

The Wisdom of the Cross Is the Wisdom of Charity: Thomas Aquinas’s Soteriology—an Anticipatory Refutation of Neo-Pelagianism and Neo-Gnosticism

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Although God may be surpassingly merciful, his mercy in no way obviates his justice. For a mercy that removes justice deserves much more to be called stupidity rather than virtue, and this does not befit God.

—Thomas Aquinas¹

In the justification of the ungodly, justice is seen, when God remits sins on account of love, though He Himself has mercifully infused that love. So we read of Magdalen: “Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much” (Luke 7:47).

—Thomas Aquinas²

Introduction

In its opening paragraph, the 2018 Letter *Placuit Deo* [PD] of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on

¹ *In III sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, ad 4: “Quamvis Deus sit summe misericors, sua tamen misericordia nullo modo iustitiae suae obviat. Misericordia enim quae iustitiam tollit, magis stultitia quam virtus dici debet; et ita Deum non decet” (my translation).

² *Summa theologia* [ST] I, q 21, a. 4, ad 1: “In iustificatione impii apparet iustitia, dum culpas relaxat propter dilectionem, quam tamen ipse misericorditer infundit, sicut de Magdalena legitur, Luc. VII, dimissa sunt ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum.” All English citations from *ST* are taken from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948).

Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation states the very heart and center of the Catholic Faith by citing Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*:

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (cf. Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4). The deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation [*Dei Verbum* §2].³

Immediately following this statement, the letter observes that “the teaching on salvation in Christ must always be deepened” (*PD* §1). One salutary way of deepening our present teaching on salvation in Christ is the constant returning to the sources, the ever renewed *ressourcement* in the theological patrimony of the Fathers, but also in the theological wisdom of that doctor of the Church, who synthesized the theological patrimony of the Fathers in such a way that for the longest time he has been called the “common doctor.” A *ressourcement* in Aquinas's theology of the Cross does not need any extraordinary justification, yet it seems to be especially apposite in light of the analysis advanced in *Placuit Deo* of present recurrences of perennial heresies some of whose characteristic tenets have found their way into strands of contemporary Catholic piety and theology—neo-Pelagianism and neo-Gnosticism:

Pope Francis, in his ordinary magisterium, often has made reference to the two tendencies . . . that resemble certain aspects of two ancient heresies, Pelagianism and Gnosticism. A new form of Pelagianism is spreading in our days, one in which the individual, understood to be radically autonomous, presumes to save oneself, without recognizing that, at the deepest level of being, he or she derives from God and from others. According to this way of thinking, salvation depends on the strength of the individual or on purely human structures, which are incapable of welcoming the newness of the Spirit of God. On the other hand, a new form of Gnosticism puts

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation, *Placuit Deo* [*PD*] (2018), §1 (all quotations from *PD* will be from the Vatican website).

forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism. In this model, salvation consists of improving oneself, of being “intellectually capable of rising above the flesh of Jesus towards the mysteries of the unknown divinity.” It presumes to liberate the human person from the body and from the material universe, in which traces of the provident hand of the Creator are no longer found, but only a reality deprived of meaning, foreign to the fundamental identity of the person, and easily manipulated by the interests of man. (*PD* §3)⁴

Pertaining to Christ’s Passion on the Cross, neo-Pelagianism and neo-Gnosticism might be best characterized as two distinct modern ways of “vacuating,” emptying Christ’s Cross by way of a profoundly problematic transignification of Christ’s Passion and death.

Neo-Pelagianism would tend to regard Christ’s Passion and death as the paradigmatic liberating act that overcomes and abolishes all forms of sacrifice. In the background of this theological current stands the assumption that sacrifice emerged in the dawn of history as humanity’s unconscious attempt to curb the violence aroused by human beings’ mimetic desires through the election and punishment of a scapegoat. The central problem that according to neo-Pelagianism Christ’s Passion and death addresses and overcomes is not sin but rather violence. Humanity is not to be redeemed from sin but rather liberated from the cycle of violence and the very scapegoat mechanism to which violence gives rise and which in turn aims at channeling (and thereby curbing) the proliferation of violence. The unique contribution of Christianity and especially of Jesus is that through his crucifixion Jesus exposes the scapegoat mechanism, brings it thereby to conscious awareness, and consequently renders it non-functional. According to this construal, Christianity is an essentially post-sacrificial, *ethical* religion—*ethos* determines if not replaces *cultus*. Redemption means the liberation of humanity *from* the deadly scapegoat mechanism enshrined in

⁴ The following important proviso that *Placuit Deo* rightly registers will need to be kept in mind whenever neo-Pelagianism and neo-Gnosticism are referred to in the subsequent considerations: “Clearly, the comparison with the Pelagian and Gnostic heresies intends only to recall general common features, without entering into judgments on the exact nature of the ancient errors. There is a great difference between modern, secularized society and the social context of early Christianity, in which these two heresies were born. However, insofar as Gnosticism and Pelagianism represent perennial dangers for misunderstanding Biblical faith, it is possible to find similarities between the ancient heresies and the modern tendencies just described” (§3).

cultic sacrifice and *for* a redeemed post-sacrificial ethos of comprehensive love made possible and de facto established by Christ's liberating act on the Cross.

Neo-Gnosticism, by contrast, takes the Cross of Christ as a mere cipher disclosing a truth that radically negates and transcends this world—the abyss of the mystery of divine love radically obscured by a fallen world. The Cross—by negating this world of sin and flesh and darkness—points to this transcendent reality of spirit and light, a reality free from materiality, change, corruption, to be reached by way of an interior illumination such that one already now becomes free from bodily, familial, and socio-cultural determinations. The gnosis that the interior enlightenment grants unmasks these time-bound determinations as passing elements of an inherently fallen, fleeting, and ultimately passing world *to* which those illuminated by true “gnosis” do not belong but *in* which they still have to live—a quietistic, retired life of enlightened interiority. In neo-Gnosticism, the Cross of Christ is salvific only as a radical negation of this world of corruption. The illumination of one's consciousness takes absolute priority over *cultus* and *caritas*, over Eucharistic worship and the embodied Christian discipleship in its concrete historical and socio-cultural contexts.

As *Placuit Deo* reminds the bishops of the Catholic Church and with them all the faithful appropriately at this moment in the life of the Church, neo-Pelagianism and neo-Gnosticism are profoundly erroneous answers to the very question, the very mystery, that human persons are to themselves. *Placuit Deo* states:

Man perceives himself, directly or indirectly, as a mystery: “Who am I? I exist, and yet do not have the principle of my existence within myself.” *Every person, in his or her own way, searches for happiness and attempts to obtain it by making recourse to the resources one has available.* However, this universal aspiration is not necessarily expressed or declared; rather, it is often more secret and hidden than it may appear, and is ready to reveal itself in the face of particular crises. Often it coincides with a hope for physical health; sometimes it takes the form of worrying about greater economic well-being; it expresses itself widely as the need for interior peace and for a peaceful coexistence with one's neighbour. On the other hand, while the question of salvation presents itself as dedicated toward a higher good, it also maintains the character of endurance and of overcoming pain. Together with the struggle to attain the good comes the fight to ward off evil: ignorance and error, fragility

and weakness, sickness and death. (PD 5; my emphasis)

What *Placuit Deo* condenses into one lucid paragraph, Aquinas elaborates in great depth in questions 1–5 of *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II.⁵ All humans are wayfarers (*viatores*) on the road to some lasting happiness. Yet the happiness attainable in this life is, even at the very best, a transitory and fragile and hence inherently imperfect happiness. Perfect and everlasting happiness—beatitude—can only be achieved in the participated eternity in the vision of the Triune God and necessarily presupposes salvation—the justification and the deification of humans⁶—such that they can enter into beatitude. The way *to* and the way *of* beatitude is the One who says about himself “I am the way” (John 14:6; see PD §11). At this very point *Placuit Deo* makes reference to an important passage from Augustine:

“I am the way and the truth and the life” (*Jn* 14, 6). If you search for the truth, follow the way, because the way is the same as the truth. The goal you aim for and the way you must tread are the same. You cannot reach your goal following another way, for you cannot reach Christ through another way. You can reach Christ only through Christ. In what sense do you come to Christ through Christ? You reach Christ the God through Christ the man. Through the Word made flesh, you reach the Word that was in the beginning God with God. (PD §11)⁷

⁵ For a more extensive treatment of Aquinas’s profound and complex treatment of this central philosophical and theological problematic, see my *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

⁶ As *Placuit Deo* states: “The Christian faith has illustrated, throughout its centuries-long history, by means of multiple figures, this salvific work of the Son incarnate. It has done so without ever separating the healing dimension of salvation, by which Christ redeems us from sin, from the elevating dimension, by which he makes us sons and daughters of God, participants in his divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4)” (§9). For a recent study of this motif at the heart of Aquinas’s soteriology, see Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God’s Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015).

⁷ Augustine, *Tractatus in Ioannem* 13.4: “Ego sum via, veritas et vita (Joan. 14, 6). Si veritatem quaeris, viam tene: nam ipsa est via quae est veritas. Ipsa est quo is, ipsa est qua is: non per aliud is ad aliud, non per aliud venis ad Christum: per Christum ad Christum venis. Quomodo per Christum ad Christum? Per Christum hominem ad Christum Deum: per Verbum carnem factum ad Verbum quod in principio erat Deus apud Deum” (*Corpus Christianorum: Series Latinae*, 36:132).

One may read Aquinas's teaching in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 14:6 not only as an exposition of Saint John, but also as a commentary on Augustine's above reflections on this text:

Then when he says, "Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life," the question is answered. Our Lord was to answer about two things: first, about the way and its destination; secondly, about their knowledge of both (v. 7). He does two things about the first: first, he states what the way is; secondly, he gives its destination (v. 6b). The way, as has been said, is Christ himself; so he says, "I am the way." This is indeed true, for it is through him that we have access to the Father, as stated in Romans (5:2). This answer could also settle the uncertainty of the faltering disciple. Because this way is not separated from its destination but united to it, he adds, "and the truth, and the life." So Christ is at once both the way and the destination. He is the way by reason of his human nature, and the destination because of his divinity. Therefore, as human, he says, "I am the way"; as God, he adds, "and the truth, and the life." These last two appropriately indicate the destination of the way. For the destination of this way is the end of human desire. Now human beings especially desire two things: first, a knowledge of the truth, and this is characteristic of them; secondly, that they continue to exist, and this is common to all things. In fact, Christ is the way to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, while still being the truth itself. . . . This is the reason why Christ referred to himself as the way, united to its destination: because he is the destination, containing in himself whatever can be desired, that is, existing truth and life.⁸

⁸ Aquinas, *Super Ioan* 14, lec 2. "Consequenter cum dicit *dicit eis Iesus: ego sum via, veritas et vita*, ponitur quaesitorum manifestatio. Duo autem dominus manifestanda proposuerat eis. Primo quidem viam et terminum eius; secundo quod utrumque scirent. Primo ergo manifestat primum; secundo secundum, ibi *si cognovissetis me, et patrem meum utique cognovissetis*. Circa primum duo facit. Primo manifestat quid sit via; secundo quid sit terminus, ibi *nemo venit ad patrem nisi per me*. Via autem, ut dictum est, est ipse Christus: et ideo dicit *ego sum via* et cetera. Quod quidem satis habet rationem: nam per ipsum accessum habemus ad patrem, ut dicitur Rom. V, 2. Competit etiam proposito quo intendit declarare dubitationem discipuli dubitantis. Sed quia ista via non est distans a termino, sed coniuncta, addit *veritas et vita*; et sic ipse simul est via, et terminus. Via quidem secundum humanitatem, terminus secundum divinitatem. Sic ergo secundum quod homo, dicit *ego sum via*; secundum quod Deus, addit *veritas et vita*. Per quae duo terminus huius viae convenienter designatur. Nam terminus huius viae finis est desiderii

Perfect human beatitude consists in unitive, that is unmediated, knowledge of the First Truth and the loving attainment of and union with the Supreme Good and everlasting existence. In virtue of his divine nature, the Incarnate Logos is the First Truth and the Sovereign Good in the single undivided act of eternal existence. He is truth and life in undiminished perfection. The human soul of the complete human nature that the second person of the Blessed Trinity assumes in the Incarnation fully is united, due to the grace of the hypostatic union, through its higher faculties, the intellect and will, with the First Truth and the Sovereign Good. The human soul of Christ is from the moment of the Incarnation on in the beatific vision. And through the instrumentality of the human nature the Son of God assumed as Incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ, the God-man in his very theandric constitution *is* the way to the Father. It is in the friendship of charity, the graced union of wills, through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharistic communion, and in the imitation of Christ's way of life that union with Christ's human nature, and by way of it, also the union of charity with the whole Blessed Trinity is attained. This is the fundamentally Johannine logic of Aquinas's soteriology—at the center of which stands his theology of the Cross.⁹

humani, homo autem duo praecipue desiderat: primo quidem veritatis cognitionem, quae est sibi propria; secundo sui esse continuationem, quod est commune omnibus rebus. Christus autem est via perveniendi ad veritatis cognitionem, cum tamen ipse sit veritas. ... Sic ergo Christus seipsum designavit viam, et coniunctam termino: quia ipse est terminus habens in se quidquid desiderari potest, scilicet existens veritas et vita" (Marietti nos. 1867–69).

- ⁹ For a pellucid presentation of Aquinas's theology of Christian satisfaction across the full spread of the Angelic Doctor's biblical commentaries and theological works, see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Godly Image: Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020). For a comprehensive defense and exposition of Aquinas's Christology in critical dialogue with contemporary Catholic and Protestant Christologies, see Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), and for a systematic re-reading of Aquinas's Christology in its Trinitarian constitution, see Dominic Legge, O.P., *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). For an astute theological defense of the beatific vision in the human soul of Christ, see Simon Francis Gaine, O.P., *Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015). For a lucid account of Aquinas on the hypostatic union, see Joseph Wawrykow, "Hypostatic Union," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 222–51, and for the metaphysical presuppositions and implications of Aquinas's account of the hypostatic union, see Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on*

The Original Order of Charity and Its Loss

While most central to the Christian message of salvation, the doctrine of original sin is at the same time notoriously misunderstood and misrepresented.¹⁰ Contemporary neo-Pelagianism would flat-out deny the very reality of original sin and would dismiss the doctrine as a remnant of the dark ages of superstition and error, while contemporary neo-Gnosticism would affirm original sin but would mistakenly take it to denote a primordial ontological and moral devastation of the whole created order in consequence of the angelic fall, and a subsequent fundamental corruption of human nature, its faculties, and dispositions such that all human actions fall under the alienation of mortal sin with the consequence that all moral acts are fundamentally ambiguous. Neo-Pelagianism's Enlightenment optimism and neo-Gnosticism's Jansenist pessimism both miss the mark of the authentic doctrine of original sin.

According to its authentic doctrine, as Aquinas defends it, original sin is a correlate to original righteousness, and both are essential entailments of a sound theology of salvation rooted in the witness of the Holy Scriptures and the theology of the Fathers. It has its root and center in the Pauline Adam–Christ typology (Rom. 5:12–21) that profoundly informed the theology of salvation of Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria—and especially by way of Augustine's reception in Scholastic theology, also Aquinas. In its essence, “original sin” denotes simply the state of loss of an original gift, a loss that is the collective result of a free moral act in the state of original righteousness. Salvation in Christ, according to Aquinas, means first and foremost the restoration and surpassing perfection—through the Incarnate Lord's Passion, death, and resurrection—of the original righteousness and the union of charity with God, now elevated by the very perfection of charity that includes the overcoming of sin and death in the surpassing act of the Son's surpassing sacrifice in charity on the Cross to the Father.

the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ For still one of the most lucid and profound treatments of the doctrine of original sin *ad mentem S. Thomae* that has been published in the twentieth century, see Gustav Siewerth's opusculum, *Die christliche Erbsündenlehre entwickelt auf Grund der Theologie des Heiligen Thomas von Aquin* (Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag, 1964). For the most extensive recent commentary on Aquinas's treatise on sin in general and original sin in particular, see Thomas Aquinas, *Die Sünde (Summa theologiae I-II, QQ. 71–89)*, with commentary by Otto Hermann Pesch, ed. Dominikanerprovinz Teutonia Cologne, Die deutsche Thomas Ausgabe 12 (Vienna: Styria, 2004).

Pertaining to the original state of humanity, Aquinas argues that from the first instance on humanity was created in an original graced union of charity with God characterized by friendship with God and the love of God above all things. The human intellect, will, and all the emotions were rightly ordered to God, the First Truth and Sovereign Good, thus constituting an original righteousness worthy of and inclined toward to the supernatural end to which God had ordered original humanity from the moment of its creation, the attainment of surpassing beatitude in the unitive deification of the beatific vision. The sin of the first parents issues in the loss of the original righteousness and graced union with God. Aquinas characterizes the state of this absence, that is original sin, as an *aversio* of the will from God and a *destitutio* of original righteousness, that is, essentially the absence of what was gratuitously given to human nature in the beginning, an absence that results in the de facto inability to love God above all things, to apprehend God's surpassing holiness, glory, and praiseworthiness, and to pursue the supernatural end to which humanity was originally ordained and equipped—deification, that is, the everlasting union of intellect and will with God in vision and charity. Furthermore, this absence of original righteousness and graced union of charity with God has the characteristic of sin (*peccatum*) and guilt (*culpa*) because it consists in the free loss of a good (the original communion with God) that is entailed in divine love: original righteousness and original friendship with God are properties of the image of divine love realized gratuitously in the rational creature from the beginning, an image of God's goodness—hence the participation in God's goodness in the union of charity—and worthy of God's holiness—hence original righteousness. Because original sin is the effect neither of a fated unavoidable event that befell the first parents nor of an unfortunate minor accident reflective of the immaturity and youth of the original couple but rather is the result of a free morally responsible act undertaken by the first parents in the intellective lucidity and volitional rectitude of original righteousness. The interior *aversio* of the human will from God and its consequent weakening characteristic of original sin Aquinas characterizes as a *culpa*, while everything befalling the will from the exterior as something contrarious, opposing, and frustrating has, according to Aquinas, the character of *poena*. *Culpa* and *poena* are essential aspects of original sin as a collective moral condition of humanity that characterizes the condition of human freedom and the human faculties as bereft of original righteousness and sanctifying grace, that is, bereft of the gratuitous elevation of human nature into the union of friendship with God that is a due to the created original image of divine love. Absent original righteousness, the powers of the human soul are left

destitute of their proper original order whereby they are naturally directed to virtue. “Destitution” and “dissolution” denote a weakening that occurs when a rational creature created in a graced original relation to God finds itself bereft of this relation and the concomitant original order of its powers of mind and heart in disarray resulting in a diminished disposition to the good and a weakened resistance toward evil. Aquinas characterizes this dissolution of the proper original order of intellect, will, and the sense appetites characteristic of original sin as a fourfold wounding of human nature:

As a result of original justice, the reason had perfect hold over the lower parts of the soul, while reason itself was perfected by God, and was subject to Him. Now this same original justice was forfeited through the sin of our first parent, ... so that all the powers of the soul are left, as it were, destitute of their proper order, whereby they are naturally directed to virtue; which destitution is called a wounding of nature. Again, there are four of the soul’s powers that can be subject of virtue, ... viz. the reason, where prudence resides, the will, where justice is, the irascible, the subject of fortitude, and the concupiscible, the subject of temperance. Therefore in so far as the reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the wound of ignorance; in so far as the will is deprived of its order to the good, there is the wound of malice; in so far as the irascible is deprived of its order to the arduous, there is the wound of weakness; and in so far as the concupiscible is deprived of its order to the delectable, moderated by reason, there is the wound of concupiscence. (*ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 3)

Actual sins are not simply unavoidable consequences of original sin; rather, they arise through the interaction of reason and will from the free will.¹¹

¹¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 75, a. 2: “We may distinguish a twofold internal cause of human acts, one remote, the other proximate. The proximate internal cause of the human act is the reason and will, in respect of which man has a free-will; while the remote cause is the apprehension of the sensitive part, and also the sensitive appetite. For just as it is due to the judgment of reason, that the will is moved to something in accord with reason, so it is due to an apprehension of the senses that the sensitive appetite is inclined to something; which inclination sometimes influences the will and reason . . . Accordingly a double interior cause of sin may be assigned; one proximate, on the part of the reason and will; and the other remote, on the part of the imagination or sensitive appetite. But since . . . the cause of sin is some apparent good as motive, yet lacking the due motive, viz. the rule of reason or the Divine law, this motive which is an apparent good, appertains to the apprehension of the

And so, importantly, Aquinas argues: "Since the inclination to the good of virtue is diminished in each individual on account of actual sin, . . . these four wounds are also the result of other sins, insofar as, through sin, the reason is obscured, especially in practical matters, the will hardened to evil, good actions become more difficult and concupiscence more impetuous."¹² The original weakening of powers of the soul is characteristic of original sin; yet any de facto increase of their weakening is the result of actual sins.

Besides contributing its respective increase of the four wounds of

senses and to the appetite; while the lack of the due rule appertains to the reason, whose nature it is to consider this rule; and *the completeness of the voluntary sinful act appertains to the will, so that the act of the will, given the conditions we have just mentioned, is already a sin*" ("Per se causam peccati oportet accipere ex parte ipsius actus. Actus autem humani potest accipi causa interior et mediata, et immediata. Immediata quidem causa humani actus est ratio et voluntas, secundum quam homo est liber arbitrio. Causa autem remota est apprehensio sensitivae partis, et etiam appetitus sensitivus, sicut enim ex iudicio rationis voluntas movetur ad aliquid secundum rationem, ita etiam ex apprehensione sensus appetitus sensitivus in aliquid inclinatur. Quae quidem inclinatio interdum trahit voluntatem et rationem, sicut infra patebit. Sic igitur duplex causa peccati interior potest assignari, una proxima, ex parte rationis et voluntatis; alia vero remota, ex parte imaginationis vel appetitus sensitivi. Sed quia supra dictum est quod causa peccati est aliquod bonum apparens motivum cum defectu debiti motivi, scilicet regulae rationis vel legis divinae; ipsum motivum quod est apparens bonum, pertinet ad apprehensionem sensus et appetitum. Ipsa autem absentia debitae regulae pertinet ad rationem, quae nata est huiusmodi regulam considerare. *Sed ipsa perfectio voluntarii actus peccati pertinet ad voluntatem, ita quod ipse voluntatis actus, praemissis suppositis, iam est quoddam peccatum*") (my emphasis). See also *De Malo*, q. 6.

¹² ST I-II, q. 85, a. 3: "Per iustitiam originalem perfecte ratio continebat inferiores animae vires, et ipsa ratio a Deo perficiebatur ei subiecta. Haec autem originalis iustitia subtracta est per peccatum primi parentis, sicut iam dictum est. Et ideo omnes vires animae remanent quodammodo destitutae proprio ordine, quo naturaliter ordinantur ad virtutem, et ipsa destitutio vulneratio naturae dicitur. Sunt autem quatuor potentiae animae quae possunt esse subiecta virtutum, ut supra dictum est, scilicet ratio, in qua est prudentia; voluntas, in qua est iustitia; irascibilis, in qua est fortitudo; concupiscibilis, in qua est temperantia. Inquantum ergo ratio destituitur suo ordine ad verum, est vulnus ignorantiae; inquantum vero voluntas destituitur ordine ad bonum, est vulnus malitiae; inquantum vero irascibilis destituitur suo ordine ad arduum, est vulnus infirmitatis; inquantum vero concupiscentia destituitur ordine ad delectabile moderatum ratione, est vulnus concupiscentiae. Sic igitur ita quatuor sunt vulnera inflicta toti humanae naturae ex peccato primi parentis. Sed quia inclinatio ad bonum virtutis in unoquoque diminuitur per peccatum actuale, ut ex dictis patet, et ista sunt quatuor vulnera ex aliis peccatis consequentia, inquantum scilicet per peccatum et ratio hebetatur, praecipue in agendis; et voluntas induratur ad bonum; et maior difficultas bene agendi accrescit; et concupiscentia magis exardescit."

human nature, every sinful act leaves two things, a stain on the sinner's soul (*macula peccati*) and the sinner's guilt that makes the sinner liable to punishment (*reatus poenae*). First, the stain on the sinner's soul. Aquinas argues that the human rational soul (*intellectus; mens*)—incorporeal and therefore subsistent, immediately produced by God¹³—has a twofold original splendor (*nitor*): one from the natural light of reason whereby humans are directed to their actions; the other from the illumination of the divine light, that is, the wisdom and grace whereby humans are perfected in order to do good and fitting actions. The rational soul has one fundamental characteristic that is central to all further considerations. It is a property of its spiritual nature: "When the soul cleaves to things by love, there is a kind of contact in the soul" (*ST* I-II, q. 86, a. 1). Consequently, when humans sin, they cleave to certain things contrary to the light of reason and contrary to the divine law. The loss of the splendor of the human soul is occasioned by such contact, which "is metaphorically called a stain on the soul." Aquinas holds that "the stain of sin remains in the soul even when the act of sin is past." For the stain "denotes a blemish in the brightness of the soul, on account of its withdrawing from the light of reason or of the divine law" (*ST* I-II, q. 86, a. 2). This stain of sin remains as long as the human remains out of this light, that is, until the human repents and returns to the light of reason and the divine law. Unless such a repentance and return occurs, the human rational soul continues to be affected by the retained *habitus* of its *aversio* from reason and the divine law and precisely this retained *habitus* constitutes the stain of sin (*macula peccati*).

The second thing each actual sin leaves after the act, is the sinner's liability for punishment (*reatus poenae*) (*De malo*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 14). Significantly, Aquinas interprets this liability for punishment as a debt of punishment (*debitum poenae*).¹⁴ The sinner stands in the position of debtor in relationship to divine justice. What is *actually* due to the sinner under the order of divine justice is punishment—even if this punishment might not occur or be elevated into a different order. Whatever God decrees from all eternity in response to actual human sin—be it the sin of the first parent or all subsequent actual sins arising from human freedom—takes into account

¹³ For a lucid recent exposition and defense of Aquinas's position on this crucial teaching, see Adam Wood, *Thomas Aquinas on the Immateriality of the Human Intellect* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020).

¹⁴ *Sent.* IV, d. 21, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 2: "Ad secundam quaestionem dicendum, quod quicumque est debitor alicujus, per hoc a debito absolvitur quod debitum solvit; et quia reatus nihil est aliud quam debitum poenae; per hoc quod aliquis poenam sustinet quam debebat, a reatu absolvitur."

the sinner's position of debtor in relationship to divine justice.¹⁵ Actual sin, the free act of the rational creature, being either the absence of a due act in reference to God (a sin of omission) or an act contrary to what is due to God (a sin of commission), disturbs the universal order of divine governance. Actual sin introduces the reality of moral evil into the *per se* good order of creation and divine governance. And because God delights in the order of divine justice, the effect of a divine perfection, punishment is due as the payment that balances out the equality of justice. To simply disregard the order of divine justice, or cancel it, from God's side would entail the divine dismissal of an effect of divine perfection, justice—an act of divine injustice that would contradict divine wisdom and is therefore impossible. The restoration of the order of divine justice, and with it also the restoration of the balance of the equality of justice, is an entailment of the perfection of divine justice, and therefore God delights in it, for God delights in everything that is good and perfect and that is nothing but the infinite goodness and perfection of God's own essence and of all the perfections identical with the divine essence.

Hence, the debt of punishment is an immediate and unavoidable consequence of the violation of the order of divine justice. And what God has decreed to remove the debt of punishment is *satisfaction*. Aquinas, importantly, observes that satisfaction is not the only way to address the debt of punishment, but rather is the most fitting way assigned by God to re-establish union of charity with God by way of removing the debt of punishment. Thus the order of divine justice is not negated but rather elevated into the order of divine charity. Sin is not only remitted, but rather the sinner restored to the original union of charity with God. Aquinas argues thus: The order of divine justice could have been accommodated differently by God than by way of removing the debt of punishment by way of satisfaction. If God had somehow willed to liberate humans from sin without satisfaction, God could have done so without acting against justice. In the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, where Aquinas considers Christ's Passion, he formulates this argument in a crisply condensed form. He states:

A judge, while preserving justice, cannot pardon fault without penalty, if he must visit fault committed against another. . . . But God has no one higher than Himself, for He is the sovereign and

¹⁵ Consequently, the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, in their translation of the *Summa theologiae*, render the liability for punishment (*reatus poenae*) itself as "debt of punishment," a felicitous decision I will make my own in the following.

common good of the whole universe. Consequently, if [God] forgive sin, which has the formality of fault in that it is committed against Himself, [God] wrongs no one: just as anyone else, overlooking a personal trespass, without satisfaction, acts mercifully and not unjustly.¹⁶

Note well, according to Aquinas, God is both merciful *and* just; mercy is as much a divine perfection as is justice; and in the absolute simplicity of the divine essence, mercy and justice are one.¹⁷ It is perfectly justifiable for a judge to practice mercy without injury to justice by forgiving the sin committed against him. Yet such mere forgiveness, as attractive as it might seem at first sight, Aquinas argues, does not free the human soul from the stain of sin, nor restore it to the order of divine charity. Yet the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ's Passion and death on the Cross, as eternally decreed by God, does precisely that—while respecting the order of divine justice, it insures first and foremost the healing of the human soul and its restoration to the original union of charity with God. What motivates Aquinas's argument from fittingness (*convenientia*) is, of course, the central datum of revelation that forms the very heart of the New Testament message, namely that Christ “by His Passion made satisfaction for the sin of the human race” (*ST* III, q. 46, a. 1, ad 3, echoing 1 John 2:2).

¹⁶ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 2, ad 3: “Alioquin, si voluisset absque omni satisfactione hominem a peccato liberare, contra iustitiam non fecisset. Ille enim iudex non potest, salva iustitia, culpam sive poenam dimittere, qui habet punire culpam in alium commissam, puta vel in alium hominem, vel in totam rempublicam, sive in superiorem principem. Sed Deus non habet aliquem superiorem, sed ipse est supremum et commune bonum totius universi. Et ideo, si dimittat peccatum, quod habet rationem culpae ex eo quod contra ipsum committitur, nulli facit iniuriam, sicut quicumque homo remittit offensam in se commissam absque satisfactione, misericorditer, et non iniuste agit.”

¹⁷ Cf. *ST* I, q. 3, and *ST* I, q. 21, esp. a. 4, “Whether in Every Work of God There Are Mercy and Justice?” In the response to the first objection, Aquinas anticipates in a nutshell the way he conceives divine mercy and justice to be one in God, but to be ordered in God's works by way of love such that justice is always grounded in mercy: “In the justification of the ungodly, justice is seen, when God remits sins on account of love, though He Himself has mercifully infused that love.” For a more detailed interpretation of the relationship of divine mercy and divine justice in the divine economy, see my essay “Human Sexuality in a Fallen World: An Economy of Mercy and Grace,” in *San Tommaso, il matrimonio e la famiglia*, ed. Serge-Thomas Bonino and Guido Mazzotta (Doctor Communis: Pontificia Academia Sancti Thomae Aquinatis; Atti XVI Sessione Plenaria) (Vatican City: Urbaniana University Press, 2019), 71–98.

In order to understand why satisfaction is most suitable (*convenientissimum*), one must appreciate, Aquinas argues, how the stain of sin (*macula peccati*) on the human soul is removed. It is evident, Aquinas holds, “that the stain of sin cannot be removed from the soul, without the soul being united to God” (*ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 6). For, after all, it was through being separated from God that the soul suffered the loss of its splendor. Aquinas conceives of the removal of the stain of sin and the attainment of union with God thus: First and foremost, the will is the faculty of the human soul by way of which the human is united to God *in via*. And therefore the stain of sin can be removed only if the will accepts the order of divine justice. Accepting the order of divine justice is the first and fundamental step of the removal of the stain of sin on the rational soul because this acceptance is identical with the re-ordering of the reason and the will to the divine law. A restoration to the original union of charity with God is impossible without the antecedent restoration of the sinner’s reason and will to the order of divine justice. Accepting the order of divine justice means for Aquinas one of two things: either humans on their *own accord* take upon themselves the punishment of past sins, or they bear patiently the punishment God inflicts on them. In both ways, Aquinas says, “punishment avails for satisfaction . . . and although satisfactory punishment, absolutely speaking is against the will, nevertheless *in this particular case and for this particular purpose, it is voluntary*” (*ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 6).

Already in his doctrine of sin we encounter the central principle that governs Aquinas’s soteriology: *Because a satisfactory punishment is in some way voluntary, it is transferable under one specific condition—to be one in will by the union of charity*. Aquinas states: “Since those who differ as to the debt of punishment, *may be one in will by the union of love*, it happens that one who has not sinned, bears willingly the punishment for another: thus even in human affairs we see [people] take the debts of another upon themselves” (my emphasis). And so “one may bear another’s punishment, in so far as they are, in some way, one” (*ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 8). With this central principle Aquinas announces the key theme that later in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae* unites the sacraments with Christ’s Passion: “*Christ bore a satisfactory punishment, not for His, but for our sins*” (*ST* I-II, q. 87, a. 7, ad 3; my emphasis).

Reflecting the overarching role he accords to charity from the state of original righteousness in friendship with God in the beginning to the surpassing perfection of charity in the beatific vision, Aquinas advances the argument from fittingness that a voluntary satisfaction in charity actually be most suitable (*convenientissimum*) for healing the soul from the stain of sin and for restoring it to the union of charity with God. In

the state of original righteousness, because of the gift of sanctifying grace, humans adhered to God by charity.¹⁸ Original sin destroyed this adherence by charity to humanity's final end, union with God. So what is at stake in satisfactory punishment is twofold: (1) satisfaction restores the order of charity by way of a substitutionary satisfaction accepted voluntarily in charity for the person wronged and for the wrongdoer; (2) substitutionary satisfaction presupposes a union of charity between the wrongdoer and the person who makes satisfaction.¹⁹ Remember, Aquinas holds that "when a soul cleaves to things by love, there is a kind of contact in the soul" (ST I-II, q. 86, a. 1). If the wrongdoer loves the person who makes satisfaction for him or her, there is a kind of contact in the soul of the wrongdoer with this person.²⁰ *And if this person is a divine person, there is a kind of contact in the soul of the wrongdoer with God.* Christ is this divine person who in his human nature is priest and victim in one, who offered in his Passion and death *voluntarily* a substitutionary satisfaction for all human sin, and more importantly, *in a supreme act of unitive charity with God the Father. Christ's satisfaction for human sin in charity both to the Father and to the wrongdoer allows for, invites, and, by way of sanctifying grace, brings about a restoration of charity through which the human adheres again to his or her*

¹⁸ See ST I-II, q. 87, a. 3: "Now in every order there is a principle whereby one takes part in that order. Consequently if a sin destroys the principle of the order whereby [the human being's] will is subject to God, the disorder will be such as to be considered in itself, irreparable, although it is possible to repair it by the power of God. Now the principle of this order is the last end, to which [the human] adheres by charity."

¹⁹ Eleonore Stump put this crucial point—easily missed or misunderstood in Aquinas's theology—in a felicitously succinct way: "Because, on Aquinas's view, the point of making satisfaction is to return the wrongdoer's will to conformity with the will of the person wronged, rather than to inflict retributive punishment on the wrongdoer or to placate the person wronged, it is possible for the satisfaction to be made by a substitute, provided that the wrongdoer allies himself with the substitute in willing to undo as far as possible the damage he has done. So Aquinas thinks that one person can make satisfaction for another only to the extent to which they are united, or that one person can atone for another insofar as they are one in charity" (*Aquinas* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 435). For a constructive development of Aquinas's fundamental insight into a comprehensive systematic theology of atonement, see Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁰ See ST I-II, q. 86, a. 1, ad 2: "The act of the will consists in a movement towards things themselves, so that love attaches the soul to the thing loved. Thus it is that the soul is stained, when it cleaves inordinately" ("actus voluntatis consistit in motu ad ipsas res, ita quod amor conglutinat animam rei amatae. Et ex hoc anima maculatur, quando inordinate inhaeret").

*final end, union with God. And adhering to God through charity inchoately attaches the soul to God such that the soul's splendor is restored. Thus humans become again what they were created for in the beginning—to be in virtue of their union in charity with God imitators and thereby living images of God.*²¹

It is apposite at this point to consider in greater detail Aquinas's Christology, especially his understanding of Christ as priest and Christ as victim, Christ who bore in his Passion and death a satisfactory punishment for all human sin, a punishment borne voluntarily, and more importantly, as a supreme act of charity, which restores all humanity to the supreme divine order of charity. For it is in his Christology, especially his focus on Christ the priest and Christ the victim, where Aquinas spells out in detail what *Placuit Deo* adumbrates in broad strokes:

Considering the salvific perspective in a descending manner, that is, beginning with God who comes to redeem humanity, Jesus is the illuminator and revealer, the redeemer and liberator, the One who divinizes and justifies the human person. According to an ascending vision, that is, beginning with the human person turning towards God, Christ is the High Priest of the New Covenant, offering perfect worship to the Father, in the name of all humanity: He sacrifices Himself, expiates sins, and remains forever alive to intercede on our behalf. In this manner, an incredible synergy between divine and human action appears in the life of Jesus, a synergy that shows how baseless the individualist perspective is. The descending perspective bears witness to the absolute primacy of the gratuitous acts of God; humility is essential to respond to his salvific love and is required to receive the gifts of God, prior to all of our works. At the same time, the ascending perspective recalls that, by means of the fully human action of his Son, the Father wanted to renew our actions, so that, conformed to Christ, we are able to fulfil “the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them” (Eph 2:10). (PD §9)

²¹ See Daria Spezzano, “‘Be Imitators of God’ (Eph. 5:1): Aquinas on Charity and Satisfaction,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 2 (2017): 615–51. By now it will have become patent that Aquinas's soteriology implicitly receives and transforms the Anselmian satisfaction theory. For a lucid discussion of this matter, see Rik Van Nieuwenhove, “‘Bearing the Marks of Christ's Passion:’ Aquinas's Soteriology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 277–302.

The Restoration of Humanity to the Order of Charity: Christ's Priesthood and Passion on the Cross

At the outset of his consideration of Christ's priesthood, Aquinas enumerates three reasons why humans are required to offer sacrifice—"sacrifice" meaning, most broadly, everything that is offered to God in order to raise the human spirit to God: "First, for the remission of sin, by which [the human] is turned away from God. . . . Secondly, that [the human] may be preserved in a state of grace, by ever adhering to God, wherein his peace and salvation consist. . . . Thirdly, that the [human] spirit . . . be perfectly united to God: which will be most perfectly realized in glory."²² Now, precisely these effects were conferred on us by the humanity of Christ: first, the blotting out of our sins (Rom 4:25), second, the reception of the grace of salvation (Heb 5:9), and third, acquiring the perfection of glory (Heb 10:19). And therefore Aquinas concludes, "Christ Himself, as [human], was not only priest, but also a perfect victim, being at the same time victim for sin, victim for a peace-offering, and a holocaust" (*ST* III, q. 22, a. 2). And so Christ's priesthood expiates human sin, and this in two respects. For two things are required for the perfect cleansing from sins. They correspond to the two things sin comprises—namely, the stain of sin (*macula peccati*) and the debt of punishment (*reatus poenae*) (*ST* III, q. 22, a. 3).

The debt of punishment is entirely removed by the satisfaction that Christ offers for all humanity to God the Father. The stain of sin is blot-

²² *ST* III, q. 22, a. 2: "Sicut dicit Augustinus, in X de Civ. Dei, omne sacrificium visibile invisibilis sacrificii est sacramentum, idest sacrum signum. Est autem invisibile sacrificium quo homo spiritum suum offert Deo, secundum illud Psalmi; sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus. Et ideo omne illud quod Deo exhibetur ad hoc quod spiritus hominis feratur in Deum, potest dici sacrificium. Indiget igitur homo sacrificio propter tria. Uno quidem modo, ad remissionem peccati, per quod a Deo avertitur. Et ideo dicit apostolus, Heb. V, quod ad sacerdotem pertinet ut offerat dona et sacrificia pro peccatis. Secundo, ut homo in statu gratiae conserveatur, semper Deo inhaerens, in quo eius pax et salus consistit. Unde et in veteri lege immolabatur hostia pacifica pro offerentium salute, ut habetur Levit. III. Tertio, ad hoc quod spiritus hominis perfecte Deo uniatur, quod maxime erit in gloria. Unde et in veteri lege offerebatur holocaustum, quasi totum incensum, ut dicitur Levit. I. Haec autem per humanitatem Christi nobis provenerunt. Nam primo quidem, nostra peccata deleta sunt, secundum illud Rom. IV, traditus est propter delicta nostra. Secundo, gratiam nos salvantem per ipsum accepimus, secundum illud Heb. V, factus est omnibus obtemperantibus sibi causa salutis aeternae. Tertio, per ipsum perfectionem gloriae adepti sumus, secundum illud Heb. X, habemus fiduciam per sanguinem eius in introitum sanctorum, scilicet in gloriam caelestem. Et ideo ipse Christus, inquantum homo, non solum fuit sacerdos, sed etiam hostia perfecta, simul existens hostia pro peccato, et hostia pacificorum, et holocaustum."

ted out by sanctifying grace, the principle of the divine life in the human being which the sinner receives through Baptism²³ and which after its loss through mortal sin can subsequently be restored through the sacrament of Penance (*ST* III, q. 89, a. 1). For by grace the sinner's heart is turned to God. Now, remember Aquinas's principle: "When the soul cleaves to things by love, there is a kind of contact in the soul" (*ST* I-II, q. 86, a. 1). Since charity is an infused theological virtue, the originating principle of which is sanctifying grace, by charity the soul cleaves again to God—with whom there is therefore a kind of union of charity in the soul, which is the soul's splendor. Aquinas argues that the priesthood of Christ produces both these effects.²⁴ Three points are crucial. First, Christ's satisfaction comports fully with divine mercy and divine justice:

That [the human] should be delivered by Christ's Passion was in keeping with both His mercy and His justice. With His justice, because by His Passion Christ made satisfaction for the sin of the human race; and so man was set free by Christ's justice: and with His mercy, for since man of himself could not satisfy for the sin of all human nature, . . . God gave him His Son to satisfy for him. . . . *And this came of more copious mercy than if He had forgiven sins without satisfaction.* Hence it is said (Eph 2:4): "God, who is rich in mercy, for His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ."²⁵

²³ *ST* III, q. 69, a. 4. Aquinas expresses the effect of Baptism most beautifully in his brief response to the question "Whether the Effect of Baptism Is to Open the Gates of the Heavenly Kingdom?" (*ST* III, q. 69, a. 7): "To open the gates of the heavenly kingdom is to remove the obstacle that prevents one from entering therein. Now this obstacle is guilt and the debt of punishment. But it has been shown above . . . that all guilt and also all debt of punishment are taken away by Baptism. It follows, therefore, that the effect of Baptism is to open the gates of the heavenly kingdom" ("Aperire ianuam regni caelestis est amovere impedimentum quo aliquis impeditur regnum caeleste intrare. Hoc autem impedimentum est culpa et reatus poenae. Ostensum est autem supra quod per Baptismum totaliter omnis culpa et etiam omnis reatus poenae tollitur. Unde consequens est quod effectus Baptismi sit apertio regni caelestis.")

²⁴ *ST* III, q. 22, a. 3: "For by its virtue grace is given to us, by which our hearts are turned to God. . . . Moreover, He satisfied for us fully, inasmuch as 'He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows' (Is 53:4)."

²⁵ *ST* III, q. 46, a. 1, ad 3: "Hominem liberari per passionem Christi, conveniens fuit et misericordiae et iustitiae eius. Iustitiae quidem, quia per passionem suam Christus satisfecit pro peccato humani generis, et ita homo per iustitiam Christi liberatus est. Misericordiae vero, quia, cum homo per se satisfacere non posset

Second, Christ's satisfaction allows for a human participation, if the human being is united with Christ in charity:

Christ's Passion is applied to us even through faith, that we may share in its fruits, according to Rom 3:25: "Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood." But the faith through which we are cleansed from sin is not *lifeless faith*, which can exist even with sin, but *faith living* through charity; that thus Christ's Passion may be applied to us, not only as to our minds, but also as to our hearts. And even in this way sins are forgiven through the power of the Passion of Christ.²⁶

Third, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross restores humanity to the order of charity: "Christ's Passion was the *offering* of a *sacrifice*, inasmuch as He endured death of His own free-will out of *charity*."²⁷ Satisfaction pertains to the debt of punishment, which refers to justice. Sacrifice, by way of which satisfaction is made, pertains to the restoration of the inchoate union between soul and God, which refers to charity. *A sacrifice in perfect charity can make satisfaction precisely because in satisfaction the affection and devotion of the offerer is what is measured. And Christ's human affection and devotion, because of the hypostatic union with the divine nature, were absolutely perfect.* It is here that Aquinas's understanding of Christ's human nature as the *instrument* of his divinity comes into full play. He had inherited this theologoumenon from patristic theology.²⁸ Christ's sacrifice was

pro peccato totius humanae naturae, ut supra habitum est, Deus ei satisfactorem dedit filium suum, secundum illud Rom. III, iustificati gratis per gratiam ipsius, per redemptionem quae est in Christo Iesu, quem proposuit Deus propitiatorem per fidem ipsius. Et hoc fuit abundantioris misericordiae quam si peccata absque satisfactione dimisisset. Unde dicitur Ephes. II, Deus, qui dives est in misericordia, propter nimiam caritatem qua dilexit nos, cum essemus mortui peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo" (my emphasis).

²⁶ ST III, q. 49, a. 1, ad 5: "Etiam per fidem applicatur nobis passio Christi ad percipiendum fructum ipsius, secundum illud Rom. III, quem proposuit Deus propitiatorem per fidem in sanguine eius. Fides autem per quam a peccato mundamur, non est fides informis, quae potest esse etiam cum peccato, sed est fides formata per caritatem, ut sic passio Christi nobis applicetur non solum quantum ad intellectum, sed etiam quantum ad affectum. Et per hunc etiam modum peccata dimittuntur ex virtute passionis Christi."

²⁷ ST III, q. 47, a. 4, ad 2: "Passio Christi fuit sacrificii oblatio inquantum Christus propria voluntate mortem sustinuit ex caritate" (my emphasis).

²⁸ For this crucial aspect of Aquinas's Christology, see Theophil Tschipke, O.P., *Die Menschheit Christi als Heilsorgan der Gottheit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung*

most efficacious for blotting out sins, because Christ's human nature—as an instrumental cause—operated by virtue of the divine.²⁹

How does one continue to remain united with this sacrifice out of charity through which Christ made a perfect satisfaction for the sins of all humanity? When considering Christ the priest and Christ the victim, Aquinas anticipates the answer to this question by pointing to the Eucharistic sacrifice: “The Sacrifice which is offered every day in the Church is not distinct from that which Christ Himself offered, but is a commemoration thereof.” He cites from Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (10.20): “Christ Himself both is the priest who offers it and the victim: the sacred token of which He wished to be the daily Sacrifice of the Church.”³⁰

Being Restored to the Union of Charity with God by Participation in Christ's Sacrifice out of Charity

Aquinas is very clear that there is only one explicitly revealed way to secure the effects of Christ's Passion.³¹ One must be configured to Christ,

der Lehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin (Freiburg: Herder, 1940). Cf. the more recent French translation: *L'humanité du Christ comme instrument de salut de la divinité* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003).

²⁹ ST III, q. 22, a. 3, ad 1. In order to support this understanding, Aquinas appeals to a famous passage from Augustine's *De Trinitate* (4.14), a passage frequently cited by medieval theologians: “Four things are to be observed in every sacrifice—to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, for whom it is offered; the same one true Mediator reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, was one with Him to Whom it was offered, united in Himself those for whom He offered it, at the same time offered it Himself, and was Himself that which He offered.” (“Licet Christus non fuerit sacerdos secundum quod Deus, sed secundum quod homo, unus tamen et idem fuit sacerdos et Deus. Unde in synodo Ephesina legitur, si quis pontificem nostrum et apostolum fieri dicit non ipsum ex Deo verbum, sed quasi alterum praeter ipsum specialiter hominem ex muliere, anathema sit. Et ideo, in quantum eius humanitas operabatur in virtute divinitatis, illud sacrificium erat efficacissimum ad delenda peccata. Propter quod Augustinus dicit, in IV de Trin., ut, quoniam quatuor considerantur in omni sacrificio, cui offeratur, a quo offeratur, quid offeratur, pro quibus offeratur; idem ipse unus verusque mediator, per sacrificium pacis reconcilians nos Deo, unum cum illo maneret cui offerebat, unum in se faceret pro quibus offerebat, unus ipse esset qui offerebat, et quod offerebat.”)

³⁰ ST III, q. 22, a. 3, ad 2: “Sacrificium autem quod quotidie in Ecclesia offertur, non est aliud a sacrificio quod ipse Christus obtulit, sed eius commemoratio. Unde Augustinus dicit, in X de Civ. Dei, sacerdos ipse Christus offerens, ipse et oblatio, cuius rei sacramentum quotidianum esse voluit Ecclesiae sacrificium.”

³¹ It would go beyond the scope of this article to discuss Aquinas's profound and still eminently pertinent theory of conceiving of the sacraments as instrumental causes. The theory of sacramental causality that he advances in the *Summa theologiae* is intimately connected with his account of the instrumentality of Christ's

and this occurs sacramentally in Baptism. Aquinas appeals to Romans 6:4: “For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death.” It is for this reason that at Baptism, no punishment of satisfaction is imposed upon the candidates, because they are fully delivered by Christ’s satisfaction. It is an altogether different matter, however, after Baptism. Aquinas states: “But because, as it is written (1 Pt 3:18), ‘Christ died but once for our sins,’ therefore [one] cannot a second time be likened unto Christ’s death by the sacrament of Baptism. Hence it is necessary that those who sin after Baptism be likened unto Christ suffering [*configurentur Christo patienti*] by some form of punishment or suffering which they endure in their own person” (*ST* III, q. 49, a. 3, ad 2). The undergoing of penance and, if necessary, purgatory is the requisite punishment of satisfaction for post-baptismal sins. The superior end of penance and purgatory, however, is not simply satisfaction but rather purification, the removal of those obstacles—the wounds of sin—that hinder the attainment of the ultimate end, our everlasting participation in divine beatitude.

Aquinas regards Baptism as an objective incorporation into the Passion and death of Christ and consequently the communication of Christ’s Passion to every baptized person “so that he is healed just as if he himself had suffered and died” (*ST* III, q. 69, a. 2). And because Christ’s Passion is a sufficient satisfaction for all the sins of all human beings, the baptized person is consequently “freed from the debt of all punishment due to him for his sins, just as if he himself had offered sufficient satisfaction for all his sins” (*ST* III, q. 69, a. 2). Hence Baptism is the sacrament that accounts for the first consequence of sin, the debt of punishment.

At this point it is apposite to turn to what is even more important, and what, according to Aquinas, is the true end of Christ’s Passion. Remember that he argues that *the stain of sin on the soul can be removed only by the soul’s re-attachment to God in charity*. For, after all, it was through being separated from God that the soul suffered the loss of its splendor. Aquinas thinks this re-attachment of the soul comes about by way of the will. For it

sacred humanity that is operative in the sacraments. As an instrument joined to the instrumentality of the sacraments, Christ’s sacred humanity moves the graced person united to him towards perfection and finally to the surpassing participation in divine happiness, beatitude. The instrumentality of the sacraments contributes efficaciously to this end by renewing and deepening the graced person in the divine friendship of charity. For an instructive and penetrating account of the instrumental causality of the sacraments in Aquinas and the Thomist tradition, see Reginald M. Lynch, O.P., *The Cleansing of the Heart: The Sacraments as Instrumental Causes in the Thomist Tradition* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

is through the act of the will that the human soul adheres to God: "When the soul cleaves to things by love, there is a kind of contact in the soul" (*ST* I-II, q. 86, a. 1). And charity is exercised by the faculty of the will. *So when the soul cleaves to God by charity, there is a contact in the soul, the soul is re-attached to God in charity—and that is nothing but the incipient union of the soul with God in charity.*³²

It is at this point that the surpassing significance of the Eucharist in its distinction from yet immediate correlation to Baptism becomes patent, for it is the Eucharist that strengthens and deepens the incipient union of the soul with God in charity. Aquinas states:

Baptism is the sacrament of Christ's death and Passion, according as [one] is born anew in Christ in virtue of His Passion; but the Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's Passion according as [one] is made perfect in union with Christ Who suffered. Hence, as Baptism is called the sacrament of Faith, which is the foundation of the spiritual life, so the Eucharist is termed the sacrament of Charity, which is "the bond of perfection" (Col 3:4).³³

The key word here is *charity*, which, according to Colossians 3:4, is the bond of perfection. Unlike Baptism, which "is directly ordained for the remission of punishment and guilt" (*ST* III, q. 79, a. 5, ad 1), the Eucharist is given for those baptized into Christ's death to be nourished and perfected through Christ.

As is well known, Aquinas considers the Eucharist in two respects, as sacrament under the aspect of communion and as sacrifice under the aspect of offering. Considered as a *sacrament*, the Eucharist has a strengthening and perfecting power. According to the intensity of the bond of charity between Christ and the faithful as they devoutly receive Christ's sacred Body and Blood, they grow in charity, and consequently they participate

³² This incipient union of the soul with God in charity is the beginning of the mystical life to which every baptized Christian is called. See on this topic, indispensable for Christian existence in the twenty-first century, the important work by John G. Arinterro, O.P., *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church*, 2 vols., trans. Jordan Aumann, O.P. (St. Louis: Herder, 1949).

³³ *ST* III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3: "Baptismus est sacramentum mortis et passionis Christi prout homo regeneratur in Christo virtute passionis eius. Sed Eucharistia est sacramentum passionis Christi prout homo perficitur in unione ad Christum passum. Unde, sicut Baptismus dicitur sacramentum fidei, quae est fundamentum spiritualis vitae; ita Eucharistia dicitur sacramentum caritatis, quae est vinculum perfectionis, ut dicitur Coloss. III."

with ever-growing devotion in the Eucharistic sacrifice by uniting in charity their own spiritual self-offering with Christ's sacrifice to the Father.

Considered as a *sacrifice* under the aspect of offering, the Eucharist has a satisfactory power pertaining to post-baptismal sins. If one were to consider only the quantity of what is being offered—the sacred Body and Blood of Christ of the one sacrifice on Calvary—this offering suffices to satisfy for all punishment. Yet crucially, Aquinas argues that in satisfaction, the affection and the devotion—in short, the effects of charity—of the offerer or the one for whom it is offered are weighed and not the quantity of the offering. Hence, Aquinas concludes, “although this offering suffices of its own quantity to satisfy for all punishment, yet it becomes satisfactory for them for whom it is offered, or even for the offerers, according to the measure of their devotion, and not for the whole punishment” (*ST* III, q. 79, a. 5). The measure of affection and devotion is the measure of the union of charity between the offerer or the one for whom it is offered and Christ. For it is by this charity that he is united with Christ's sacrifice. *Hence the unity in distinction of sacrifice and sacrament integrates the demand of justice into an ever-intensifying circle of union in charity with God.*

This is the sacramental pillar of the restored arc of the order of charity. The other pillar of the restored arc of the order of charity is the human participation by way of mercy, which is an effect of charity. Alms deeds stand out most crucially here because they integrate the demands of justice and satisfaction into the encompassing circle of the sacrifice in charity. For ultimately, both pillars denote offerings out of charity, that is, sacrifices “offered to God in order to raise the human spirit to God in charity” and thus restore the union in charity with God.³⁴

³⁴ This second pillar of the restored order of charity is emphasized strongly in *Placuit Deo*: “The salvific economy is also opposed to trends that propose a merely interior salvation. Gnosticism, indeed, associates itself with a negative view of the created order, which is understood as a limitation on the absolute freedom of the human spirit. Consequently, salvation is understood as freedom from the body and from the concrete relationships in which a person lives. In as much as we are saved ‘by means of offering the body of Jesus Christ’ (Heb 10:10; cf. Col 1:22), true salvation, contrary to being a liberation from the body, also includes its sanctification (cf. Rom 12:1). The human body was shaped by God, who inscribed within it a language that invites the human person to recognize the gifts of the Creator and to live in communion with one’s brothers and sisters. The Savior re-established and renewed this original language by his Incarnation and his paschal mystery and communicated it in the economy of the sacraments. Thanks to the sacraments, Christians are able to live faithful to the flesh of Christ and, as a result, in fidelity to the kind of relationships that he gave us. *This type of relationality particularly calls for the care of all suffering humanity through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy*” (PD §14; my emphasis).

Some, however, might want to ask whether alms should be understood at all as acts of charity rather than exclusively as acts of justice. For Daniel 4:24 (according to the *Vulgate*) says after all: “Peccata tua elemosynis redime” (“Redeem your sins with alms”). And satisfaction is an act of justice. Aquinas responds to this objection, as usual, with a distinction. Almsgiving is reckoned among the works of satisfaction and hence as an act of justice insofar as the pity for the one in distress is directed to the satisfaction for one’s own sin. But insofar as almsgiving is directed to please God, it has the character of a sacrifice. *And an act of mercy united with Christ in charity, that is, done for God’s sake, has the character of a sacrifice* (ST II-II, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2 and 3).

Aquinas defines almsgiving as “a deed whereby something is given to the needy, out of compassion and for God’s sake.” An alms deed is motivated by mercy and, since mercy is an effect of charity, alms deeds are acts of charity through the medium of mercy. Aquinas is adamant about this aspect of alms deeds. Whereas almsgiving can be materially without charity, to give alms “formally,” that is, genuinely for God’s sake with delight and readiness, is possible only with charity (ST II-II, q. 32, a. 1, ad 1). Aquinas usefully draws upon a traditional distinction of alms deeds and regards them as suitably reflecting the various needs of our neighbor. Seven bodily alms deeds correspond to the needs of the body: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, harboring the harborless, visiting the sick, ransoming the captive, and giving burial to the dead. Seven spiritual alms deeds correspond to the needs of the soul: prayer, instruction, counseling, comforting, reproving, pardoning the injury, and bearing one another’s burdens (ST II-II, q. 32, a. 2).

What makes the discussion of alms in Aquinas’s theology so instructive is that, in his way of thinking, alms deeds follow the logic of sacrifice and satisfaction that already characterized the sacramental pillar of the restored arc of charity: the demands of justice—satisfaction—are integrated in the overarching dynamic of the sacrifice in charity. *The human response of satisfaction to the demands of justice, paying the debt of punishment, is elevated to a participation in the sacrifice in charity.* Instead of some sentimental super-added ornamentation of a nominal Christian way of life otherwise untroubled by charity, alms deeds are according to Aquinas—not merely in respect to their materiality but rather in respect to their formality—an integral and indispensable element of charity, the life of friendship with the Blessed Trinity. Participation in and increasing conformity to the *caritas* that when taken personally is the proper name of the Holy Spirit (ST I, q. 37, a. 1) has its proper expression for wayfarers in *via ad patriam* in alms deeds. They are nothing less than the heartbeat

of the wayfarer's *caritas*. To have a part in Christ's sacrifice in charity is to live a life of sacrifice in charity—by way of participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice as well as by way of spiritual and corporal alms deeds. Enabled by sanctifying grace, informed by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and actualized by acts of mercy commanded by charity the wayfarer becomes a true image of the eternal *caritas* of the Blessed Trinity.

Conclusion

The one single bond that in Aquinas's theological synthesis holds together the debt of punishment consequent upon sin, substitutionary satisfaction, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, and our participation in that sacrifice through Baptism, Eucharist, and alms deeds is the one bond of perfection, which is charity. Christ's Passion on the Cross, the surpassing act of charity, liberates humanity from the estrangement and corruption of sin, restores humanity to God, and reestablishes the primordial order of charity, the friendship with God. The debt of punishment on account of sin is not simply cancelled through Christ's expiation for the sins of the whole world. Rather, the debt of punishment becomes, in and through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice in charity, the occasion for the sinner to be restored to the order of charity, a restoration in which the sinner's participation is indispensable, indeed, crucial. Differently put, the debt of punishment—an indispensable entailment of divine justice—is transformed by the order of divine charity into an instrument that restores sinners to the union of charity with God, re-configures them efficaciously to the supernatural ultimate end, the beatific vision, and thereby constitutes them as wayfarers (*viatores*) of charity *in via ad patriam*. According to Aquinas, *the wisdom of the Cross is the wisdom of divine charity—to extract the poison of sin through the economy of charity, whose principal effect is mercy, in short, the overcoming of the malice of sin by love and the restoration of the union of charity with God.*

Aquinas's theology of the Cross is able to integrate the legitimate concern behind neo-Pelagianism—the unique character of Christ's Cross issuing in a new way of life—and behind neo-Gnosticism—Christ's Cross pointing to and disclosing the radical transcendence of the abyss of divine love. Yet at the same time, Aquinas argues—implicitly contra neo-Pelagianism—that Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is not the *terminus* but rather the *telos* of all sacrifice, its perfection and at that the only truly efficacious sacrifice *eph' hapax*, re-establishing through union of charity with the crucified Christ a new life in the union of charity with God—not as the substitute of sacrifice, but rather as its surpassing fruit. Contra neo-Gnosticism, Aquinas argues implicitly that Christ's Cross is the way (*via*) to the Father and that this way leads to the heavenly *patria* by way

of God's creation in the extant order of God's providence through the sacramental body of the Incarnate and Risen Lord and through the *viator's* own embodied moral rectitude and life of charity and mercy in spiritual and corporal alms deeds in one's familial, social, cultural, and political contexts.

Augustine famously stated: "God created us without us, but he did not save us without us."³⁵ Active participation in Christ's sacrifice in charity is the way God chose most fittingly to restore the original union of charity with God and thus for sinners to become *viatores* and for *viatores* to become *comprehensores*—on the very way that is Christ himself and thus through becoming united in charity with Christ's Passion and death on the Cross in a life that *in via* is shaped by spiritual and corporal works of mercy.³⁶ Thus in his theology of the Cross—"sapientia crucis est sapientia caritatis"—Aquinas offers a still fecund and pertinent, albeit implicit, response to neo-Pelagian and neo-Gnostic distortions of Christian salvation identified in the letter *Placuit Deo* and maintains the fullness of the vision that *Placuit Deo* affirms:

Total salvation of the body and of the soul is the final destiny to which God calls all of humanity. Founded in faith, sustained by hope, and working in charity, with the example of Mary, Mother of the Savior and first among the saved, we are certain that "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself" (Phil 3:20–21). (*PD* §15) N.V

³⁵ This citation is found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1847, referring to Augustine, Sermon 169, no. 11 (*PL*, 38:923). The exact quote from Augustine's sermon differs though a bit from the rendition offered in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Eris opus Dei, non solum quia homo es, sed etiam quia iustus es. Melius est enim iustum esse, quam te hominem esse. Si hominem te fecit Deus, et iustum tu te facis; melius aliquid facis quam fecit Deus. Sed sine te fecit te Deus. Non enim adhibuisti aliquem consensum, ut te faceret Deus. Quomodo consentiebas qui non eras? *Qui ergo fecit te sine te, non te iustificat sine te. Ergo fecit nescientem, iustificat volentem*" (my emphasis).

³⁶ In greatly abbreviated catechetical form, *Placuit Deo* states the matter thus in §11: "Jesus gave us a 'new and living way that he inaugurated for us through his flesh' (Heb 10:20). Therefore, Christ is Savior in as much as he assumed the entirety of our humanity and lived a fully human life in communion with his Father and with others. Salvation, then, consists in incorporating ourselves into his life, receiving his Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 4:13). He became, 'in a particular way, the origin of all grace according to his humanity.' He is at the same time Savior and Salvation."