

When Our Fathers Fall: A Thomistic-Confucian Approach to Lay Moral Correction of Clergy

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In this article, I seek to draw upon the resources of Thomas Aquinas and early Confucian philosophy in order to answer the following question: what are the responsibilities of lay Catholics to our priests and bishops as regards their personal moral rectification? This justifiably provokes two questions in reaction: why is this question worth pursuing, and why pursue it via a comparative reading of Aquinas and Confucian philosophy?

As to the first of these, the question I pose here is a specification of the larger responsibilities that fall to Christians according to the Scriptures. Galatians 5:1–2 puts the matter this way: “Brothers, even if a person is caught in some transgression, you who are spiritual should correct that one in a gentle spirit, looking to yourself, so that you may also not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.”¹ In the theological tradition, “bearing one another’s burdens” has been neatly and aptly represented in the principle of fraternal correction. The question I am focused on here, then, is how is fraternal correction properly offered from laity to clerics.

Ultimately, articulating the shape or form of virtuous lay correction of clergy is actually a rather knotty problem. This is because the manner of the relationship between laity and clergy is not simply understood in terms

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Scripture are taken from the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE). Unless otherwise attributed, all other translations are my own, and all citations of Chinese texts in this article refer to text divisions according to the Chinese Text Project, ed. Donald Sturgeon (ctext.org).

of the bonds of Christian fraternity. Certainly, all Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ, for through His grace we have been adopted into the inheritance of the Kingdom of God as children of God (see Eph 5:1–5; 1 John 3:1–3). Yet the Church also recognizes that priests and bishops possess not simply a fraternal but also a paternal relationship to laity. As St. Paul again puts it to the church in Corinth, “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:15–16).

I propose here that, although fraternal correction is a still useful concept for understanding how laity can morally correct clergy, it has an obvious weakness in that it corresponds to a particular relational analogy, that of fraternity, within which the difference in authority is not as great as the parent–child bond. Thus, fraternal correction is exceptionally useful for understanding how relationships with more or less equal rank of authority can function in terms of moral remonstrance, such as how a lay Christian might fraternally correct another lay Christian, or a cleric fraternally correct a cleric. However, when it comes to clergy–laity relations, the shape of fraternal correction is far less clear, for there is a just and genuine disparity between them in the order of ecclesial, magisterial authority underlying the relationship, even if there is equality in other important respects.

I argue here that lay responsibilities for correcting clergy can be fruitfully understood in terms of filial remonstrance as understood by the Confucian philosophical tradition. Of course, there is one tremendous dissimilarity between Confucian views on the responsibilities for filial remonstrance and those pertaining to the laity–clergy relationship: the former occur within and flow from the natural foundation of the parent–child bond, while the latter are not based on blood relations and natural duties. Yet, the same can be said about the language of fraternal correction, which draws upon the analogous duties of blood-kin applied to the spiritual fraternity of the Christian life. And so, it must be admitted that although the father–child relationship is used only analogously to describe the priest–laity relationship, it also accurately depicts the reality of that relationship. As John Paul II observed, priestly celibacy entails “a singular sharing in God’s fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church.”² The call of the priest to the celibate life is thus a call to fatherhood, indeed, a call to imitate and participate in the paternity of the triune God in a special and spiritual way. It seems clear that only a materialistic conception of things that denies the spiritual its proper weight and importance can deny

² John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), §29.

the significance and justice with which the priest and bishop are known as true “fathers” for the faithful. This is especially so because even biological fathers do not create physical life for their children, but transmit what has been given to them in the execution of God’s providential ordering of existence. So too, Catholic clergy do not originate the life of grace and salvation, but play an indissoluble role in transmitting and guarding the life in the Spirit for Christians, even as they require care and development of this life for themselves as well.³

Indeed, it might be argued that a recovery of the paternal nature of priesthood would be of great help in our age of clerical abuses, ecclesial mistrust, and the increasingly popular conception of the Church as a “sacrament factory.” For, in our age in the West, it seems the priest and bishop often see themselves as administrators of social contracts rather than fathers pining for their children’s flourishing. Perhaps recovering the image of the priest as father would help cultivate the kinds of courageous household leaders we need so desperately. Yet this is clearly beyond the scope of my argument here. I mean to say only that we really should be able to take the paternal character of the priest and bishop seriously, and that in consequence means that the paternal character of the priesthood can helpfully clarify lay responsibilities towards those who are called to be our fathers in spiritual matters.

Hence, I believe the Confucian tradition provides a helpful resource for thinking about lay responsibilities towards priests, as it reflects upon the natural duties of children to offer moral correction for their parents. Although Aquinas’s reflections on fraternal correction are rich in detail and very helpful for producing guidelines for virtuous correction of clergy,

³ My appeal to a paternal conception of the priesthood should not be taken to undermine or distract from the universal priesthood of the Church or the spiritual cultivation needed by the individual priest. Yves Congar helpfully provides a way to connect the two themes, describing the priesthood of all believers in terms of the sacrifice of one’s self to God (*A Gospel Priesthood*, trans. P. J. Hepburne-Scott [New York: Herder and Herder, 1967], 90–95). For priests, Congar observes, there must be this continuous act of self-sacrifice of “building the Church in ourselves,” and through this sacrifice “we are only the stewards of good which God has placed in the world, which is his property, for the good of all mankind, which is his family” (94). The conception of the universal Christian sacrifice of self helpfully highlights the way the priest really is a spiritual father, as a steward of what has been given to him. Furthermore, as those blessed to be earthly fathers know experientially, it is only in this kind of sacrifice of self that fathers can take up this role of paternity in being stewards of God’s gifts to us. Thus, the priest’s imperfection and need for spiritual cultivation does not contradict his paternity, but rather reinforces it in a beautiful manner.

Aquinas himself says nothing about moral difficulties for the lay Christian vis-à-vis the filial relationship with clergy. Chinese Confucianism, on the other hand, gives tremendous attention to negotiating the moral difficulties of children in correcting the moral waywardness of their parents. Recently, it has become popular to draw on Confucian approaches to ethics to emphasize how the diverse social relationships and roles we play towards others help to define the nature of virtuous activity in these different circumstances.⁴ Traditionally, classical Confucianism focuses on the Five Relationships (*wu lun*; 五倫) that are the primary moral roles humans must virtuously negotiate: those between husband and wife, between father and son, between older brother and younger brother, between ruler and minister, and between friends.⁵ In Confucianism, all but the last of these are construed as superior-subordinate relationships (literally “high and low”; *shang-xia*; 上下). With regard to the father-son bond, the Confucian tradition is unequivocal that sons owe their fathers moral remonstrance (*jian*; 諫), as an expression of, and never a departure from, the filial attitude of love and reverence owed to their fathers (i.e., being *xiao*; 孝).

I argue here that the Confucian emphasis on maintaining filial virtue in the midst of moral correction provides helpful resources to lay Christians

⁴ See, e.g.: Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011); A. T. Nuyen, “Confucian Ethics as Role-Based Ethics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 2007): 315–28; Jung H. Lee, “An Ethics of Propriety: Ritual, Roles, and Dependence in Early Confucianism,” *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2013): 153–165; Daniel J. Stephens, “Confucian Ethics and the Practical Value of Roles,” *Philosophy East and West* 68, no. 3 (2018): 909–28. Ames in particular has emphasized describing Confucianism as “role ethic” over and against considering it as a form of virtue ethics. Stephen C. Angle, who has defended at length the interpretation of Confucianism as a virtue ethic, has published an illustrative critique of Ames’s vision of role ethics (Angle, “Building Bridges to Distant Shores: Pragmatic Problems with Confucian Role Ethics,” in *Appreciating the Chinese Difference: Engaging Roger T. Ames on Methods, Issues, and Roles*, ed. James Behuniak Jr. [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018], 156–82). For what it is worth, my own interpretation of Confucianism is far more in line with Angle than Ames. I insist on the terminology of “role ethics” because I think there is value in the robust Confucian attention to how our social (and especially familial) roles help to concretely define virtuous acts. For other noteworthy critiques of the role ethic perspective, see John Ramsey, “Mengzi’s Externalist Solution to the Role Dilemma,” *Asian Philosophy* 25, no.2 (May 2015): 188–206, and Henry Rosemont Jr., “Role Ethics: Problems and Promise,” in Behuniak Jr., *Appreciating the Chinese Difference*, 229–248.

⁵ Classically, this list is taken from the *Mengzi*, 3A:4, wherein the relationships are listed, though not labeled as the “Five Relationships.”

for understanding how we might virtuously correct our spiritual fathers. While Aquinas provides clarity about the responsibilities Christians owe one another under the law of grace and charity and helpful general guidelines for correcting superiors, the Confucian tradition provides a way to heighten and clarify how lay Catholics can enact our properly filial agency when we seek to correct our priests and bishops due to sin. Therefore, this article proceeds in three distinct steps. The first two sections construct the conceptual apparatus of fraternal correction according to Aquinas and filial remonstrance in Confucianism, respectively. The third and final section synthesizes these concepts in order to provide concrete moral guidelines for how laity can offer virtuous moral correction to clergy that serves this particular bond.

Before turning to construct my account of lay correction of clergy, two clarifications are in order. The first regards the scope of my argument: here my focus is on what we might call the private sin of clerics relevant to their holiness and pursuit of righteousness. This is due in large part to guidelines I take from Aquinas. As I detail below, Aquinas sees fraternal correction as attempting to correct another out of charity for his/her own sake, and not as a means to secure or protect the common good, which is a matter of justice. Therefore, the kind of correction I mean here is when a clergyman falls into sin that impedes his holiness, such as becoming slothful, gluttonous, or lustful. When these sins concern the common good (as in the case of the sexual abuse crisis), the moral problem is entirely different, since it falls under justice rather than charity, and what I offer here is of limited relevance.

Finally, I should like to make one last clarification. I have attempted in the following to make the proper analogous adjustments that are required when applying practices from a natural kinship bond to the spiritual life of the Church. I believe I have done so appropriately, but wish to stress again that I think it both important and valuable to draw upon remonstrance as a complement to fraternal correction, which is also a moral action that is only analogously applied to the spiritual life. It might be the case that what I offer here would ultimately require a more comprehensive theological account of the priest *qua* father. At the least, I hope the reflections here show the fruitfulness of such a task, and perhaps inspire others to undertake it.

Fraternal Correction in Aquinas

Because I seek to expand upon Aquinas's concept of fraternal correction, it is condign to begin with this concept on Aquinas's own terms. Fraternal correction is a deeply biblical idea, especially in the theology of the Apostle Paul (see citations above), as well as a traditional idea, particularly in Augustine.⁶ In the Middle Ages, theologians developed a more sophisticated and programmatic account of fraternal correction.⁷ Aquinas's own understanding of fraternal correction was heavily indebted to the Franciscan theologian Alexander of Hales. Indeed, Takashi Shogimen has even argued that Aquinas's reflections on fraternal correction are set firmly within the framework provided by Alexander.⁸

Given the size of the task I have set myself to read Aquinas's reflections on fraternal correction alongside early Confucian texts, I will dispense with a discussion of precisely how Aquinas draws upon these sources, and focus instead on Aquinas's own understanding of fraternal correction. At the very least, his own thought on the concept developed over time. In his commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, Aquinas initially focuses on fraternal reproving (*correptio*), primarily discussing the relationship between punishments and authority within hierarchical communities.⁹ Aquinas distinguishes between different kinds of admonishment, each of which is concerned with helping the brother maintain the path of rectitude.

⁶ Gregory S. Moule, *Corporate Jurisdiction, Academic Heresy, and Fraternal Correction at the University of Paris, 1200–1400* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 241–42, and 282–83. Moule identifies Matt 18:15–22 (and not merely 18:15–18) as a key verse that inspired medieval considerations of fraternal correction, in addition to Rom 1:32. However, as Moule also notes, the Matthean text presented “by its very nature . . . an idealized situation, one that did not always occur in practice. Thus, medieval theologians had to clarify the application of these texts to particular circumstances” (245).

⁷ Moule, *Corporate Jurisdiction*, 247. Moule notes that Peter Lombard did not include a specific treatment on fraternal correction in the *Sentences*.

⁸ See Takashi Shogimen, “From Disobedience to Toleration: William of Ockham and the Medieval Discourse on Fraternal Correction,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52, no. 4 (2001): 599–622, esp. 601–6.

⁹ See *In IV sent.*, d. 19, q. 2. All translations of Aquinas are my own unless otherwise noted. I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewer at *Nova et Vetera* for pointing out that most religious orders have fraternal correction discussed as an explicit responsibility within their constitutions. See, for example, chapter 8 of the *General Constitutions General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor* (ofm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CGSG2016EN.pdf). This underscores that for Aquinas, fraternal correction was not an abstract idea, but part of the concrete life of a fraternal religious order.

Eventually, Aquinas identifies “correction” (*corrigere*) as responding to a brother’s departure from the right way of life in order to lead him once again to rectitude.¹⁰ Aquinas further distinguishes two ways of helping restore another to rectitude. The first is through fear of shame or hatred of the sin itself, showing another the ugliness of his sin.¹¹ The second is through “fear and hatred of sadness” (*per timorem et odium tristis*), resulting in the brother’s retreat from sin due to fear of punishments or damnation.¹²

Significantly, Aquinas argues that the second mode of correction pertaining to punishments can be exercised only by prelates, because only superiors possess the requisite authority to inflict punishment.¹³ In his mature reflections in the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*], Aquinas maintains attention on correction as a form of punishment and the question of competent authority, but he largely treats such punishment as a matter of justice rather than charity. Consequently, Aquinas distinguishes between fraternal correction as a matter of charity and fraternal correction as a matter of justice. Note that Aquinas holds that this former type of correction—showing a brother the ugliness of his sin—can be practiced by confrères and does not require authority.¹⁴

In the *ST*, Aquinas discusses fraternal correction as a sub-virtue of charity.¹⁵ He thus prioritizes the demonstration of sin as more proper to fraternal correction than punishment, though the latter is charitable when the corrector is a superior charged with care for the wrongdoer’s soul. In emphasizing fraternal correction as a form of charity in the *ST*, Aquinas asserts fraternal correction as a demand of charity on all Christians, and not primarily part of a superior’s duties to subordinates.¹⁶ Ultimately, correction is a responsibility of all Christians for one another. However, virtues are practiced amidst concrete circumstances, which greatly impact fraternal correction. There are clearly forms of correction Aquinas thinks

¹⁰ *In IV sent.*, q. 19, a. 2, a. 1, corp.

¹¹ *In IV sent.*, q. 19, a. 2, a. 1, corp.

¹² *In IV sent.*, q. 19, a. 2, a. 1, corp.

¹³ *In IV sent.*, q. 19, a. 2, a. 1, corp.

¹⁴ *In IV sent.*, q. 19, a. 2, a. 1, corp.

¹⁵ For an excellent overview of charity in Aquinas, see Christopher J. Malloy, *Aquinas on Beatific Charity and the Problem of Love* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019).

¹⁶ Shogimen, “From Disobedience to Toleration,” 603. Shogimen argues here that Aquinas thus refined Alexander’s distinction between correction *ex officio* and *ex caritate*: “Aquinas linked the distinction to the nature of the error that is to be corrected. . . . In other words, whether the error has any impact on the common good determines the appropriate type of correction.”

are appropriately enacted only by superiors. Therefore, not all modes of reproving are appropriate to charitable fraternal correction.

Thankfully, Aquinas addresses this issue explicitly, producing helpful guidelines. First, Aquinas says that “the correction of a wrongdoer [delinquentis] is a certain remedy that should be applied against the sin of another person.”¹⁷ Thus, correction is a remedy with sin as its patient. We must also bear in mind that a person’s sin is harmful in two ways, both to himself (because it is doing evil) and to others as injury, scandal, disruption of the common good, or promotion of injustice.¹⁸ Eventually, Aquinas concludes that rectifying the harm of sin affecting others falls under justice.¹⁹ Therefore, since fraternal correction is ordered by charity rather than justice, it is “ordered to the emendation of the wrongdoer.”²⁰ Aquinas explains that, when we seek to remove a person’s evil, we are seeking the person’s good, which pertains to charity more than any other virtue.²¹ The key is our intention. If one seeks to remove the evil in a person primarily for maintaining justice, it would be an act of justice. But when we seek to remove the evil a person does inasmuch as it diminishes their flourishing (as all evil does), we do so out of charity.

Consequently, fraternal correction is primarily an act of charity for sinners wherein the corrector wills the sinner’s flourishing and his/her turning from evil. When the corrector wills to ameliorate the effects of evil on others, this is an act of justice in support of the common good. Moreover, charitable correction means willing the good of those who perpetuate even grave evils and seeking their conversion to the good. Inasmuch as we will the good of a sinful brother in Christ, charity binds us to seek to remove the evil from the brother’s life and work for his return to the good.

This is of tremendous importance for thinking about how laity might practice fraternal correction towards clerics. In explaining why fraternal correction (which is a form of counsel) does not fall under the virtue of prudence, Aquinas says, “whenever we act rightly through prudence to attain the end of another moral virtue, . . . the act is principally of that virtue that is ordered to that end (we seek).”²² Whenever the end we seek is an end of charity, all the virtues needed to bring about that end produce acts of charity. Similarly, all acts that seek to obtain the end of a certain

¹⁷ *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 33, a. 1, resp.

¹⁸ ST II-II, q. 33, a. 1, resp.

¹⁹ See ST II-II, q. 33, a. 1, resp. and ad 1.

²⁰ ST II-II, q. 33, a. 1, resp.

²¹ ST II-II, q. 33, a. 1, resp.

²² ST II-II, q. 33, a. 1, ad 2.

virtue are ordered by and to that virtue.²³ Put concretely, the one who seeks to correct the brother out of fraternal correction should be motivated by charity, and thus all acts that accomplish this correction should conform to the order of charity. It is not fraternal correction, strictly speaking, to rectify a wrongdoer in uncharitable ways.

Does Aquinas then specify what form(s) fraternal correction takes as an act of charity? Article 2 of question 33 in the *secunda secundae* of the *ST* deals with whether fraternal correction is a precept of the divine law. For Aquinas it is, but it is a kind of positive law. Negative laws name evils which should be avoided at all times, but positive laws name virtuous deeds that are virtuous only when the performed the right way in the right circumstances.²⁴ Hence fraternal correction must admit of a certain variety of forms in order to be virtuous.

Aquinas identifies three basic circumstances structuring virtuous fraternal correction: (1) the likely effectiveness of the correction, (2) the relationship and status of both the corrector and wrongdoer, and (3) the mode of correction.²⁵ Aquinas teaches that omitting fraternal correction can be either virtuous or sinful. If one omits correcting another “out of charity,” this can be virtuous. If I believe that my correction is untimely or will make matters worse, I can virtuously refrain from correcting him or her. However, if I fail to correct a brother or sister due to fear of others or when it is clear that my intervention might help him or her withdraw from evil, then I sin against charity.²⁶

The second circumstance is the relationship and status of those involved in the correction. Given the theme of this article, Aquinas’s comments regarding how subordinates or inferiors should correct superiors warrant special attention. *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 3, poses the question of whether it is at all virtuous for subordinates to correct their superiors, and Aquinas argues it is. The key in his account is the distinction between correction as an act of justice and fraternal correction as an act of charity. Subordinates are not authorized *qua* subordinates to correct superiors according to justice, since

²³ Commenting on charity’s dependence upon the infused virtue of prudence, Michael Sherwin, O.P., writes: “Charity’s act is measured according to the real value of the objects of its love, but this ordered measure is placed in charity’s acts by human reason elevated by the infused virtue of prudence” (*By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005], 178).

²⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 2, resp.

²⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 2, resp.

²⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 2, ad 3.

subordinates cannot justly punish their superiors.²⁷ However, inasmuch as fraternal correction is an act of charity seeking to amend the wrongdoing of the brother, Aquinas says this is the responsibility of all to one another. In sum, subordinates do not possess the authority to correct superiors under *justice*, but they can correct superiors under charity.

Significantly, Aquinas sees that fraternal correction of superiors in charity is possible because subordinates can still possess “healthy judgment of reason” (*sanum rationis iudicium*).²⁸ The healthy rational faculty enables a person to discern and correct the wrongdoing of another. This is a subtly important point in Aquinas’s account of fraternal correction, for it means the corrector is responsible for ensuring he/she possesses a “healthy judgment of reason.” Aquinas does not in the context of question 33 say how a person can determine if he/she possesses a healthy judgment of reason, but it is not difficult to derive his answer. The cultivation of virtue in general would be key, in addition to obeying precepts of the divine and natural laws.²⁹

However, this raises a unique moral problem inasmuch as the magisterium is the authentic interpreter of the divine law transmitted through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. In ecclesial matters, the superior–subordinate relationship does not concern merely earthly authority. Superiors are distinguished by their magisterial authority, especially as regards laity. Consequently, in the ecclesial setting, subordinates depend upon superiors as one source of clarity about the divine and natural law. This creates the paradoxical situation that a subordinate who seeks to correct a superior must ensure his/her judgment of reason is “healthy” based on clarifications offered by the superior he/she wishes to correct.

Fortunately, this complication is ameliorated in the broader theological context. For the superior is not the primary authority of the divine and natural law. The divine law is primarily known through Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and the natural law known through reason. Consequently, the authority of the superior is not *sui generis* or absolute, but is itself subordinate to the authority of revelation and natural reason as endowed in human beings by God.³⁰ And this means that the subordinate

²⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 3, resp.

²⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 3, ad 2.

²⁹ See *ST* II-II q. 91; see also Matthew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 15–30.

³⁰ While not speaking about natural law, the above claim regarding the divine law is clear in the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei*

can also determine the health of his/her judgment of reason by means of Scripture, Tradition, and natural reason (with emphasis on the first) in order to offer correction.

Of course, when the subordinate offers correction he/she might have made an incorrect judgment and misapprehended a superior's actions for evil when it was not. But this can happen even with a healthy judgment of reason. The key is that those seeking to offer correction seek to maintain a healthy judgment. Maintaining a healthy reason would seem to include a humility to be shown how one has interpreted something incorrectly.

In addition to a healthy reason, Aquinas also notes the corrector needs moral virtue. Importantly, Aquinas freely admits that sin does not completely remove healthy judgment of reason, especially concerning matters not pertaining to the corrector's own sin, and thus a sinner can have the necessary capacity and judgment to accurately see and admonish the sin of another.³¹ However, sin does reduce one's effectiveness as a corrector in three ways. First, when a person has sinned gravely and attempts to correct a lesser sin in his brother, the sin of the corrector can render him "unworthy" to correct another. Second, if the corrector's sin is well known, then her attempt to correct another can lead to scandal, because it would suggest the correction is not practiced out of charity, but rather ostentation. Third is that the corrector might slip into a sense of moral superiority and fail to correct with due humility. This is especially difficult to avoid because Aquinas notes that, in making the correction, the corrector who has sinned not only proves the sinfulness of his brother's deeds but also shows the corrector himself is condemnable on account of his evil deeds.³²

The fourth article of the question on fraternal correction is most important for the current analysis because it asks whether we are obligated to correct prelates. Again, Aquinas distinguishes correction given in charity without punishment from correction in the order of justice involving punishment.³³ In the *ST*, Aquinas maintains that punishment is appropri-

Verbum, §10: "This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed."

³¹ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 5, resp.

³² *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 3, resp.

³³ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, resp.

ately exercised only by prelates, and so laity cannot correct in that way.³⁴ However, fraternal correction as an act of charity is universal, and thus can and should be offered to superiors should they fall into sin.³⁵

That said, Aquinas recognizes that the subordinate's correction of a superior is fraught with practical difficulties, and he offers advice on how to virtuously correct prelates. First, Aquinas says that, when correcting a prelate, a subordinate ought to "adhere to a manner congruent to the situation."³⁶ Aquinas seems to mean "congruent" as the kind of decorum proper to the subordinate–superior relationship: he says the subordinate should not be "impudent and harsh," but correct his prelate with "gentleness and reverence."³⁷ Additionally, Aquinas defines "inordinate" correction as occurring when a subordinate "irreverently scolds" or "speaks disparagingly" of his prelate.³⁸ Aquinas additionally counsels that is not typically proper to fraternal correction to reprove another in public unless you are an equal, and hence "he who is not an equal can admonish privately and reverently."³⁹

There is an important proviso to Aquinas's advice regarding public correction. When discussing whether fraternal correction requires private admonition to precede public denunciation, Aquinas argues that, "if they are public sins, not only should the remedy be applied to he who has sinned that he may become better, but also to others who were aware of it, so that they may not be scandalized."⁴⁰ Additionally, Aquinas notes that a sinner can sin in secret but still harm others, such as in a plan of sedition or committing to heretical teachings.⁴¹ Would Aquinas conclude that, in a situation in which a subordinate finds his or her prelate is guilty of

³⁴ That is, a layperson cannot punish a prelate inasmuch as she is his subordinate. *Qua* layperson, one does not possess the authority to laicize or remove a bishop, for example. However, if a layperson is also a magistrate or official of the justice system, he/she possesses a different competence of authority that legitimately can be used to exact punitive measures against someone who happens to be his/her ecclesiastical superior, since the cleric's authority does not extend to the sphere of civil justice.

³⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, resp. Specifically, Aquinas emphasizes that the act proceeding from a habit or power (in this case, charity) extends to whatever is contained under the object of the power of that habit. Since charity is love of God and all others for God's own sake, prelates are not omitted as proper objects of charity, and thus not fraternal correction when it proceeds from charity, as opposed to justice.

³⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, resp.

³⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, resp.

³⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, ad 1.

³⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, ad 2.

⁴⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 7, resp.

⁴¹ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 7, resp.

public sins or sins that will harm others, the subordinate ought to breach the “private and reverent admonishment” principle we saw above? The answer seems to depend on the circumstances, because sins concerning the common good ultimately fall under justice. Subordinates do not possess the authority to coercively punish prelates, but are competent to denounce prelates’ sins publicly. So, under the aegis of justice, the subordinate might be able to virtuously publicly admonish the prelate in the case of public sins that cause scandal or private sins that greatly affect the common good.

At the same time, Aquinas might urge caution against publicly admonishing prelates even for just reasons. For one, the subordinate is still not equal with the prelate. Therefore, it seems prudent that a subordinate enlists one equal to the prelate to admonish him in public, if it is needed. This is not always possible, but it is in the context of the laity–clergy relationship.

Another reason Aquinas provides for being hesitant to admonish a prelate in public is “so that he may keep his good name.”⁴² Aquinas gives three reasons for why this is important. First, often the only thing keeping a person from greater sin is fear of dishonor, and so once he is dishonored, he is more likely to sin worse than before. Second, dishonoring one prelate may also dishonor those with whom he is associated. Third, making one man’s private sin public may induce others to the same sin.⁴³ Significantly, Aquinas recognizes that the concern for reputation is not an absolute good, and a good conscience takes precedence over a good name.⁴⁴ Still, the act of fraternal correction involves a healthy respect for another and the effect of his/her dishonor on others as part of the decision of how to admonish the wrongdoer.

Ultimately, this concern for reputation must be understood in light of charity. When we love another for God’s sake, we love also when they are praised for the good they do, since they stand as an example and promotion of virtue conducive to loving God. If a fellow Christian departs from the path of rectitude in a private way, this does not cancel out either the virtue he/she has genuinely performed or the laudable celebration of that virtue by others. Our goal in charity is to help our brother or sister become more perfect in his/her virtue, and not “expose” them as hypocrites, and so on. Therefore, out of charity, it is preferable to correct privately rather than in public, so as to help our brother or sister the opportunity to return

⁴² *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 7, resp.

⁴³ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 7, resp.

⁴⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 7, resp.

to virtue. This is especially true with clergy: I cannot in charity relish the dishonor of my superior, because then his moral authority in good things is weakened. If this can be avoided without compromising justice, then it seems the best way forward is to admonish a prelate in private.

Filial Remonstrance in Early Confucianism

While Aquinas certainly has a clearly helpful account of how subordinates can offer fraternal correction to superiors based in the virtue of charity, it is also apparent that his account is not specifically formulated with laity in mind. For laity, the problem of remonstrating with ecclesial superiors is not simply a fraternal matter, though as I said above, certainly all Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. There is also a way that laypersons relate to clergy in a filial relationship. Hence, knowing how to correct a clergyman as a layperson without diminishing the proper reverence and honor can be difficult. Sadly, in our age, where nearly all human relationships are reduced to the *libido dominandi*, many Catholics (including many Catholic theologians) do not treat the power disparity between clergy and laity as good and worth preserving in moral interactions between the two. Unlike postmodern Western culture, the Confucian tradition provides resources for negotiating moral correction in ways that support and preserve the proper authority and reverence inherent in filial bonds. For this reason, the Confucian reflection on filial remonstrance proves a helpful complement to the concept of fraternal correction for the purpose of understanding how laity can virtuously admonish delinquent clerics while not disrupting the nature of and goods found within the laity–clergy bond.

This section will build toward an eventual synthesis between fraternal correction and filial remonstrance (*jian*) by developing the latter in the terms laid out by the Confucian tradition.⁴⁵ Notably, *jian* is a more precise verb than the Latin *correctio* as a form of moral correction. As the radical to the graph 諫 suggests, *jian* primarily signifies verbal forms of remonstrance.⁴⁶ Unlike the Latin *correctio*, which can be implemented via

⁴⁵ Though focused on neither filial remonstrance per se nor early China, the best study in English that examines the broader context of Chinese thought on filial virtue is without doubt Keith N. Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005). Another helpful contextual resource (though not containing an essay examining filial remonstrance itself) is *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, ed. Alan K. L. Chan and Sor-hoon Tan (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

⁴⁶ The word *yan* (言) means “to speak” or “words” and often indicates words associated

punishment and therefore requires distinctions on Aquinas's part between correction *ex caritate* and *ex iustitiae*, the Chinese *jian* excludes punishment of superiors by subordinates.⁴⁷ Punishments (*xing*; 刑) are a different kind of action, and are typically understood to be fixed by law, and thus properly authorized superiors.

In the Confucian tradition, *jian* is most often discussed in the context of the ruler–minister relationship, concerning the minister's duties to remonstrate with a wayward ruler. The father–son relationship was a less common context to discuss the morality of remonstrance, but still significant. The relational context of remonstrance is important for early Confucianism because of the goods involved in remonstrance. With the father–son relationship, for example, the child seeking to correct a parent undertakes a different task from the reproving minister. For the child must seek the remonstrance in such a way as to guard the intrinsic goods of the father–son relationship in the act of remonstrance.⁴⁸

Therefore, in the Confucian tradition, filial remonstrance is inherent to being a virtuous *son*, to possessing the fullness of filial virtue (*xiao*), to performing those deeds necessary to be virtuous as a son (or daughter by extension).⁴⁹ At the same time, the idea of filial virtue is not isolated from the general cultivation of moral virtue and rectitude. In fact, the Confucian tradition presupposes that those who remonstrate should themselves be sure to cultivate moral virtue.⁵⁰ For example, in the *Da Dai Liji*, we find the following passage: “The filial piety of the moral gentleman is like this: he offers remonstrance by means of his own rectification.”⁵¹ There are two important aspects of this passage that show how moral rectification

with types of speech when used as a radical form, as it does in 諫.

⁴⁷ The Chinese term for punishments (*xing*; 刑) denotes typically legal forms of punishment that superiors (especially rulers) can render to subordinates, but not the reverse.

⁴⁸ For a helpful Confucian account of the father–son relationship and how it shapes the moral imagination, see Tu Wei-Ming, “Self-hood and Otherness: The Father–Son Relation in Confucian Thought,” in *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 113–30. Technically, Tu's reflections are indicative of a perspective scholars refer to as “New Confucianism” rather than the Classical tradition, but they are illuminating nonetheless.

⁴⁹ The concept of *xiao* in early Confucianism and more broadly early Chinese thought is complex. For helpful overviews, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Filial Piety as a Virtue,” in Chan and Tan, *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and Tradition*, 189–202, and Joshua R. Brown, *Balthasar in Light of Early Confucianism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 42–100.

⁵⁰ This is a classic theme in the Confucian tradition more broadly; see *Mengzi*, 2A:2.7.

⁵¹ *Da Dai Liji*, *Zengzi Ben Xiao*, 5.

precedes virtuous remonstrance. Most explicitly, the passage argues that rectification is the proper instrument through which remonstrance is offered. Unless a son knows the moral *dao* and is himself rectified, he cannot correct his parents. Second, the Confucian tradition sees filial and ministerial remonstrance as aspects of the path to being a “moral gentleman” (*junzi*; 君子).

Filial remonstrance is therefore a virtuous activity flowing out of a son’s rectified heart-mind, whereby he enacts his filial obligations to his parents when the latter fall into moral error. Here I should note that, by “filial obligation,” I mean that early Confucianism argues that sons have an inherent responsibility to care for the moral rectification of their parents. But this is not typically presented as a kind of reciprocity argument in which children owe their parents moral correction because of the formation they themselves received. Rather, the responsibility arises out of the demands of the love by which one loves his or her parents—it is a responsibility of affection and devotion (and for this reason, applicable to the priest–laity relation). Since the need to care for parents’ rectification flows from filial love, a major Confucian concern is to discern the proper practice of remonstrance. For example, the *Baibutong* lists five different types of remonstrance based on different virtues that should be practiced in different contexts.⁵² The main question, then, is not whether, but how one practices virtuous filial remonstrance.

The *Xiaojing* provides one influential concrete description of the practice of filial remonstrance. In this text, the disciple Zengzi asks Confucius, “if a son simply follows [*cong*; 從] whatever his father commands, can this be called filial piety?”⁵³ Here the verb *cong* suggests mere obeisance and compliance on the part of children, and thus Zengzi asks if such compliance is equivalent to filial virtue. The Confucian tradition by-and-large rejects such a reduction of filial piety and argues, instead, that *xiao* must include being willing to “contend” (*zheng*; 爭) with parents when they are in the wrong.⁵⁴

⁵² *Baibutong*, *Juan Si*, *Jian zheng*, 11. The text does not technically specify five “kinds,” “classes,” or “types” of *jian*. Rather it simply says there are five *jian* (*you wu jian*; 有五諫). The text seems to treat what follows as different strategies for remonstrance, but it is unclear if all are seen as equally valid and important.

⁵³ *Xiaojing*, 15.

⁵⁴ *Xiaojing*, 15. The *Xiaojing* embraces contending (*zheng*) with parents as part of filial remonstrance, though below in the essay I show that contentiousness is seen by some Confucian authors as inappropriate filial remonstrance. In other words, esteeming filial *jian* as contending with parents is not a universally accepted standard in

Upon this interpretation, filial remonstrance is considered a form of filial service (*shi*; 事) to parents, because through it, the son seeks his parent's good. This is explicit in one Zengzian chapter of the *Da Dai Liji*.⁵⁵ Here we find someone asks Zengzi if there is a proper way to serve parents. Zengzi replies,

There is: love and reverence [*ai er jing*; 愛而敬]. If your father and mother's actions concord with the *dao*, then follow/obey them. If your parents are not in accordance with the *dao*, then remonstrate with them. If you remonstrate to no avail, treat them like they are from yourself. To follow without remonstrating [when needed], this is not *xiao*; to remonstrate without following [when proper], this is not *xiao* either.⁵⁶

This passage clearly shows how remonstrance is related to loving and honoring parents. As true love concerns desiring the good of the beloved, true love for parents means desiring they do what is right and avoid the wrong. According to Zengzi, filial virtue is not identifiable with courage to remonstrate or complaisance per se, but the ability to accurately discern and properly respond to the parent's deeds with whichever act is needed.

Notably, for early Confucians, wrongdoing was not merely the offense of social mores, but a departure from flourishing. Though addressing ministerial remonstrance, the Han scholar Liu Xiang nicely articulates this perspective: "When the ruler has faults, this is the sprouting bud of great danger and death. If one observes his ruler's great mistakes and does not remonstrate with him, this means he is being flippant [*qing*; 輕] about his ruler's danger and death."⁵⁷ In the political context, it is self-evident that a ruler's mistakes can engender great danger for him, as they can incite rebellions, weaken the state, and genuinely bring about his downfall. However, parents who fall into moral disorder also place themselves in great danger. In early China, one prominent example of parents gone wrong is when they

Confucianism, but the more essential point of not being complacent when parents do wrong is.

⁵⁵ Notably, the Chinese scholar Luo Xinhui holds the opinion that ten chapters in the *Da Dai Liji* which contain "Zengzi" in their titles are indeed the remnants of an earlier eponymous book attributed to Zengzi. For discussion, see Luo Xinhui, 罗新慧, *Zengzi Yanjiu: Fu "Da Dai Liji" "Zengzi" Shi Pian Zhu Yi* 曾子研究: 附《大戴礼记》“曾子”十篇注译 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2013).

⁵⁶ *Da Dai Liji, Zengzi Shi Fumu*, 1.

⁵⁷ Liu Xiang, *Shuo Yuan, Zhengjian*, 1.

became criminals—especially thieves or murderers—and therefore became subject to harsh punishments from the state. And so, even in the most practical sense, it was clear for early Confucians that inappropriate conduct was dangerous for parents and a departure from flourishing.

Additionally, in the early Chinese context, protecting one's parents from errors was a sign of love and reverence not only for one's own parents, but one's ancestral lineage as well. Early Chinese society was clan-based, wherein one's reputation (*ming*; 名) impacted the reputation of the entire lineage. In such a society, protecting a parent (usually the father) from error would benefit not only the parent's own pursuit of flourishing, but also the honor and reputation of the clan.⁵⁸

All this is significant because (like Aquinas) early Confucians held that the form of filial remonstrance should follow upon the reasons for which remonstrance is performed—the love and reverence for parents. As a general rule of thumb, early Confucians argue that filial remonstrance must be conducted in a manner that both preserves and enacts filial love and reverence for parents. Filial reverence (*jing*; 敬) is more easily discerned in Confucian arguments about proper remonstrance. Essentially, early Confucians see reverential remonstrance as correction of parents that is guided by the rules of ritual propriety governing the father-son relationship more broadly, and the act of filial remonstrance in particular. The reason this distinction between the broad and particular rules of ritual propriety for remonstrance is necessary is that it is unclear that certain claims about the proper ritual components of remonstrance were in fact understood as normative for early Confucians. At the very least, early Confucians attempted to articulate filial remonstrance according to the dictates of filial ritual propriety.

Some texts, such as the *Nei ze* chapter of the *Liji*, even attempted to clarify the ritual dictates of filial remonstrance in particular. The *Nei ze* says that, “when a parent commits an error, the son should remonstrate with them with humility and a harmonious expression, and speak with a gentle voice.”⁵⁹ For early Confucianism, aspects of interpersonal interactions and relationships such as posture, facial expression, and tone are key components of ritual propriety—these features signal proper comportment that can communicate either reverence or irreverence. These are ostensibly filial analogs to the main ritual component of ministerial remonstrance, which

⁵⁸ For a helpful discussion, see K. C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 9–32.

⁵⁹ *Liji*, *Nei ze*, 18.

consists of approaching and withdrawing (*jin tui*; 進退) from one's ruler with due reverence and humility.⁶⁰

Another aspect of remonstrance falling under the reverential component concerns the way the correction is verbally communicated. In the *Nei ze*, filial remonstrance is said to require a "gentle voice" (*rou sheng*; 柔聲). Similar arguments can be found throughout the Confucian tradition that avoiding harshness is essential to filial remonstrance. One passage attributed to Zengzi argues that filial remonstrance should be "subtle" (*wei*; 微).⁶¹ In part, the need to remonstrate subtly reflects the broader linguistic norms of Chinese culture, in which it is often considered rude to be overly explicit. Additionally, the exhortation for subtle remonstrance likely expresses a concern that a son not "broadcast" his father's mistake(s) too publicly and explicitly so that others may overhear and shame him or the clan.

Another Zengzian passage shows a similar concern when it says filial remonstrance should never involve "contentious argument" (*zheng bian*; 爭辯).⁶² This teaching seems to exclude a kind of hasty escalation in intensity of remonstrance such that it becomes "contentious," as well as engaging in a back-and-forth debate with one's father. Undoubtedly the concern against contentious argument does not mean the Confucian tradition thinks the son ought to cease remonstrance when it is unsuccessful. Rather, the point is that remonstrating with an angry father is ineffective and will lead to enmity between father and son. Thus, the son should cease his remonstrance before it becomes a contentious argument, taking up the cause later when his father is more conducive to correction.

One clear reason the Confucian tradition gives for why a humble appearance, gentle voice, subtle words, and avoiding contentious argument matter for filial remonstrance is the goal to honor one's parent through correction. An oft-repeated warning is that, "when your parents are at fault remonstrate with them, but do not be rebellious [*bu ni*; 不逆]."⁶³ In the context of the family, the meaning of "rebellion" is not obvious. On the one hand, it could be taken to mean disobedience (see *Analects* 4.18), which would obviously conflict with the ends of remonstrance in the first place.⁶⁴ On the other hand, rebellion could signify alienation between

⁶⁰ See *Baihutong*, *Juan si*, *Jianzheng*, 11.

⁶¹ *Da Dai Liji*, *Zengzi Li Xiao*, 3.

⁶² *Da Dai Liji*, *Zengzi Shi Fumu*, 1.

⁶³ *Da Dai Liji*, *Zengzi Da Xiao*, 6.

⁶⁴ For an interesting and classic discussion in sinology that interprets filial disobedience in terms of moral actualization and post-conventional morality, see Heiner Roetz,

father and son that essentially renders the son unable to serve his father in ways his filial duties require. At the very least, filial remonstrance is meant to eventually strengthen and not endanger the father–son bond.

The fact that early Confucians suggested caution on the part of remonstrating children in order to not endanger the father–son relationship points to the foundation of filial remonstrance in love. A fuller account of how filial love informs filial remonstrance is apparent in the Confucians concern for indefatigable remonstrance. As I suggested above, when faced with a parent who does not listen or accept remonstrance, Confucian texts do not recommend the son abandon his remonstrance. Rather, the son is exhorted to try again unceasingly as long as it is possible.

This advice takes several interesting forms. One of the most prominent forms focuses on the strength or commitment of the son needed in order to maintain remonstrance. Both Confucius and Zengzi are attributed a teaching that filial children should remonstrate “without growing weary” (*bu juan*; 不倦) of the task.⁶⁵ With this approach, the emphasis lies on how sons ought not despair when their remonstrance is not effective, since there would be a temptation to abandon their fathers. Rather, they should persist in this work because their love for their fathers does not grow weary (at least it should not for virtuous sons).

The *Baihutong* offers a somewhat idiosyncratic yet illuminating approach to the theme of maintaining remonstrance. This text employs the correlative cosmology framework prominent in Han China to discuss the natural “models” (*fa*; 法) for remonstrance. Here we find that a remonstrating son cannot abandon (*bu qu*; 不去) his father, for “they are one body divided into two” (*yi ti er fen*; 一體而分).⁶⁶ The father and son are then compared to the natural models of the elements Wood (the son) and Fire (the father).⁶⁷ If the son were to abandon his father, it would be like Wood leaving Fire—it would soon be extinguished. In this way, the *Baihutong* suggests that the father–son relation is based in and expressive of the correlates governing the cosmos, and therefore it is necessary to maintain it.

Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age: A Reconstruction under the Aspect of the Break-through toward Postconventional Thinking (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 56–66.

⁶⁵ *Da Dai Liji*, Zengzi Li Xiao, 3. The same teaching is attributed to Confucius in *Liji*, Fang Ji, 18.

⁶⁶ *Baihutong*, Juan si, Jianzheng, 10.

⁶⁷ Typical of Han-era texts, this passage discusses the father–son relationship in terms of the correlational cosmology of the Five Phases (*wu xing*; 五行).

Finally, another important aspect of Confucian discussion of maintaining remonstrance concerns how to properly respond to parents who are not only unconvinced by correction, but become violent. To reiterate, early Confucians saw filial remonstrance as a form of service primarily given by adult sons. In early China, the social arrangement of clans and households meant that fathers were typically considered the patriarchs until they died.⁶⁸ Thus the father still held paternal authority over even adult children and had the necessary authority to punish even adult children.

In short, just as a minister's remonstrance with his ruler could bring about deleterious effects for the former and cost him his life, so too remonstrating with his father opened a son to punishment and harm. The *Neize* chapter of the *Liji* stresses that the son should never abandon remonstrance with his father, particularly when it endangers the common good. The text is so adamant in this perspective that it says that, "even if the parent becomes angry, displeased, and flogs the son until he bleeds, the son should not give in to hatred and resentment, but let reverence and filial devotion arise in him all the more."⁶⁹ It is worth emphasizing that, in this passage, the proper response to parental lack of virtue through violence is not responding in kind, but turning even more to filial reverence and devotion. In other words, even when one's filial correction is resisted, rejected, and returned with violence, children should return to the principles that animate their correction in the first place: love and honor for their parents.

Some Practical Results

In this concluding section of the article, I seek to show how the complementary reading of Aquinas and early Confucianism produces concrete moral suggestions for the lay correction of clergy in the Catholic context. Although the natural kinship bond of father-son does not entirely apply to the priest-laity relationship, there is an analogy in that laypersons love and care for clergy as spiritual fathers who have a legitimate and important role as a paternal authority in our lives. And so, while what I offer here is far from exhaustive, I think it nonetheless succeeds in providing concrete guidance to the virtuous performance of lay fraternal and filial correction.

First and foremost, there is a point of agreement between Aquinas

⁶⁸ For broader context of the family life in classical China and Han China, see Mu-chou Poo, *Daily Life in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 68–73, and Michael Loewe, *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China during the Han Period 202 BC–AD 220* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005), 54–63.

⁶⁹ *Liji*, *Nei ze*, 18.

and early Confucianism worth emphasizing. Both Aquinas and early Confucianism argue that correction or remonstrance has to be enacted in accordance with the principle of love that animates it. Consequently, when laity face the prospect of correcting clergy, we must first be very clear with ourselves about our motivations. If our main motivation is anger or taking joy in being able to correct the immoral actions of a clergyman, we ought not move forward with correction. Of course, the principle of correcting in love does not remove all obstacles or resolve all questions. Whereas Aquinas says that correcting a brother for the sake of justice and the common good should be done by a proper authority, the Confucian tradition teaches sons should remonstrate with parents even when the common good is threatened, though they lack the authority to punish their parents.⁷⁰ At the very least, what this should point out to us is that, when a layperson remonstrates with a priest, we cannot do so as competent authorities (at least ecclesially) that can use punishment as a means of correcting our superior. Rather, we can select only those forms of remonstrance appropriate to our “filial” position.

This is to say that lay correction of a prelate must flow from the principle of filial love, seeking the good of one’s superiors and their flourishing. Here the Confucian emphasis on filial love shows its fruitfulness for Christian reflection on this matter. Just like the Confucian filial son, Catholic laity must seek to remonstrate with clergy in ways that maintain filial love for them. At the very least, laity must love wayward clergy qua our superiors and will that they flourish in that role. Rather than seeking to use remonstrance as a means of gaining power in an imbalanced relationship or becoming obstinate before our superior, lay remonstrance must seek to help the clergyman become a superior whose commands can be obeyed joyfully and promptly.

The concern to ground lay correction of clergy in the principle of both Christian and filial love permeates the entire task of remonstrance, and so as I move to more practical considerations of lay correction, it is fitting to use this principle as a canon of virtue. One aspect that in some sense must

⁷⁰ My thanks to the blind peer reviewer from *Nova et Vetera* who identified this problem in my argument. I believe this disagreement between Aquinas and the Confucian tradition may signal a deeper complication to explore on this issue. It raises the question of to what degree Aquinas intends to distinguish acting for charity from acting for justice, and how those distinguished ends (or the analogous correlates) are treated in the Confucian tradition. Suffice it to say, I lack the space here to address this problem to the extent it deserves; my solution above is a practical one that seems correct to me, but is admittedly not a perfect resolution to the problem.

accompany the process of lay correction is also seen in both Aquinas and early Confucianism. The one who seeks to correct another—especially a superior—must not only do so for the right reasons (Christian and filial love), but also must cultivate in his or her own life a pursuit of virtue. The Confucian tradition stresses this is necessary in order to rightly see how a parent has fallen away from what is right; only by seeking virtue more generally can we have the means to discern and defend what is truly right for our parent. This essentially corresponds to Aquinas's argument that the corrector must possess a "healthy judgment of reason." Though it is also worth recalling Aquinas emphasizes that he who has a poor history of pursuing virtue should often not remonstrate, since it may likely be either ineffective or a cause of scandal.

Consequently, before offering correction to a clergyman, one must first determine if he or she is the appropriate person to offer such correction. On the one hand, the remonstrator must first examine his or her own conscience and determine the intention of the correction to be offered. Is it love, justice, or something un-virtuous? If correction corresponds more to justice than love, it is likely the case that the layperson should seek another means to address the problem of concern because the layperson lacks the ecclesial authority to deal with a superior in matters of justice. Additionally, the remonstrator must examine his or her own life of virtue. Does she possess sufficient moral virtue to accurately recognize the lack of virtue in the clergyman? Has the remonstrator sinned in such a way that can obscure his vision about what the clergyman has done? Is the remonstrator guilty of a sin that would cause great scandal were she to attempt to correct the clergyman of his shortcoming? Depending on the circumstance, it may be right for the layperson either to conclude that correction is not necessary or to seek to enlist another layperson or clergyperson in order to help either ascertain the veracity of her perception of a priest's or bishop's sin, or to help bring the correction itself.

For the purpose of this article, let us assume a layperson has examined herself and concluded she can and should virtuously correct a cleric. Aquinas and early Confucianism show that there are two important aspects of how one should remonstrate with a superior. First, Aquinas wisely advises that remonstrations should occur in private if possible, advice we also saw present in early Confucian texts. The goal of remonstrations is to expose sin to the sinner, not to expose another's sin to public awareness as such. As Aquinas saw so well, on the one hand, this is for the sake of the sinner's return to rectification: public shame can often be one of the few external limits for indulging in sin, and publicizing another's sin may well

cause him to give himself more fully to sin rather than seek righteousness. But additionally, the public exposing of a superior's sins has a deleterious effect on the community because the superior then can lose his moral authority, even regarding matters not related to the sin he himself has committed. Put differently, public correction of a clergyman can actually cause the clergyman to lose his functional status as a genuine superior.

Now this is not to say that clergy do not deserve to lose their moral authority in certain situations. I simply mean that, if our goal is to correct a clergyman whom we love as superior, then we cannot seek to inordinately expose his sin to the public eye. Recall that, for Aquinas, this is true for fraternal correction except in matters that affect the public good. But this is trickier because such circumstances relate less to charity and more to justice. Therefore, Aquinas would likely say that, whenever possible, if virtue and concern for the common good requires public correction, it should be offered by an equal or a superior, not a subordinate. At the very least, such correction would allow the public reputation of the clergy in general to maintain a good name and not fall into undue disrepute on the part of the wrong-doer.

In addition to privacy, early Confucianism emphasizes the need for remonstrance to be performed with proper comportment. The filial son correcting his father must still show forth the principle of love and respect for his father as he offers his correction. In one sense, this clearly depends upon cultural values of comportment. In early China, for example, reverence was often communicated through physical postures such as bowing, or how one sat at the table that would look very different from analogous "polite" postures in the twenty-first-century United States. Thus, the Confucian point is that the son's mannerisms and conduct in remonstrance should conform to the standards of ritual propriety expected of him.

In terms of physical comportment, lay remonstrance with priests and clergy can draw upon both cultural and ecclesial norms that help to maintain and communicate filial reverence in the act of remonstrance. For example, it seems condign that, when remonstrating, subordinates should not stand while a superior sits if possible. Additionally, the remonstrator should resist certain admonitory gestures such as wagging the finger or furrowing the brow too harshly. Such gestures and postures imply superiority and authority that are inapplicable to laity vis-à-vis superiors and can encourage the remonstrator to offer correction in un-virtuous ways.

Early Confucianism also emphasizes correcting one's father with "gentle speech." This seems to mean at least two things. First, that the son should choose very carefully words that will effectively point out his father's

wrongdoing, but without being too explicit or condemnatory (e.g., the “subtle words” in Zengzi’s advice). Second, the son should deliver his words in an attitude of humility and an appropriate tone of voice, such as with “gentle sounds.” This is analogous to Aquinas’s advice that one should not remonstrate in an “impudent and harsh” way, but “with gentleness and reverence.”

In the context of lay correction of clergy, the rule of gentle speech makes good sense for two reasons. The first is practical: correcting a priest or bishop in a harsh or impudent way will make the wrongdoer less conducive to correction and provide him reasons to dismiss the correction as inauthentic. A clergyman may well perceive harsh correction as an indication of the layperson’s resistance to ecclesial authority or become so offended by the correction that he focuses on the wrong done to him rather than the wrong he has done. The second reason the rule of gentle speech makes sense is due to the connection with charity and filial love. Addressing a cleric with harshness and impudence undermines the reverence and love of clergy that is supposed to animate lay correction in the first place. The subordinate and son must still be a subordinate and son even when correcting his superior—we do not exchange places just because the superior has fallen into evil in some regard. Indeed, according to Confucianism, correction is a task my subordinate position requires of me *qua* subordinate. Hence, I should not undermine or abandon the proper attitudes and demeanor of my role in order to offer correction.

A final practical guideline for lay remonstrance with clergy concerns what to do when remonstrance fails. Sadly, it is much easier to persist in sin than virtue. Even if I have offered correction for the right reasons and in the right way, I still may find my efforts come to no avail with my clergyman. What then can be done? The Confucian tradition helpfully shows that, from the view of filial love, the son cannot abandon his purpose to correct his father, but must prudentially seek to remonstrate when it might be effective so as to save his father from error. Ultimately, this is due to the principle of love: if we seek the amendment of our superior for the superior’s own good (*ex caritate*), then we cannot fall away after one attempt. If the remonstrance does not go well (e.g., the clergyman becomes angry), it is helpful to let him calm down for a time rather than persist immediately in the correction. However, one should nonetheless return to the task of correction when it is prudent to do so.

This is especially the case in the ecclesial context because of the kind of filial love laypersons have for clergy. As we saw above, the *Baihutong* states that the natural father and son are “one body in two parts” and that,

just like Wood is with Fire, if Fire leaves Wood, it is extinguished. In the Church established by Christ, clergy are essential to lay discipleship: the magisterium helps laity to know how to interpret divine revelation well, to know what practices and rituals are proper and conducive to salvation, and to organize a sustainable community among the faithful. To abandon a pastor to his sin is, in a very real respect, to leave Christians without a good that is essential to the faith. Such abandonment also deprives the pastor of what he needs to be faithful to his ordination: the proper moral authority to guide and support his flock. Hence, laity should not merely attend another parish or diocese in the case of a priest or bishop who sins. When such decisions are premature (i.e., not a last resort), they are forms of genuinely abandoning one's priest to his own sin, which endangers not only him but also one's fellow parishioners. And this in turn harms in some way (though not absolutely) the relationships necessary to flourish as Christians.

Ultimately, of course, the remonstrance with a priest or bishop is not the same as remonstrance with a father. So, what should be done in the case of the persistent refusal of a clergyman to accept correction in the faith and turn away from evil? It seems to me that there are two clear paths for laypersons to follow. The first is preferable. When possible, the layperson should communicate the concerns to someone who is equal or superior to the wrongdoer under consideration in hopes that he can be induced to righteousness by the authority of another. The second possibility is that the layperson exposes the priest or bishop's sin to the public eye. The second seems to be just only if the sin persists in such a manner or develops in such a way as to genuinely threaten the common good of the Church or the community more broadly.

For example, if I were to discover my priest had been viewing internet pornography in the office, this would clearly be the matter of a private sin for which I should offer him filial correction as persistently as possible. However, such private sin can begin to affect the common good in several ways. For one, the longer the priest persists in this sin, the more likely it becomes that other parishioners will become aware of his habit. This would harm the common good both by the power of rumor and scandal and by causing some parishioners to perhaps view pornography as not as grave a sin as Church teaching insists it is. Additionally, the priest might become obstinate and use the pulpit as a means to upbraid those who attempt to correct him, or even begin to offer casuistic sermons that obscure Church teaching on pornography. In this situation, correction *ex caritate* should likely give way to correction *ex officio* and the matter should be reported

to the priest's superiors. However, should that prove ineffectual or if the matter must be dealt with immediately (for example, if the priest in question tells a room of young men it is virtuous to experiment with pornography and masturbation), then the layperson can, in the name of justice, publicly remonstrate with the priest. However, such remonstration would fall more under the virtue of justice than charity, and thus not be most properly an act of fraternal correction.

As a final summary word, it is self-evident at this point that a morally virtuous lay correction of clergy cannot carry only one form. For, both secular and ecclesial cultural norms impact the manner of correction and its ability to safeguard a filial attitude such that the form of filial correction in its particulars will be distinctive for each cultural context. At the same time, it is also clear that the lay correction of clergy should always be performed out of Christian love for clerics and should be an example and expression of such love. For lay Christians there is both a fraternal aspect to Christian love of clergy and a filial one, and we must strive to honor and express both in our attempts to aid our wayward priests whom we love, and for whom we will the good of happiness. Therefore, the virtuous correction of clergy requires constant reflection upon whether and how a laypersons actions are expressive of and faithful to the unique Christian love laity owe clergy, which is at once fraternal and filial. N.V.