

REASON—the Natural Supposition of Faith, of Grace

APPENDIX A

“Religion: A Rational Consideration of the Basic Relationship of Creation to the Creator.”
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Stating the Issue

Scope of the Term.

The term “religion” is a word, which indicates man’s relation to God. The fullness of this relationship cannot be realized unless it includes *man* in the fullness of *his* nature, namely, as a being composed of body and soul [male and female]. In the hierarchy of being spirit is superior to matter, hence, spirit should receive first considerations, not, however, to the neglect of matter. The primary faculties of spiritual beings are the faculties of intellection and volition, hence, the activities of these faculties must be seen in their relation to religion. It is our purpose to analyze religion in the light of the foregoing in order to arrive at a full appreciation of the role it plays in the life of man.

Meaning of the Term.

The word religion is derived from the Latin; either from, “religare” (to bind – namely to God), or from “religere” (to take carefully in consideration, to ponder over, to weigh conscientiously and reflect upon with due care – especially that which is divine and holy). (1). However, an adequately complete concept of the word’s meaning is arrived at only by combining [the meanings of] these two words. In the word “religare” is indicated the free action of the will in choosing to bind itself to the Supreme Good; while the word “religere” indicates that this act of the will is founded on the rational considerations of the intellect. Thus, an act of religion, though consummated by the will, must, to be in accord with man’s nature, be based on convictions of his intellect.

“By means of this virtue we honor the Lord our God inasmuch as we acknowledge and proclaim His greatness, majesty and dominion over us, and at the same time confess our own littleness, lowliness and dependence on Him. Religion, consequently, includes in itself two requisites: first, lively acknowledgement of His infinite perfection and dignity; and then, humble subjection to His infinite power and dominion.” (2). [Emphasis added].

The Natural Virtue of Religion.

For the present, our discussion will refer to religion as a natural, acquired virtue. By “virtue” we mean a *habit perfecting a certain faculty to its proper functioning*; and by “habit” we mean with St. Thomas a *quality inhering within the intellect and will, ordering these faculties to the attainment of their proper ends*. The object of the intellect is knowledge of beings, which includes the essences of things in their relation to true order, and the realization of one’s place in that order. The object of the will is “the good” as it is proposed by the intellect, which ultimately must be the “Supreme Good”. In the realization of its Ultimate “Object” the spiritual being must elicit acts of adoration, the necessary act of religion. (4).

Method of Procedure.

Realizing then, that a rational understanding of our relationship to God is basic to any bona fide understanding of religion, we will proceed to make a rational approach to at least some of the fundamental aspects of the relationship of creation to God; first, Angels, then the material order, an-organic and organic, man—the composite of spirit and matter, then Christ, the God-man, and finally, again man in view of his new relation with God because of the Incarnation. When we come to where Redemption enters our discussion religion will then be considered as an infused supernatural virtue.

The Hierarchy of Dependence in Creation.

Principle.

A work that lacks continuity is the work of an inferior intellect. Hence, in creation, we should expect to find a [pattern of] continuity, nowhere else paralleled, because of the infinitely perfect Intellect that produced it. Our approach is intended to bring out the marvelous continuity of creation.

Angels.

First in the hierarchy of created beings are Angels – pure spirits. Each is a species of its own, a sufficient entity in itself with dependence on God alone, hence, personal, individual obligations to God. Thus, each in its own inimitable way mirrors some perfection of God. (5). They possess intellects and free wills, their sole faculties, which in their “natural” order cannot err. (6). Hence, in the question of their fall, the answer must be found in an order superior to their own, the supernatural. St. Thomas says the fall of the Angels consists in this, that:

“[T]hey preferred their natural glory in its isolation to the community of the supernatural charity...It is pride because they elected excellency without reference to the more excellent good; it is rebellion because the will of God was that they should accept the supernatural”. (7).

By this act the bad Angels severed any hope of attaining their intended relationship with God, a fact they know but their choice remains forever unchangeable. (8). With the “Good” Angels, on the contrary, their happy relationship with God is forever happily sealed; their intellects and their wills have attained their destined ends. Their relationship is perfectly ordered.

Material Creation.

An-organic Nature.

Having considered the most sublime of created beings, we will now descend to the other extreme of the hierarchical order of creation. An-organic “beings”, composed of matter only (as opposed to spirit – no reference to *hylomorphism* here) evidently cannot exercise virtue as we have defined it; yet, they have a definite relationship and dependence on God. Their excellence is derived from the fact that in their existence and natural activity, they mirror the intelligence of their Creator. A given element, in a given circumstance, will always react in a definite manner. This uniform activity of the individual elements, as well as the uniform interactions of different elements, mirrors the ordered intellect of God. Ultimately, material beings have their dependence on God, yet in the order of things they are dependent on each other. This mutual interdependence is intrinsic their very nature. The fact that they do act upon each other is evident and can

be easily demonstrated, but, just WHY they do so we cannot fully comprehend. All we can say is, "it is their *property* to act so". From their consistent actions [reactions] we can learn something of their nature. By observation and experiment we find evident that some activity is intrinsic to the nature of matter, and this activity is effected only by the mutual interactions of different substances; hence, we can define a principle, that: "a *social relationship*, i.e., mutual interdependence in their activity, is intrinsic to the nature of material beings".

Organic Nature.

A further and more marvelous indication of the ordered intelligence of God can be derived from the continuity of an-organic and organic beings. The division between organic and an-organic in the last analysis is hard to determine. For all practical purposes, it is the division between living and non-living beings; in highly developed living beings the division is evident, but when it gets to the point where the living being is in its simplest form, i.e., the stage of transition from non-living to vegetative to sentient life, it is not too apparent. In fact, if it were proved that all life, animal and vegetative, is nothing more than matter highly organized by intricate interaction of involved physical and chemical activity, the theologian need not get excited (provided the spirituality and immortality of the human soul is not tampered with). Even sensation and feeling are subject to the organism and thus share in the general determinism of matter. (9). It is clearly evident that organic beings are wholly dependent upon an-organic matter for their existence and activity; thus, such a concept as suggested in no way does violence to the activity of God in creation, on the contrary, it bears out all the more strikingly the continuity of creation! The infinite fruitfulness of the divine Intelligence is more fittingly portrayed, if matter, in view of the intrinsic potentialities God has planted in it, would evolve in an orderly and patient process due to its naturally inherent qualities, than if God by separate creative acts should produce a hierarchy of material beings. In the latter case, the continuity of creation would not be as striking as it would be if simple matter were capable of interaction. Nor would the material part of man's nature be excluded from this process, else, the finality of matter as it is striving for realization in its noblest form would be frustrated.

The preceding discussion of spiritual beings and material beings in their relation to God and each other, has been rather extensively discussed, because a thorough understanding of them has been considered basic to an understanding of the full nature of man's dependence.

Man the Composite.

Man is a being composed of both spirit and matter. As a spiritual being he possesses faculties of intellect and will; and thus, as an individual is bound to exercise the virtue of religion in his relation to God. As a being of matter, he is also bound to exercise a social relationship with other creatures. Then, as one being, composed of spirit and matter, man's exercise of religion must correspond to his nature, thus, it must be interior and exterior. (10). Material beings, as we have said, of themselves cannot exercise the virtue of religion, but are by their very nature, wholly determined by the Creator, and thus must honor Him by realizing, in their activity, the end for which He created them. Spiritual beings, on the other hand, see their relationship to God and are free either to serve Him or not. Thus, in the free choice of the spiritual being, God is much more honored than He is by the necessary, determined activity of material beings. But in man, matter receives the ability of sharing with spirit the free choice to honor God. Hence, by participation, matter can in the proper sense exercise the virtue of religion. Herein the continuity of creation is further expressed; man is the bond of creation

wedding spirit and matter. He becomes the sole mediator of matter because he shares in its nature. (11). Here matter is raised to an eminence above that proper to its nature. (12).

Man's Break with God.

But if matter received the capacity of sharing the privileges of spiritual beings, it should also share in the activity of the spiritual being in achieving these privileges. Thus, the test given to man to determine his status with God should be one fully accommodated to his nature, effecting body and soul. At the same time, the nature of this trial should be proportionate to the gravity of its effect, (13) hence it should affect the primary faculties of man's soul, his intellect and will, and the primary faculty of his body. Which is the primary faculty of his body? Is it the faculty of self-preservation or the faculty for the preservation of the species? It seems the latter, since by it is realized more fully the social nature of man, whereas, the drive of self-preservation looks more to man as an individual being. Also, we see the grave social effect the first sin had on man, namely, that all are born with it; which would indicate that it should be a social act, capable in its very nature, of accounting of accounting for its grave social effect upon the whole group. Such an act is that by which the very existence and growth of the social body is assured.

The Break Repaired.

If man had existed in the order of pure nature only, he would have had the virtue of religion only as a naturally acquired virtue; but, as a matter of fact, he existed from the beginning gifted with the infused supernatural virtue of religion, and was possessor of supernatural and preternatural prerogatives. (14). By first sin, man lost his supernatural and preternatural gifts, and his infused supernatural virtue of religion became inefficacious in aiding him to acquire his destined supernatural end. Unless God intervened his fate and that of all his children, [they] would be [in] such [a condition] that they could never rise above their purely natural state; they could never attain that supernatural state [which] God intended for them. (15). Here then, God's plan of Redemption enters the scene. In the light of Redemption, man's whole relationship with God takes on a new character; so, an understanding of religion must include the consideration of man in his status as a "redeemed being".

The Supernatural Virtue of Religion.

After the fall, God must bestow upon each man the supernatural virtue of religion if he is to realize his supernatural end. Religion, then, is a moral virtue directing man in his relation to God. (16). The nature of this relationship is conditioned by man's nature; thus, in virtue of his spiritual nature man has obligations to God as an individual; in virtue of his material nature, he has social or community obligations to God. (17). Because of the social nature of man's obligations to God, each individual has thus religious obligations to his social group, which means, that man's relation to his social group will also determine his relationship with God. Hence, it must be that the social group, "qua societas", has obligations to God. And we have said that religion directs man in his relation to God, and to do this it must be efficacious. From the foregoing we can now derive a definition of religion as a supernatural, infused virtue. "*Religion is an efficacious virtue ordering the life of man, as an individual and social being, in his relation to God, and ordering the society of man in its relation to God.*" In the final clause of the definition is meant that religion determines and directs the external act of society by which it acknowledges its supreme dependence on God; in the final analysis it is nothing other than Divine Revelation.

The Manifestation of Religion.

We have sufficiently covered as an individual obligation, now we must deal with it as it is to be manifested in the social group. To do this we will consider man's obligation to the social group and that of the social group to God.

First, man in his obligation to the social group: that man has social obligations is evident, first, from his nature as a material being, and secondly, from the experiential fact that no one is self-sufficient but is indebted to others for his very being and for his continued existence. In view of this social dependence it must follow *a fortiori* it [social dependence] extends also to the accomplishment of his final end, since his social obligations are also means to that end.

Secondly, the social group in its relation to God: just as the dependence of the individual to God is true, all the more true is the dependence of the social group to God. And, just as the spiritual being must elicit acts of religion [relationship] in accord with its nature, namely, spiritual acts, so must society by its very external [corporeal] nature elicit external [physical] acts of religion. Further, each man by the same law of his external nature, and by his participation in society, must share in society's external act of religion. Thus, man's need to express his religion externally is intrinsic to his nature. Over and above this, God has by positive decree determined the form this external manifestation should take on, namely, sacrifice, [the physical "pouring out" of self in the course of one's lifetime and the ultimate dissolution of the body in death. The necessity of sacrifice is encoded in Natural Law (genetic coding)]. (18).

Acts to be included in the supreme act of religion: men of all times have felt the universal conviction that they must make some offering to God. (19). They realize His supreme power in the contingencies that affect their daily lives; they acknowledge His supremacy by adoring Him. At the same time they are conscious of having offended Him and wish to appease Him. They are thankful to Him for having given to them life and other blessings; and they petition Him in the hope of obtaining future blessings. In these four acts man's needs in his relationship to God are realized, hence, they must be contained in the supreme act of religion. At the same time, this act being offered to the Infinite Deity must be proportionate to the Person to whom it is offered. Thus, the nature of sacrifice as fulfilling a reciprocal relationship between God and man will be considered.

Sacrifice. Sacrifice must be a legitimately instituted act. This means that the act has been fully approved both by God and society, and acknowledged as capable of satisfying their reciprocal relationship. On the part of man to God: it must express society's and each man's acknowledgement of the supreme dominion of God over them. Being an act of a visible body, it must be accomplished by means of a visible object, a victim, something the whole body can acknowledge as representing it, offered by [some] one[s] delegated. (This [these] duly delegated person[s] we will consider later.) Then, on the part of God to man: it must express God's satisfaction with *the object* offered as capable of establishing man in his relationship to God. And since he act is accomplished by means of an external object, the expression of God's acceptance of the object must also be made externally manifest in it. To preserve the reciprocal, social nature of sacrifice, this external expression of God's acceptance is considered an essential aspect of this supreme act of religion otherwise, externally the act remains a one-sided affair, an offering on the part of the social body with no assurance of God's response to it. How then, is this external manifestation of God's acceptance to be accomplished? We answer: God Himself has determined by positive law the institution [natural] of sacrifice, both as to the objects offered and as to ones competent in offering it. Thus, if His

directives are carried out in this act of religion, it is infallibly acceptable to Him. This acceptableness of the sacrifice to God, in order to preserve the social, reciprocal aspect of it, must take on a perceptible nature, which is accomplished by an apparent, external effect upon the object offered, i.e., destruction or the equivalent. Thus, the so-called “*immutatio in peius*” would seem to be an essential part of sacrifice if its social, reciprocal nature is to be indicated in the act itself. (20). At the same time, since sacrifice by its very nature is the noblest act man can perform, (21) it also follows that the object which is offered is given a nobler status (22) by the function it performs, a status excelling that of all other material objects. Therefore, the “*immutatio in melius*” of the object is also, as a necessary consequence, realized, in virtue of the transcending purpose for which the object is destined. From all that has been thus far said about sacrifice, we can now derive a definition of it: *sacrifice is the offering, in a legitimate manner, of an external object acknowledging the supreme dominion of God.* The word “legitimate” indicates: the offering performed by one acceptable to God and man; that the object offered is representative of the social body and offered by them as such; that the same object is acceptable to God (23), which is manifested by an external effect upon the object, i.e., destruction or some other essentially equivalent change. The words “acknowledging the supreme dominion of God” determine it the supreme act of adoration, including within it acts of thanksgiving, propitiation and petition.

Fulfillment of Redemption. Thus far we have not spoken of the “One” competent to offer sacrifice. He must [be] represent[ative of] all, hence, he must be a man. [ahem, “human”]. At the same time, man has freely offended his Creator, an Infinite Being, hence, man is himself incapable of righting the wrong he has committed (24). Thus, it was God’s plan that his Divine Son, true God in every respect, should take human flesh and redeem man from his fallen state. Man consequently, in virtue of this divine plan, takes on a whole new relationship with God. Man in his nature became sole mediator of spirit and matter. But in a more wonderful manner, Christ by taking human flesh became the sole Mediator between the Creator and His creation. (I Tim II, 5). Here in a far more excellent degree is the continuity of creation realized, where it has achieved [attained the status of] participation in the nature [divinity] of the Creator. (25).

Christ the Redeemer. All sacrifices of the Old Law were efficacious only through faith in Christ the promised Redeemer. (26). Thus, all priesthood of the old Law received competency [before] God through the priesthood of His Divine Son, since Christ alone as God and man, possessed both the authority and competency of offering to God man’s supreme act of religion. Thus, in the foreseen merits of Christ’s sacrifice, as priest and victim, did other sacrifices become efficacious for man[kind]. We find therefore, that the character of Christ *as sole priest among men* is intrinsic to the very nature of His being, and that [mark of character came about] from the very instant of His conception. (27).

Redemption Applied to Each. Just as the merits of Christ’s sacrifice were already applied before it was accomplished, i.e., through the sacrifices of the Old Law, so there is need that in the New Law these merits be applied to each person. For this, Christ established His Church, His Mystical Body, perpetuated in visible form, in which “from the rising of the sun to its setting there is offered to my name a clean oblation, says the Lord of hosts.” (Mal I: 11). Calvary is evidently Christ’s consummated sacrifice, “sacrifice” in the proper sense as we have described it, by which man’s status with God is completely righted. Still, each man [person] must draw for [her]himself from the abundant merits of Christ to effect his own personal justification. For this need, Christ

established the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which each can partake of the Sacrifice of Calvary. The Holy Eucharist too is sacrifice in the strict sense. (28).

Thus, through the sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood is attained in a most perfect manner that divinely intended relationship between God and man. This then, establishes man, in the present economy of salvation, in his full relationship with God.

Our approach to the subject [of religion] was intended for the most part to remain on the rational plane. Thus, as to historical facts, e.g., whether through history the facts show that the destruction of the object of sacrifice is also present and thus establishes it as an essential part, has not been touched upon. Also, "revealed truths" have simply been presumed [taken on faith]. We have attempted to consider the *facts* as our faith informs us that they are, in the light of reason [faith derived].

But, the affect of our *rational consideration* of religion should [remain open to growth of consciousness], else it is really quite [ineffective]. [Knowledge changes, insights expand, and faith understandings change with informed vision.] If our intellects grasp this, our [changing understanding of] relationship to God, our wills should accordingly be ready to respond to the results of our intellect's searching. God grant [us openness, so] that our wills [are] found not wanting when [our intellects grow in understanding of rightly ordered and informed] relationship with the Supreme Good!

[Note: *the bracketed copy is added to the original text but does not change original meanings*].

References:

- 1.) Gihl, The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Book I, Ch. I, footnote #2, pg. 17.
- 2.) Id. Book I, Ch. I No. 1, pg. 18
- 3.) Noldin, De Principiis, Rauch Innsbruck, 1953, Liber V, Quaestio Prima, No. 257; also footnote #2
- 4.) Gihl, op. cit. pg. 22
- 5.) Smith, The Teaching of the Catholic Church, New York, MacMillan, 1956, Vol. I, pp265, 266
- 6.) Id. Pp 262, 273, 277
- 7.) Id. Pg 277
- 8.) Id. Pp 278, 279
- 9.) Id. Pg 296
- 10.) Gihl, op. cit., #5a, pg 24,
- 11.) Id. #5c, pg 25
- 12.) Smith, op. cit., Pp 42, 43
- 13.) LeFrois, "The Forbidden Fruit", The American Ecclesiastical Review, Vol. CXXXVI, No. 3, March 1957
- 14.) Smith, op. cit., pg 322 "Original State of the First Parents"
- 15.) Gihl, op. cit., #2, pg 60
- 16.) Id. Pg 22
- 17.) Id. #5d, pg 25
- 18.) Saint Thomas Aquinas, 2,2, q. 85, a 1 ad 1. "oblatio sacrificii in communi est de lege naturali; sed determinatio sacrificiorum est ex insitutione humana vel divina." Council of Trent: Session 22, Ch. 1. "Many theologians assert that sacrifice is strictly required by the very law of nature...Others do not grant this, but say that sacrifice is only in an eminent degree in accord with the law of nature." (Gihl, op. cit., pg 31)
- 19.) Gihl, op. cit., pg 29, also, Smith, op. cit., pg 88

20.) Generally, authors who maintain that the “*immutatio in peius*” is essential to sacrifice (presuming they base their reasons on historical fact, with the consequent explanation as to the reason “why” it is so), do so for the reason that by it man must acknowledge the supreme dominion of God over him, and shows God his willingness to offer Him his very life, which he does by the destruction of the victim offered, since apart from the social aspect we have considered, seems insufficient to prove it is an essential part of sacrifice.

21.) Gehr, op. cit., pg 31

22.) Id. Pg 25

23.) There are those who do not consider acceptance of the object as an essential aspect. Referring to Christ’s sacrifice, Father D’Arcy, S.J., says, “The acceptance...is the complement of it and is not intrinsic to it.” Cf: Smith, op. cit., pg 511. Still, if sacrifice is not acceptable to God it is worse than useless, it becomes distasteful to God, as the prophet Malachy tells the priests of Israel. Mal: I

24.) Not that God could not have arranged other wise, the fact is that He willed condign satisfaction; not only were full amends made for man’s sin, but man received anew and nobler relationship with God. (Smith, op. cit., pg 509)

25.) In virtue of this continuity it would seem, as Scotus maintains, that even had man not sinned, still God would have arranged that human nature should be raised to partake in the divine; consummating in this act the noblest aspiration any creature could have. (Smith, op. cit., pp 492, 493)

26.) Gehr, op. cit., pg 35

27.) Suhard, E. Cardinal, Priests Among Men, Fides, Pub. Co., Chicago, pp 8, 9

“The Word, Who at once perfectly reflects the Father and is exemplar of creation, cannot, once He becomes incarnate, help but be the Mediator, the religious tie between God and man, and consequently, The Priest.” (Salet, S.J., G., “Le Christ notre Vie”, Casterman, 1937, pg 53)

“The priesthood, being a public function, legitimately belongs only to the one who is mandated by God, who receives official investiture from Him. Christ’s priesthood is not an exception to that rule. The unique person of Christ ever hears the eternal words of the divine generation, ‘Thou art my Son’. That divine decree simultaneously constitutes Him Mediator between God and man. Therein lies the metaphysical root of Christ’s priesthood, its eternal foundation.” (Bonsirven, Epitre aux Hebreux, pp 40, 41 and 267)

Thus, Cardinal Suhard, drawing from the teachings of the Fathers states: “Our Lord’s Ordination was neither virtual nor inferential but proceeded from his double nature; ‘The unction by which Jesus Christ was consecrated Sovereign Priest was the very divinity which filled and sanctified His sacred humanity at the very instant of the Incarnation’.”

28.) It may be objected: if the Eucharistic sacrifice is constituted at the moment of consecration how is the visible nature of God’s acceptance signified in the object offered, namely, in destruction? We answer: Man attains knowledge in a twofold manner, either through the evidence of the senses (experience) or through the evidence of others testimony (faith). As to the certitude of knowledge, that based on faith is the firmer because of the authority of the one testifying, God Himself. Men of the Old Law for the most part relied on the evidence of their senses, less perfect knowledge, but God was willing to accommodate them. In the order of the New Law: it is through faith in God that His redeemed people are to attain the supernatural life. Hence, to the Catholic believing in the Eucharist, no knowledge is more certain than the fact that bread is changed into Christ’s Body, and wine into His Blood. The substance of bread and wine are no longer present, an essential change has occurred, no less real though imperceptible. Under the consecrated species is present the Victim of the Eucharistic

Sacrifice. But, the external change must be found in the Victim of the sacrifice, not simply in the bread and wine or the species. This external change is signified (*vi verborum*) by the double consecration, by which the sacrifice of Christ's life is represented, i.e., His Body separate from His Blood. Thus, man's knowledge of the acceptableness of the sacrifice to God is fully satisfied and externally represented in the Victim; hence, the social, reciprocal aspect of the Eucharistic sacrifice is also realized. (Cf: Smith, *op. cit.*, pp 897-899)