedience to God.

We cannot here treat in detail the manifold ways Aquinas sees Jesus Christ prefigured in Israel’s cultic life: the redemptive effusion of his blood and the richness of his love by the animal blood poured out on the steps of the altar and the fat consumed in the fire; his opening up for us of heavenly glory by the high priest’s entry into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement; his Paschal sacrifice and his Eucharistic presence as true food of the faithful by the slaying and communal eating of the Passover lamb; the sins he conquers by the prohibited foods; and so forth.¹³⁹ Whatever his success in individual cases, Aquinas does not simply assume, but tries to show, that Christ’s saving passion and his sacraments are the “truth” of which Israel’s ceremonial law in its totality is the figure. While the richness and density of this truth surpasses that of the realities which anticipate it, the truth nonetheless has to correspond or “answer” (*respondere*) to the figure.¹⁴⁰ The mystery

¹³⁷ ST III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3: “The Word of God did not assume human nature in general, but ‘in atomo’—that is, in an individual—as the Damascene says; otherwise it would belong to every human being to be the Word of God, just as it belongs to Christ” (“*Dei Verbum non assumpsit naturam humanam in universalis, sed in atomo, idest in individuo, sicut Damascenus dicit; alioquin oporteret quod cuilibet homini conveniret esse Dei Verbum, sicut convenit Christo*”).

¹³⁸ *Super Heb.* 2, lec. 4: “[A]ssumpsit . . . humanam naturam, non tamen idealem, sed in individuo et atomo, et ex semine Abrahae” (Marietti, vol. 2, no. 148).

¹³⁹ See, respectively, ST I-II, q. 102, a. 3, ad 8; q. 102, a. 4, ad 4; q. 102, a. 5, ads 2–3 (and III, q. 73, a. 6); and I-II, q. 102, a. 6, ad 1.

¹⁴⁰ ST III, q. 39, a. 4, obj. 1: “Veritas enim debet respondere figurae.” Naturally, the correspondence cannot be complete, or the figured truth would not fulfill and surpass the figure; it would be the figure. “While the truth suitably answers to the figure, the figure cannot be adequate to the truth” (ST III, q. 76, a. 6, ad 2: “Veritas autem licet figurae respondeat, tamen figura non potest eam adaequare”).

of Christ has a multiplicity of aspects or benefits for the world that need to be figured by a whole variety of ceremonies.¹⁴¹ But not just any ceremonies will do. Rather, just the ones given in the law are what he requires, what the mystery of his Passion, Resurrection, and sacramental presence calls forth by way of a figurative anticipation.

Israel needs this cult so that, by practicing it, she may be joined to the Christ whom it prefigures, and so be saved by him.¹⁴² Christ having come in the flesh, the Church no longer practices the ancient cult, but worships God in a new way, with sacraments instituted by God in the flesh (on which more shortly). Yet, the Church still needs Israel's cult, in at least the sense that the Church cannot do without Scripture's witness to the liturgical commands God gave and Israel's implementation of them. All the saving benefits God confers upon the world are given at once in an utterly concentrated form in the single event of the Paschal mystery. We would be powerless to grasp it, to see what God has done for us in Christ, had it not been prefigured for us by the practices of Israel's worship in all their manifold variety. Precisely because Israel's cultic life was the divinely constructed figure of Christ's saving passion, it gives us the many concepts and examples we need so that we may begin to appreciate what has happened to us, and for us, in Christ. This process is already underway, of course, in the New Testament itself. No one concept or example can contain all that happens in the Paschal mystery, or come remotely close to doing so. We need many such notions, and we need to combine them correctly, knowing that, even then, we will not have plumbed the depths of the saving mystery. In a not wholly unrelated fashion, we need many different concepts to speak and think correctly of God, whose one simple essence we nonetheless know we will fall short of grasping. In both cases we need the

¹⁴¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 101, a. 3, resp.: "[M]ysterium Christi, quod per huiusmodi caeremonialia figurabatur, multiplices utilitates attulit mundo, et multa circa ipsum considerata erant, quae oportuit per diversa caeremonialia figurari." To be sure, the multitude of cultic laws God gave the Israelites has both literal and figurative purposes: they enable Israel, alone among the nations, to worship the one true God here and now, as well as anticipating Christ to come.

¹⁴² See (among others) *ST* I-II, q. 103 a. 2, resp.: "In the time of the law the minds of the faithful were able to be joined to Christ incarnate in his passion, and in this way they were justified by faith in Christ. Their observation of the ceremonies was a profession of this faith, in that the ceremonies were a figure of Christ" ("Poterat autem mens fidelium, tempore legis, per fidem coniungi Christo incarnato et passo: et ita ex fide Christi iustificabantur. Cuius fidei quaedam protestatio erat huiusmodi caeremoniarum observatio, in quantum erant figura Christi").

right concepts and guidance on how to combine them, and it is these that scriptural Israel gives us. This is what it means to say that Israel's whole existence was a figure of Christ "for *our* instruction" (I Cor. 10:11), as well as for Israel's own salvation.

Jesus Christ, then, needs more from Israel than a holy stock from which God the Son can draw his human flesh. The complex saving role that Christ enacts has to be *available*, it has to be a real possibility, and its availability consists precisely in its manifold prefiguration. The human "atom" that the eternal Son assumes for the world's salvation has been given its determinate shape by generations of Jewish obedience. Abraham, as priest and prophet, already began to embody the shape of the coming redeemer. So, in one way or another, did David, the prophet and king, and all Israelite obedience to God's manifold commands.¹⁴³

The holiness of Mary's Jewish flesh, upon which the Incarnation itself depends, is likewise inseparable from her obedience, her whole self's yes to the will and command of God. She brings to perfection the shape of Israelite obedience. Mary is, in Thomas's language, the truth of which the synagogue—Israel at worship—is the figure. She "enacts the figure of the synagogue, which is the mother of Christ," and so is alone suited to be his mother according to the flesh.¹⁴⁴ The redeemer of the world not only needs flesh descended from Abraham and Israel, but flesh formed by the law, by Israel's religion and worship. He needs the synagogue for his mother; in Mary, this is just the mother he has.

Of course, Christ is the *ratio* of the ceremonies, and indeed of Israel's whole figurative existence, and not they of him. They take the shape they have because of him, not he because of them.¹⁴⁵ But this is simply to say that being the fulfiller of just this law is constitutive of who he is as redeemer.¹⁴⁶ He redeems all humanity by accomplishing all that is anticipated in this particular cult, the worship of this particular people. Jesus Christ is, in Thomas's felicitous phrase, "the fruit of the law," and

¹⁴³ On Abraham and David, see *ST* III, q. 31, a. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Super Ioan.* 2, lec. 1: Mary "provokes" Jesus to his first miracle at Cana, "realizing in this way the figure of the synagogue, which is the mother of Christ" (no. 346: "gerens in hoc figuram synagogae, quae est mater Christi").

¹⁴⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 3, resp.: "Because the figure takes its shape from what it is a figure of, the contents of the figural sacrifices of the old law are derived from the true sacrifice of Christ" ("Et quia ex figurato sumitur ratio figurae, ideo rationes sacrificiorum figuralium veteris legis sunt sumendae ex vero sacrificio Christi").

¹⁴⁶ Matthew Levering develops this point extensively in *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple*.

for just this reason he is fit to offer, and to be offered as, the redemptive sacrifice for all humanity.¹⁴⁷ He offers a particular sacrifice for the world's salvation, the sacrifice that only the Jews have prepared by their worship, in which only they have believed, grasping the meaning of their figures. He offers the sacrifice that only a Jew can offer. If just this cult has been prepared by God in order to be the determinate figure of Christ's passion, then only a Jew can be the redeemer of the world, as only a Jew can be God incarnate.

The Purpose of Election Fulfilled: A Perplexity

In Thomas, it seems, we have in many ways a far more exalted estimate of both the Jewish people and the Jewish religion than that typically found in recent Christian theology, precisely where recent theology has prided itself on having overcome the hopelessly grave defects of traditional Christian thought about the Jews. For Thomas, in a word, both the Jewish people and Judaism are closer to God, more intimately bound up with God and God's purposes, than "post-supersessionist" theology usually ventures to suppose.

Thomas insists not only on God's irrevocable election of the Jewish people—the point where recent theology has thought it was returning to the biblical roots of the faith long repudiated in the tradition—but also on God's irrevocable assumption of Jewish flesh to be his own. In the actual economy of salvation, as we have seen, only Jewish flesh is capable of being assumed in this way. This means not only that Jewish flesh is uniquely as close to God as it is possible for a creature to be—hypostatically united to God the Son—but that Jewish flesh thereby attains an infinite dignity. It is nothing less than the flesh of God, the *caro Dei*, "from whom it has boundless worth."¹⁴⁸

As we have also seen, the acts of the virtue of religion depend on the availability of precepts God must give, in order for creatures to offer God the worship and honor that is due to him. Judaism, in its biblical

¹⁴⁷ By the prohibition of eating the first fruits (Lv 19:23), it was prefigured that, only when the law had fully run its course, "was Christ, who is the fruit of the law, to be offered to God" (*ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 6, ad 5: "erat Christus Deo offerendus, qui est fructus legis"); cf. *Super Gal.* 3, lec. 7 (nos. 164 and 166).

¹⁴⁸ *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2, ad 3: "The value of Christ's flesh is not to be judged only according to the nature of flesh [itself], but according to the person who assumes it, that is, insofar as it was the flesh of God, from whom it has boundless worth" ("[D]ignitas carnis Christi non est aestimanda solum secundum carnis naturam, sed secundum personam assumentem, inquantum scilicet erat caro Dei, ex quo habebat dignitatem infinitam").

form, for Aquinas, consists in just these divinely given precepts. But it is not simply the case, as post-supersessionist theology also typically insists, that Christians must regard the Jewish religion as willed by God, and so as the proper worship of the Jewish people. That is right as far as it goes. But God and his mother both practice this religion and, in just this way, enact the virtue of religion.¹⁴⁹ Precisely from her practice of Judaism, from her participation in Israel's cult and her obedience to Israel's laws, Mary draws the perfect (that is, sinless) holiness of the created person, the pure creature. And precisely in his full acceptance of the law of Israel, Jesus realizes the supreme holiness possible to the creature at all, the human holiness of God the Son.¹⁵⁰ By his submission to the Father, his prayer, and his priesthood, enacted in free obedience to the law of Israel, from circumcision to paschal sacrifice, Jesus fulfills and

¹⁴⁹ That Jesus possesses all the moral virtues, thereby including the virtue of religion, Aquinas holds explicitly (see *ST* III, q. 7, a. 2). He must possess these human virtues in the fullest possible way—as fully, in other words, as the subsistence of his humanity in the person of the Word allows. This means that, while he will have religion, he will not have faith, since the hypostatic union entails, Aquinas holds, the immediate possession of the vision of God in Jesus' human soul (see, e.g., *ST* III, q. 9, a. 2). This claim is lately much contested, but we will have to leave that aside for now. We may simply note that, since Jesus is a *comprehensor* even on the *viator's* way that leads to the Cross, in him the virtue of religion is not caused by the virtue of faith, as it presently is in us. Rather the immediate vision of God causes and makes perfect the virtue of religion in him, as it does all the virtues compatible with the vision of God (that is, the moral virtues under the regime of charity). This is to be expected, since Thomas has already held that, in our case too, the virtue of religion will remain when we see God. Indeed, it will be the form in which the virtue of justice continues to exist *in patria*: "As to justice, it is clear what act it will have there, namely to be subject to God, because even in this life it pertains to justice to be subject to a superior" (*ST* I-II, q. 67, a. 1, resp.: "De iustitia vero manifestum est quem actum ibi habebit, scilicet esse subditum Deo, quia etiam in hac vita ad iustitiam pertinent esse subditum superiori"). Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 136, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁵⁰ On the relationship between the holiness of Mary and the holiness of Jesus, see, e.g., *ST* III, q. 27, a. 5, resp.: "Christ is the source of grace . . . hence it is said in John 1:17: 'Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.' But the blessed virgin Mary was nearest to Christ with respect to humanity, because he received human nature from her. Therefore it was due to her to receive from Christ a greater fullness of grace than others" ("Christus autem est principium gratiae. . . unde et Ioan. 1[17] dicitur, 'gratia et veritas per Iesum Christum facta est.' Beata autem virgo Maria propinquissima Christo fuit secundum humanitatem, quia ex ea accepit humanam naturam. Et ideo prae ceteris maiorem debuit a Christo plenitudinem gratiae obtinere").

perfects the precepts of divine worship God gave to his elect people. In just this way, he perfects the virtue of religion. Judaism, as practiced by Jesus, is the perfect religion—so exceedingly perfect, indeed, as to constitute the salvation of the world.

Herein lies a perplexity. The perplexity I have in mind is neither trivial nor recondite; but it is troubling, and it goes to the heart of the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. This puzzlement is not Thomas's invention, but he brings it clearly to light. Recent Christian theology tends to talk as though it had untied the knot of this perplexity. But this is to mistake ignoring a problem for solving it. Allow me to conclude by reflecting briefly on this difficulty and on why it is so hard to overcome.

Christ has so fully enacted the divinely mandated worship of Israel that now every priestly act, every act that offers to God the worship he is due in justice, will be Christ's own act. To the extent that this worship belongs to us, it will be our participation in his one supreme act of sacrifice, his high priestly offering of himself in the upper room and on the altar of the cross. And this is simply to say, it would seem, that the worship due to God is now possible only for those who are in Christ, that is, for Christians. Jesus—Israel's God made flesh and the Jewish redeemer of all the world—has so fulfilled the law of Israel that no space appears to remain for the Jews themselves to practice it. Differently put: it would now seem to be impossible for any human being, Jew or gentile, to exercise the virtue of religion except in union with Christ. "In the Lord Jesus Christ," Aquinas succinctly observes, "there was the perfection of all religion and sanctity."¹⁵¹

In agreement with a long tradition, Aquinas holds that the worship (the "ceremonies") God enjoined upon Israel is not only fulfilled in their totality by Christ, but "taken away when they are fulfilled."¹⁵² The claim that, in all its particulars, Israel's divinely mandated worship has become a thing of the past (*tolluntur*) is not an unnecessary and invidious addition to faith in its fulfillment (*implentur*), but part of what it means for the ritual laws of the elect people to have been fulfilled. In its totality, Israel's *cultus* was a gift given for her sanctification and as an abundant figure of the redeemer yet to come. With the advent

¹⁵¹ *Contra impugnantes*, ch. 8, §2, obj. 8: "In domino Iesu Christo omnis religionis et sanctitatis perfectio fuit" (Leonine ed., vol. 41A [1970], 126.136–137). Thomas is here stating an objection against the religious habits of the mendicant orders, but he obviously agrees with this assumption, which fuels the objection.

¹⁵² *ST* I-II, q. 107, a. 2, ad 1: "[C]eremoniae legis tolluntur cum implentur."

of Christ in the flesh and his saving passion, the twin purposes of this divine gift have been fully accomplished. To continue the old way of worship after the coming of Christ attests, whether or not intentionally, that the purposes for which God gave it have not in fact been accomplished, but still await their realization. "Worship according to the law ceased when it was fulfilled by the passion of Christ, since God established it as a figure of Christ."¹⁵³ From this follows Thomas's well known insistence, also not unique to him, that to follow the law once enjoined upon Israel after the passion of Christ, after his high priestly offering on the Cross, is no longer to exercise the virtue of religion, but the vice of infidelity—that Jewish worship has become *mortifera*, death-dealing.¹⁵⁴

To us, such claims seem impossibly harsh and unwarranted, and we instinctively assume they must have a non-theological, indeed non-religious, explanation. But Aquinas does not say such things out of an arbitrary disregard for Judaism, let alone out of an incipient anti-Semitism. He says them precisely as a result of his remarkably *high* estimate of Jewish election and Judaism. From the priesthood of God incarnate, of the God who has become Jewish flesh, "flows the entire worship of the Christian religion," the whole sacramental life of the Church.¹⁵⁵ The Church's saving *ritus* does not flow from the priesthood of Christ by rejecting the worship God enjoined upon Israel, but by fulfilling it. The Church's sacramental life simply *is* the worship enjoined upon Israel, enacted and thus fulfilled by Christ. To treat the divinely mandated worship of Israel as an *alternative* to the sacramental life of the Church is not to continue in the worship of the one true God, but to fall away

¹⁵³ *ST* I-II, q. 103, a. 4, ad 1: "[R]itus autem legis cessabat tanquam impletus per Christi passionem, utpote a Deo in figuram Christi institutus"

¹⁵⁴ See, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 104, a. 3, resp.: "The ceremonial rites have been made void to such an extent that they are not only 'dead,' but even 'deadly,' for those who observe them after Christ. . . . therefore, observing them is against the truth of the faith" ("Nam caeremonialia adeo sunt evacuata ut non solum sint 'mortua,' sed etiam 'mortifera' observantibus post Christum. . . . et ideo ipsa observatio eorum praeiudicat fidei veritati"). Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 103, a. 4, resp. and ad 1, and II-II, q. 93, a. 1, resp. Some complexities in Aquinas's view of the Levitical ceremonies as "mortifera," in contrast to "mortua," I will not pursue here. These are sometimes taken to mitigate his apparent claim that Jewish worship is now "deadly" for those who practice it, though I think these efforts on Thomas's behalf are unsuccessful in the end. For a brief discussion see my essay, "Christ and Israel" (note 91 above), 338–339, esp. n. 17.

¹⁵⁵ *ST* III, q. 63, a. 3, resp.: "Totus autem ritus Christianae religionis derivatur a sacerdotio Christi."

from it by rejecting the priest and the priesthood in which alone this worship now can take place.

Something has gone deeply wrong here. It cannot be the case that the Jewish people, precisely by the practice of Judaism, fail to worship, and indeed reject, the God who chose them and their descendants forever. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, among other important magisterial interventions, evidently supposes that this cannot be the case. The Jewish people and the Church aim at the same goal—not simply at the one true God, but at the advent of his Messiah.¹⁵⁶ In any case, it seems hard to reconcile Thomas's thought that the Jewish religion has become a mode of infidelity with his own commitment to the permanence of Israel's election. Surely, the Jewish religion, now as before, must be the divinely given means to the right and just worship of God for his elect people, and so a genuine alternative to the sacramental life of the Church as a way to intimacy with God. So we must suppose, if we believe in the election of Israel. But if we believe in the Incarnation and the redemption, there can be no such alternative.

I do not know how to solve this problem, or even whether it has a solution short of the last day.¹⁵⁷ I do, however, think it is a perplexity to which we need to face up, even—indeed especially—if that means acknowledging our own impotence to untie this knot. N-V

¹⁵⁶ “[W]hen one considers the future, God’s People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar (*analogos*) goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §840).

¹⁵⁷ For a more detailed articulation of the problem, and an indication as to why the usual solutions fail, see Marshall, “Christ and Israel.”