

# RELIGION AND CHRISTIAN LIFE: RELIGION AND THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

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## Introduction

In my paper, I intend to look at the relationship between religiosity and the life of the theological virtues, not so much in the context of dialogue with the great religions of the world, but in the context of the teaching of Pope Francis. Coming from a Catholic continent that is rich in its powerful traditional religiosity, the Pope has observations that sometimes raise eyebrows within other ecclesial contexts. I propose therefore to review the teaching of Aquinas having the intuitions of the Holy Father in mind.

## The Theology of the People

Argentinian theological reflection has developed the theology of the people.<sup>1</sup> This current has appeared in the shade of Latin American theology of liberation, but the “people” are understood here not in a Marxist sense, as a social class set against the owners of the means of production. The “people” are viewed as encompassing all social classes that participate together in popular religiosity. Religious piety is always culturally conditioned, carried by a historical tradition with its local customs, communal expressions of fervour and experience of faith. The “people”, as the Pope notes, are the subjects of their devotions and not only objects of clerical pastoral endeavours. In their piety they have their own grass-roots initiatives that need to be supported so that their religiosity will be enriched and deepened. Thus, in some sense, the pastors are being led by the flock, as the “people” with their *sensus fidei* mark out the way, even though they may lack precise theological expertise.<sup>2</sup> Popular piety is to be appreciated

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Víctor Manuel Fernández, *Il progetto di Francesco. Dove vuole portare la Chiesa* (Bologna: EMI, 2014). Kieth Lemna and David H. Delaney, “Three Pathways into the Theological Mind of Pope Francis”, *Nova et Vetera – English Edition* (Winter 2014), p. 25-56. Juan Carlos Scannone, “Lucia Gera: Un teologo <dal> popolo”, *La civiltà cattolica* 3954 (21 marzo 2015), p. 533-544.

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 119. Cf. Laurent Festin, “*Evangelii gaudium*. Une spiritualité de «sortie»”, *Catholica* (Printemps 2014), p. 55-70; “La décomposition du magistère”, *Catholica* (Hiver 2015), p. 10-21.

specifically as it exists among the poor. The Pope's affirmation of the "option for the poor" is not a call for social revolution or only a moralisation inviting greater social activism and generosity towards the poor. It is also the recognition of the fact that the marginalised poor of the peripheries have a spiritual life, an experience of faith, a knowledge of the suffering Christ and this needs to be respected and even contemplated.<sup>3</sup>

Within popular piety, there is a religious vitality, but this is sometimes menaced by reification of various sorts. At times this derives from a Gnostic focus on some half-truth that becomes the ultimate criterion of assessment and at other moments it proceeds from a Neo-Pelagianism that focuses primarily on activism and institutions that are to be established and maintained. There is worldliness in this, in attempts to understand, classify and inspect religious practice instead of opening the door to grace.<sup>4</sup> Conceptual tools need not complicate that which is simple and cloud that which is clear. Prime attention should be centred on the communication of the Gospel message, and not just on conservation and defence of the deposit of faith.<sup>5</sup> Communication takes place not only through memorised speculative catechetical formulae, but also through gestures and *happenings*, that express inculturated, communal customs.<sup>6</sup>

Is all this a preference for orthopraxy over orthodoxy, a juxtaposition of an authentic true service towards the Gospel against doctrine, canon law and religious discipline in the fear that they may suffocate the élan vital of true religiosity? In this suggestion, there is a similarity with Lutheran accusations that Catholicism excessively burdens subjective personal experiences of faith with an onus of rational concepts, definitions and hierarchical structures, but it is only a similarity, because the theology of the people does not question the sacramental structure of the Church as it appreciates grass-roots communitarian expressions of religiosity. The Protestant Anglo-Saxon world often finds the popular piety of Catholic countries distasteful, but the Pope values it and perceives it as a rich *locus theologicus* that demands attention.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that in this view there is only a strong reaction against a certain type of officious ministry executed by rigid professionalised pastoral

<sup>3</sup> EG, n. 198–200.

<sup>4</sup> EG, n. 94–97.

<sup>5</sup> EG, n. 194.

<sup>6</sup> EG, n. 129.

<sup>7</sup> EG, n. 126.

agents and a distance towards speculative theology, which maybe had been presented in the past as being supposedly rational and self-evident, but was deprived of an encounter with the mystery and was divorced from a true exercise of the theological virtues. Thus in this proposed pastoral approach there appears to be a preference for talking that is stimulating and supportive of communal expressions of religiosity rather than for teaching, in particular when that teaching sounds like pontificating. The critique of an exaggerated insistence on intellectual structures in the name of the promotion of popular religiosity runs however the risk of upholding traditional forms primarily because they are appreciated by the “people” and because this is what has always been done, without ever looking into the meaning of religious practices and the spiritual depth that they are to serve. It also may invite the searching for other, presently more attractive expressions of religiosity, attributing excessive appreciation to new customs and practices only because they are popular and new, thereby succumbing to a Hegelian vision that elevates the self-unfolding of history above metaphysical and doctrinal truth. An uncritical, untheological promotion of popular religiosity may also end up in some other form of reification of the spiritual life, where certain religious traditions will be continued mechanically, even though they have ceased to have an impact on true decisions in practical daily life.

### **Elucidation from Aquinas**

The questions therefore, that I address to Aquinas, is how does the virtue of religiosity tie with the theological virtues? Are the external forms of religiosity a necessary prop for interior faith and a means for its expression or can faith make do with a scanty and unobtrusive religiosity? And if personal and communal religiosity is a useful and strengthening support of the life of faith, is there a permanent opposition between the inner vitality of religious experience and the conceptual formulation of the truths of faith together with the structural and even disciplinary dimension of organized religiosity? Can the life of faith be nourished and deepened and not only maintained without a sensation that an intrinsically rigid and external control is being imposed upon it?

These questions are formulated within the context of the contemporary debate and so an immediate answer to them cannot be found directly in the writings of Aquinas, but the principles that he formulated can be brought to light as a clarifying tool. Since these questions span a number of issues, a reflection on them is necessarily conditioned by the interpretation of the general architecture of Aquinas’ works. His insightful and extensive

treatment of particular problems is found in specifically chosen locations that need to be taken into account in the interpretation. Unfortunately, the tying together of the various sections of his works is explained by Aquinas in very terse introductions and prologues, generating thereby multiple and diverse readings of his overall project. It is not possible to enter into this debate here and so an internally coherent and strictly theological and not just philosophical reading of Aquinas' work is presumed.

### The difference between the theological and the moral order

Direct focus on supernatural beatitude and the mysterious participation in the inner life of God exceeding human capacities explains the need for a special set of theological virtues, which have the living God as their object and are divinely infused. Their existence is known uniquely due to Revelation<sup>8</sup>. These virtues differ from both the intellectual and moral virtues<sup>9</sup> and also from the natural orientation of the reason and the will towards God.<sup>10</sup> Philosophical curiosity about the ultimate cause and the attraction of the will for the supreme good are not the same as a spiritual relationship with God. The specificity of faith, hope and charity lies in their enabling a personal attachment to God as the ultimate supernatural end, whereas the moral virtues focus on means to the end.<sup>11</sup> Union with the mysterious God that surpasses the grasping capacity of the natural mind<sup>12</sup> is a source

<sup>8</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 62, a. 1: "Et huiusmodi principia dicuntur theologicae: tum quia habent Deum pro obiecto, in quantum per eas recte ordinemur in Deum; tum quia a solo Deo nobis infunduntur; tum quia sola divina revelatione, in sacra Scriptura, huiusmodi virtutes traduntur".

<sup>9</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 62, a. 2: "Obiectum autem theologiarum virtutum est ipse Deus, qui est ultimus rerum finis, prout nostrae rationis cognitionem excedit. Obiectum autem virtutum intellectualium et moralium est aliquid quod humana ratione comprehendi potest. Unde virtutes theologicae specie distinguuntur a moralibus et intellectualibus".

<sup>10</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 62, a. 1, ad 3: "Ad Deum naturaliter ratio et voluntas ordinatur prout est naturae principium et finis, secundum tamen proportionem naturae. Sed ad ipsum secundum quod est obiectum beatitudinis supernaturalis, ratio et voluntas secundum suam naturam non ordinantur sufficienter".

<sup>11</sup> *De veritate*, q. 14 a. 3 ad 9: "Virtutes autem theologicae, quamvis convenient subiecto cum intellectualibus vel moralibus, differunt tamen obiecto. Obiectum enim virtutum theologiarum est ipse finis ultimus; obiectum vero aliarum ea quae sunt ad finem".

<sup>12</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 62, a. 2: "Obiectum autem theologiarum virtutum est ipse Deus, qui est ultimus rerum finis, prout nostrae rationis cognitionis excedit. Obiectum autem virtutum intellectualium et moralium est aliquid quod humana ratione comprehendi potest".

and inspiration for the infused moral virtues. The theological virtues can be paralleled to the innate principles of nature from which the acquired, both intellectual and moral virtues derive.<sup>13</sup> Thus the theological virtues have a prime role because they set a new foundation, necessarily leading to a supernatural transformation of the entire ethos.<sup>14</sup> Supernatural moral virtues infused by grace are only possible, when faith is formed by charity.<sup>15</sup> Aquinas justifies the presence of the infused moral virtues by a mere *oportet*, as if he were oblivious of the fact that some theologians, both his and our contemporaries have reservations about their existence.<sup>16</sup>

What therefore does the differentiation of the theological virtues from the infused cardinal virtues and their many allied moral virtues, including religiosity entail? Since the virtue of religiosity can be infused by grace, how does it differ from the theological virtues? The theological virtues are unique because they have a specific object and motive that is God whereas the moral virtues, both acquired and infused, being focused on this-worldly values have a different object. They are *circa alias res* that the human mind can grasp, even though in the case of the infused moral virtues, these other issues are ordered towards God.

<sup>13</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 63, a. 3: “Omnes autem virtutes tam intellectuales quam morales, quae ex nostris actibus acquiruntur, procedunt ex quibusdam naturalibus principiis in nobis praeexistentibus... Loco quorum naturalium principiorum, conferuntur nobis a Deo virtutes theologicae, quibus ordinamur ad finem supernaturalem. Unde oportet quod his etiam virtutibus theologis, proportionaliter respondeant alii habitus divinitus causati in nobis, qui sic se habeant ad virtutes theologicas sicut se habent virtutes morales et intellectuales ad principia naturalia virtutum”.

<sup>14</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 63, a. 3, ad 2: “Virtutes theologicae sufficienter nos ordinant ad finem supernaturalem, secundum quandam inchoationem, quantum scilicet ad ipsum Deum immediate. Sed oportet quod per alias virtutes infusas perficiatur anima circa alias res, in ordine tamen ad Deum”.

<sup>15</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 65, a. 2: “[Virtutes morales] secundum quod sunt operativae boni in ordine ad ultimum finem supernaturalem, sic perfecte et vere habent rationem virtutis; et non possunt humanis actibus acquiri, sed infunduntur a Deo. Et huiusmodi virtutes morales sine caritate esse non possunt”.

<sup>16</sup> Michael S. Sherwin OP, “Infused Virtue and the Effects of Acquired Vice: A Test Case for the Thomistic Theory of Infused Cardinal Virtues”, *The Thomist* 73(2009), p. 29–32. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares that the theological virtues are infused (No. 1813), but it does not say the same about the moral virtues (Nos. 1803–1811). In this it differs from the *Catechism of Trent*. Cf. *Catechismus Romanus ex decreto concilii tridentini ad parochos, Ila*, c. 2, n. 51: “Huic autem additur nobilissimus omnium virtutum comitatus, quae in animam cum gratia divinitus infunduntur”.

## The moral value of religiosity

Religiosity is a moral virtue, allied with the cardinal virtue of justice. Since the entire creation is governed by God, it is only just and reasonable that man expresses due reverence to Him.<sup>17</sup> Religious cult manifests explicitly a conscious human submission to God and a respect for His superiority.<sup>18</sup> Religiosity is universal as is the sense of justice. From the dawn of history, humanity has recognised its dependency upon the Creator working out some forms of religious devotion. In these there are moments of awe, gratitude, sometimes fear, obedience and pleading, but above all reverence and submission addressed towards the Omnipotent.

Religiosity is not a theological or intellectual virtue, but a moral one, expressing a just attitude towards God, the source of all being. As every virtue it contributes to the finding of the appropriate mean in actions that may be multiple and diverse, united in the common giving of glory to God.<sup>19</sup> Such acts can never fully express what is due to God, but there is an aptitude in what can be done by man in religious devotion and in what is acceptable to God, and so the moral virtue has to find what is right and just.<sup>20</sup> The religious sense is natural, but a given manifestation of religiosity is regulated by human and also divine laws.<sup>21</sup> It is not surprising that the revealed divine law excludes the offering of human sacrifices to God (Dt 12, 31; 18, 10), but where the divine laws were unknown, natural religiosity has at times succumbed to such excesses.

<sup>17</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 3: “Ad religionem autem pertinet exhibere reverentiam uni Deo secundum unam rationem, in quantum scilicet est primum principium creationis et gubernationis rerum”.

<sup>18</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. IIa-IIae, q. 81, a. 3, ad 2: “Cultus respicit Dei excellentiam, cui reverentia debetur; servitus autem respicit subiectionem hominis, qui ex sua conditione obligatur ad exhibendam reverentiam Deo”.

<sup>19</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 4, ad 2: “Omnia, secundum quod in gloriam Dei fiunt, pertinent ad religionem non quasi ad elicentem, sed quasi imperantem. Illa autem pertinent ad religionem elicentem quae secundum rationem suae speciei pertinent ad reverentiam Dei”.

<sup>20</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 3: “Religio non est virtus theologica neque intellectualis, sed moralis, cum sit pars iustitiae. Et medium in ipsa accipitur non quidem inter passiones, sed secundum quandam aequalitatem inter operationes quae sunt ad Deum. Dico autem aequalitatem non absolute, quia Deo non potest tantum exhiberi quantum ei debetur, sed secundum considerationem humanae facultatis et divinae acceptationis”.

<sup>21</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3: “De dictamine rationis naturalis est quod homo aliqua facit ad reverentiam divinam: sed quod haec determinate faciat vel illa, istud non est de dictamine rationis naturalis, sed de institutione iuris divini vel humani”.

Since religiosity expresses a moral responsibility towards the divinity, it means that the religious person is profoundly rooted. He does not consider himself and his spiritual identity as an accidental appearance in an icy, meaningless cosmos. Religiosity entails a metaphysical awareness of the uniqueness of human existence and of some wise finality within the world, which has its origin in God. The reaching out of the mind beyond the limits of its own immediate empirically based comprehension towards the ultimate foundation of being and truth confirms the dignity of human existence above that of the animal and mineral world. At the same time it confirms that there is an obligation towards a transcendent reality that elicits respect.<sup>22</sup> The individual, who due to his religiosity is not lost in nihilism or racked by senseless ephemeral whims, behaves in a manner that is somewhat predictable, because he has a focus and is balanced. Religiosity therefore is a great moral and human value and when it is shared with others it contributes to social cohesion. Thus it is not surprising that men perceive the need of showing reverence to God, because it is more a human than a divine need. God is not enriched in any way by human veneration, whereas men are more secure and ordered when they are religious.<sup>23</sup>

Worship is expressed primarily through interior mental devotion, but it manifests itself in sensate physical acts, which serve the interiority inciting it towards union with God.<sup>24</sup> Thus the passions find their place in religiosity. Since the acts of the virtue engage the entire personality, excess in religious frenzy has to be avoided, and other circumstances also have to be taken into account, even though the interior veneration of God has no limits. Aquinas was aware of the fact that some superfluous forms may occasionally be attached to religiosity.<sup>25</sup> These may be superficial, inappro-

<sup>22</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 4: “Bonum autem ad quod ordinatur religio est exhibere Deo debitum honorem... Deo autem competit singularis excellentia: in quantum omnia in infinitum transcendit secundum omnimodum excessum”.

<sup>23</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 7: “Deo reverentiam et honorem exhibemus non propter ipsum... sed propter nos: quia... per hoc quod Deum reveremur et honoramus, mens nostra ei subiicitur, et in hoc eius perfectio consistit”.

<sup>24</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 7: “Mens autem humana indiget ad hoc quod coniungatur Deo, sensibilibus manuductione... Et ideo in divino cultu necesse est aliquibus corporalibus uti, ut eis, quasi signis quibusdam, mens hominis excitetur ad spirituales actus, quibus Deo coniungitur. Et ideo religio habet quidem interiores actus quasi principales et per se ad religionem pertinentes, exteriores vero actus quasi secundarios, et ad interiores actus ordinatos”.

<sup>25</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 3: “Superfluum autem in his quae ad divinum cultum pertinent esse potest, non secundum circumstantiam *quanti*, sed secundum alias cir-

priate or excessively imposed by society. It follows therefore that religious expression has a communal and cultural flavour that may differ in time and place and where there are particular sensibilities and customs foreign forms of religious devotion may be viewed as being out of place. Nevertheless, since authentic religiosity is a human and moral value, it merits respect. Furthermore, expressions of religiosity may also be vehicles of true theological virtues. Thus the ridicule of religious values and devotions is always experienced as painful. Such mockery may be tainted by blasphemy, meaning that it intends to do violence to God or it may only be addressed against those who practice the religion or even only against some of its forms. The blasphemer believes in God and speaks out against Him. The one who mocks religiosity attacks a religious practice and thereby is anti-social. That is why public derision of religiosity generates anger.

Being a moral virtue, religiosity is a natural social phenomenon. In contemporary parlance, even an acquired and not infused religiosity, such as the Islamic, is sometimes described as a “faith”. This is a terminological abuse.<sup>26</sup> The theological virtues are the fruit of Christ’s grace working in the human soul. Thus, essentially they are only within Jewish and Christian religiosity, although the possibility of a more generous divine granting of grace is not excluded.<sup>27</sup> All natural religions express a human grass-roots veneration of the Absolute. They often contain a rich mythical, ethical and social content. Thus they are to be respected and they can be treated as a partner for dialogue, because of their natural moral and social value, because of the philosophical perception of truth that sometimes takes place within them, and also because they may harbour a hidden grace of faith, but natural religiosity is not to be automatically equalled with what the Gospel has to offer.

Natural religiosity has to be distinguished from philosophical enquiry about God. The philosophy of God, known as theodicy or natural theology expresses the intellectual curiosity of the mind that knows about the existence of the Absolute and then tries to know more, even though precisely where it would like to know more, it finds a blind, or rather blinding spot.<sup>28</sup>

cumstantias, puta quia cultus divinus exhibetur cui non debet exhiberi, vel quando non debet, vel secundum alias circumstantias prout non debet”.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Georges Cottier, *La mémoire des sources. Pour une philosophie de la religion*, (Paris: Cerf, 2015), p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 106, a. 1, ad 3: “Unde quibuscumque fuit lex gratiae indita, secundum hoc ad novum testamentum pertinebant”. Art. 3, ad 2: “Omni tempore fuerint aliqui ad novum testamentum pertinentes”.

<sup>28</sup> Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, *Le mystère du Père. Foi des apôtres. Gnosés actuelles* (Paris:

A purely intellectual enquiry about God manifests the natural desire for the vision of God, which results from the inherent structure of the mind open to the fullness of truth.<sup>29</sup> This is understandable, but Semi-Pelagianism has to be rejected. This heresy claims that a natural move from intellectual questioning and from a purely human example to theological faith is possible. This is erroneous, because there is no such thing as a natural desire of and a natural transfer to the supernatural. Philosophical investigations about God do not have such power. The encounter with God in faith is always the fruit of grace. Nevertheless, both outside faith and also within faith, philosophical reflection on God is possible and so it is a value. Faith does not wound the mind, which has the right to ask questions on its own grounds, even the highest questions, but this type of reflection is neither religiosity nor faith. Its fruit is knowledge, philosophical knowledge about the Absolute, but not a personal encounter with the living God.

Natural religiosity also has to be distinguished from idolatry. In idolatry there is a base self-made attribution of divine status to some worldly reality and often a subordination of religiosity to a political or ideological human agenda. The Bible praises holy pagans, such as Melchizedek, Job, the people of Nineveh and the queen of Sabah for the purity of their natural religiosity, but it strongly rejects the deformed idolaters, who as a punishment succumb to sensual sins (Ws 13, 10–14, 31; Rm 1, 18–32).

Aquinas discusses religiosity within the *Iia pars* of the *Summa*, that is, within a theological reflection, which spells out the fecundity of grace in the psyche, in reactions to moral challenges and in various vocations. Religiosity, therefore, is viewed primarily as an infused and not merely natural acquired moral virtue. It is obvious that Aquinas had Christian religiosity in mind, one that is animated from within by the theological virtues. Nevertheless, in his precise thinking he distinguished between religiosity and the theological virtues, specifying the difference between them.

The theological virtues have the capacity to assure a direct contact with God, whereas religiosity does not have such an intrinsic power. The proper object of religiosity is its action through which the worship of God is expressed. Through the offering of sacrifices and other religious gestures reverence is shown to God, but that reverence is not the same as friendship with God that is charity. Religiosity therefore is not a theological virtue,

Fayard, 1973), p. 189.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010).

the object of which is God as the ultimate end. Religiosity is only a moral virtue focused on the means that lead to that end.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless it has a prime place among the moral virtues, precisely because through worship it arrives at such proximity with God that the other moral virtues cannot attain, even though this is not the encounter that is made possible through the theological virtues.<sup>31</sup> Where, however the individual is living out a life of faith and charity, the acts of the virtue of religiosity are commanded by the theological virtues<sup>32</sup> and animated by them from within.

It follows from this that, while it is impossible to live out the infused moral virtues without charity, a natural acquired act of religiosity, without charity is imaginable. This is an important conclusion for the current debate about the religious practices of those who are not living in charity, for the love of God and according to the mind of God, because they have entered into relationships that contradict charity. These individuals may still be Christians, capable of eliciting acts of unformed faith, and also acts of acquired religiosity, and such acts do have a true moral value, even though they fail to reach the mark of “faith that is operative in charity” (Ga 5,6), which is decisive for justification and manifests the functioning of the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

### The specificity of formed faith

The supreme expression of the spiritual life is defined by Aquinas as “faith that is formed by charity”.<sup>34</sup> In it faith does not limit itself to the rec-

<sup>30</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 5: “Aliud autem est id cui [cultus] affertur, scilicet Deus. Cui cultus exhibetur non quasi actus quibus Deus colitur ipsum Deum attingant, sicut cum credimus Deo, credendo Deum attingimus...: affertur autem Deo debitus cultus in quantum actus quidam, quibus Deus colitur, in Dei reverentiam fiunt, puta sacrificiorum oblationes et alia huiusmodi. Unde manifestum est quod Deus non comparatur ad virtutem religionis sicut materia vel obiectum, sed sicut finis. Et ideo religio non est virtus theologica, cuius obiectum est ultimus finis: sed est virtus moralis, cuius est esse circa ea quae sunt ad finem”.

<sup>31</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 6: “Religio autem magis de propinquo accedit ad Deum quam aliae virtutes morales: in quantum operatur ea quae directe et immediate ordinantur in honorem divinum. Et ideo religio praeminet inter alias virtutes morales”.

<sup>32</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1: “Virtutes autem theologicae... habent actum circa Deum sicut circa proprium obiectum. Et ideo suo imperio causant actum religionis, quae operatur quaedam in ordine ad Deum”.

<sup>33</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 108, a. 1: “Principalitas legis novae est gratia Spiritus Sancti, quae manifestatur in fide per dilectionem operante”.

<sup>34</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 4: “Per hoc quod fides formata fit informis non mu-

ognition of God – *credo Deum* and of the fact that He is truthful – *credo Deo*, but it moves towards God – *credo in Deum*, engaging the entire psyche and all the person’s activities in a relationship of friendship with God.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in formed faith all actions are transformed by charity. Aquinas explains this by saying that God then is not only the ultimate end of action, but also its formal reason.<sup>36</sup> This means that in charity there is a formal, conscious focus on God. Things are done, not only for their intrinsic value, not only within a general ethos that views God as the ultimate end, but they are done for the good pleasure of God, who is remembered as a Friend, and invited precisely within the act that is done. A glass of water may be offered to somebody as an act of justice; it may be offered as a spontaneous act of natural human generosity because the other person is thirsty; and it may be offered for the love of God, within a conscious awareness of the friendly proximity of God and a desire that the other be brought into that same fellowship with God, meaning that what is really desired for the other is not just his overcoming of thirst, but his sanctity. Charity towards the neighbour that results from the love of God is serious and profound. It is not just altruistic activism. It springs from the quality of the encounter with the living God that retains its primacy within the gesture that is made. It is not surprising therefore that fraternal correction has a special place among the acts of charity.<sup>37</sup>

tatur ipsa fides, sed mutatur subiectum fidei, quod est anima, quod quandoque quidem habet fidem sine caritate, quandoque autem cum caritate”. *IIIa*, q. 49, a. 1, ad 5: “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”.

<sup>35</sup> *S. Th.*, *IIa-IIae*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 4: “Voluntas movet intellectum et alias vires animae in finem. Et secundum hoc ponitur actus fidei credere in Deum”.

<sup>36</sup> *De virtutibus*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 2: “Caritas in diligendo proximum habet Deum ut rationem formalem obiecti, et non solum ut finem ultimum... Aliae virtutes habent Deum non ut rationem formalem obiecti, sed ut ultimum finem. Et ideo, cum dicitur quod caritas diligit proximum *propter* Deum, illud *propter* denotat non solum causam materialem, sed quodammodo formalem. Cum autem dicitur de aliis virtutibus quod operantur *propter* Deum, illud *propter* denotat causam finalem tantum”. Q. 2, a. 4: “Caritas diligit Deum ratione sui ipsius; et ratione eius diligit omnes alios in quantum ordinantur ad Deum: unde quodammodo Deum diligit in omnibus proximis; sic enim proximus caritate diligitur, quia in eo est Deus, vel ut in eo sit Deus. Unde manifestum est quod est idem habitus caritatis quo Deum et proximum diligimus. Sed si diligeremus proximum ratione sui ipsius, et non ratione Dei, hoc ad aliam dilectionem pertineret: puta ad dilectionem naturalem, vel politicam”.

<sup>37</sup> *S. Th.*, *IIa-IIae*, q. 33, a. 1: “Unde correctio fraterna magis est actus caritatis quam curatio infirmitatis corporalis”.

When the theological virtues are exercised the quality of engagement with God goes well beyond the moral order with its religiosity expressing respect for the Transcendent. The standard of supernatural love does not permit a chasm between religious moments and daily life, because all human acts are then transformed from within by grace. In every, even the most minute external act, an internal expression of the love of God can be maintained. The absence of such a conscious focus does not change a good act into an evil one, but it means that the occasion of raising the naturally good act to an act of charity has been missed. Natural morality with its reasonable and therefore good deeds is not the same as responsiveness to the grace of the Holy Spirit, which grants a divine fecundity to human acts. Incidentally, a special theological discipline sometimes called the “theology of the interior life” was developed precisely because moral theology had been reduced to a mere “ethics of the exterior life” that did not show how the personal relationship with God could be introduced into the heart of Christian action. The old manuals, without denying grace, in fact had shelved the possibility of a dynamic, coherent existence based upon supernatural support.

Charity is impossible without the foundation of faith and hope. Faith is first among these virtues, as it establishes the contact with God. It is then followed by hope, opening out to the mystery that lies ahead and by charity that expresses an interpersonal friendship with God. One cannot do things for the love of God, if God is only understood to be a philosophical concept or a distant, impersonal and transcendent reality that elicits respect. Since faith is a gift that surpasses the capacities of nature and is directly infused in the soul by God, certainly at the moment of baptism and sometimes even before, the theological virtues represent a new order. They bring in the supernatural life, a living encounter with God. As such, these virtues have an extreme resistance and an interior source of growth. A faith that is unformed by charity and therefore is not followed up by conscious acts elicited for the love of God may still persist in the depth of the soul. The supernatural life may seemingly be extinct and forgotten and yet it may remain infused in the soul enabling in an appropriate moment a living relationship with God. Children, people of a limited intellectual capacity and the mentally sick can all be endowed with a true life of grace that empowers them to touch God through faith and invite Him into their life and acts. It is not possible to declare with certitude that baptised individuals have no faith. Their faith may not be used, may be unpacked, ignored or even consciously repressed from the intellect, and yet it may still persist

in the depths of the soul, having the capacity to ignite acts of true charity.

The virtue of faith is a divinely given tool that enables the awakening of the supernatural life. Aquinas sees this capacity for the *inchoatio vitae aeternae* as being the fundamental attribute of the virtue of faith. It is coupled with a second characteristic that makes the intellect assent to that which is not evident.<sup>38</sup> Modern theological reflection centred its attention on the second part of the definition, pondering on the relationship between faith and reason, as if forgetting why faith is important and why it is infused by God. It is true that in its humility the intellect of the believer reaches out beyond its natural bounds to the received divine mystery, but this is done, so as to open up to divine grace, which instantly supports and changes from within the being and action of the Christian. In faith the mind of the believer is overpowered by God, the first truth, and this comes as a free divine gift and not as a result of natural efforts. The expanding of this first truth and the articulation of its contents is the task of teaching, transmitted in the Church, but the initial capacity for faith is a divine gift. The meaning of the Pauline adage *fides ex auditu* is explained by Aquinas as referring to the contents of the teaching and not to the virtue of faith itself that as a divine gift precedes the listening to the preacher.<sup>39</sup> Faith needs the support of received teaching, so that the spiritual encounter with the living God will be clarified, not forgotten or deformed, but in its essence faith, and also the other theological virtues are supernatural, having a divine origin, dynamism and capacity to maintain the contact with God.

The object of faith, viz., God as the first truth is simple, but that truth has to be adapted to the mind that adheres to it through mental operations requiring necessary distinctions. Thus, faith needs the *enuntiabilia*, the teaching composed of the articles of faith, because it is through these verbal formulations that faith is expressed, going however beyond them to the reality that is God Himself.<sup>40</sup> In the act of faith, its object is divine,

<sup>38</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 4: “Fides est habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum assentire non apparentibus”.

<sup>39</sup> *Ad Romanos*, c. 10, l. 22 (844): “Ad fidem duo requiruntur: quorum unum est cordis inclinatio ad credendum et hoc non est ex auditu, sed ex dono gratiae; aliud autem est determinatio de credibili et istud est ex auditu”.

<sup>40</sup> *S. Th., IIa-IIae*, q. 1, a. 2: “Sic igitur obiectum fidei dupliciter considerari potest. Uno modo, ex parte ipsius rei creditae: et sic obiectum fidei est aliquid incomplexum, scilicet res ipsa de qua fides habetur. Alio modo ex parte credentis: et secundum hoc obiectum fidei est aliquid complexum per modum enuntiabilis”. Ad 2: “Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem”.

but human psychology requires concepts to assimilate this mystery. Using words, both in the historical Revelation and in Church teaching that transmits the deposit of faith, the living God, as if, submits Himself to a *kenosis*, and the encounter takes place through humble formulations, as it takes place through the Incarnation of God's Word. The teaching that uses human concepts is not a purely external and optional service within the Church, even though God may infuse salutary faith, without its mediation. The danger that this teaching may sometimes be imparted in an inappropriate way, within a rigid, condescending and pontificating manner, ignorant of the actual questionings and stage of spiritual development of the hearer does not justify the conclusion that faith does not need teaching. It has to be imparted and it has to be correct, as a sacred teaching, received from God in Revelation and transmitted in the Church since the time of the apostles, being always in the service of living faith. Aquinas therefore understood his own theology as being a *sacra doctrina*. He explained its finality quoting a line from St. Augustine, in which there are four verbs. The words of the preacher and theologian are to generate, nourish, defend and strengthen salutary faith.<sup>41</sup> They do not give life, but like a mother they transmit it, and then sustain it, educating the mature life of faith.

Service towards the life of faith is public and therefore also social. It covers not only academic discourses of theology, but all teaching in the Church, expressed in words and writings that elucidate and unpack the very *res* of faith, leading by the hand into the life giving mystery.<sup>42</sup> Thus the human transmission of the *enuntiabilia* of faith encompasses the language of metaphor, parable, poetry and liturgy and also well organised evangelising events that we may describe as *happenings*. Faith is expressed not only in the depths of the soul, but also by its public confession, and this witnessing to God serves others, confirming them in their faith. The encounter with God is nourished primarily by the foods that Jesus Himself mentioned: the sacraments (Jn 6, 51), the Word that comes from the mouth of God and is transmitted (Mt 4, 4), and the very living out of the relationship with God through obedience to the Father's will (Jn 4, 34).

True Christian life surpasses natural religiosity and the religiosity of the Old Dispensation. The culminating point of the history of salvation is

<sup>41</sup> *S. Th.*, Ia, q. 1, a. 2, sc: "Huic scientiae attribuitur illud tantummodo quo fides saluberrima gignitur, nutritur, defenditur, roboratur".

<sup>42</sup> *S. Th.*, Ia, q. 1, a. 5 ad 2: "Propter defectum intellectus nostri... facilius manuducitur in ea quae sunt supra rationem, quae in hac scientia traduntur".

the Paschal Mystery with the effusion of the Holy Spirit and the promulgation of the New Law of the Gospel. That law is written on human hearts, because its fundamental force lies in the grace of the Holy Spirit, imparted to those, who believe in Christ. But the New Law is not uniquely spiritual. It includes also a second element that is transmitted orally and in writing, which disposes to the grace of the Holy Spirit and shows how to use it in practice.<sup>43</sup> Doctrinal and moral teachings as well as disciplinary rules concerning the administration of sacraments are necessary within the economy of the New Law. These, however are always to be in unison with a primary openness to the grace of the Holy Spirit. A teaching that is void of faith, both in the preacher and in the listener, is always frustrating, even if, the very word of the Gospel is proclaimed.<sup>44</sup>

Aquinas was aware that the moral and ceremonial rulings of the Gospel had added little above what was known from the natural law. Church tradition has introduced some supplementary guidelines for religious practices, much simpler than those which were required in the Old Law. Nevertheless, following St. Augustine, he reminded that the Church needs to retain moderation in its religious legislation so as not to burden excessively the life of the faithful.<sup>45</sup> Religious practices within faith need to be free, springing from charity and not from imposed obligations. Thus, it is understandable that the Church at times reduces existing customary religious observances, so as to leave breathing space for the inner liberty of love.

Aquinas' exposition maintains a healthy balance between the inner spiritual encounter with God and its external supports offered by sacred doctrine and manifestations of religious devotion. The second element of the New Law that supplies doctrinal and moral teaching, always within the primacy of grace, is not presented as a temporary structure, like scaffolding that is erected during the construction of a building and then is removed,

<sup>43</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 106, a. 1: "Principaliter lex nova est ipsa gratia Spiritus Sancti, quae datur Christi fidelibus... Habet tamen lex nova quaedam sicut dispositiva ad gratiam Spiritus Sancti, et ad usum huius gratiae pertinentia, quae sunt quasi secundaria in lege nova, de quibus oportet instrui fideles Christi et verbis et scriptis, tam circa credenda quam circa agenda".

<sup>44</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 106, a. 2: "Unde etiam littera Evangelii occideret, nisi adesset interius gratia fidei sanans".

<sup>45</sup> *S. Th., Ia-IIae*, q. 107, a. 4: "Lex nova, quae praeter praecepta legis naturae, paucissimum superaddit in doctrina Christi et Apostolorum; licet aliqua sint postmodum superaddita ex institutione sanctorum Patrum. In quibus etiam Augustinus dicit esse moderationem attendendam, ne conversation fidelium onerosa reddatur".

because it is no longer needed. Even though the economy of the New Law is final and expectations of some new stage of the history of salvation are completely mad,<sup>46</sup> we are not in an angelic state. It is erroneous, therefore to claim that the externals of religiosity are unnecessary, because the inner spiritual life supposedly does not need them anymore. This would be an unjustified eschatological anticipation.

### **Religiosity within faith**

Responding therefore to the initial questions, it has to be reiterated that the eliciting of acts springing from the grace of the Holy Spirit is fundamental for true Christian living. Attentiveness to God intrinsically needs the support of sacred teaching and of external manifestations of practical religiosity. It is therefore important that religious customs and devotions be maintained and animated from within by the theological virtues. Furthermore, these virtues can be supported by the gift of piety, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which enables a filial relationship with God, who is recognized not only as the Creator, but also as Father.<sup>47</sup> When however this higher perspective is ignored or underdeveloped, there is the danger that religious customs become superficial and mechanical. Such practices may still serve a social and religious function, expressing cultural affinity and perception of divine transcendence, but their transforming force will be weak. It should not however be immediately judged that they cannot confirm and shelter true moments of faith. Even when religious devotions do not reach the supreme mark of the fullness of the supernatural life, they still maintain the necessary focus. An unformed faith that generates only acquired religiosity, not springing from charity, expressed while not being in a state of grace, is still a true faith and as such has value, because at some moment a living faith formed by charity may spring from it.

Pastoral concern needs to focus above all on the quality of the exercise of the theological virtues and not just on the vitality of religious customs. Pastors indeed do follow their flocks participating in traditional religious

<sup>46</sup> *S. Th.*, *Ia-IIae*, q. 106, a. 4, ad 2: “Stultissimum est dicere quo Evangelium Christi non sit Evangelium regni”.

<sup>47</sup> *S. Th.*, *Ia-IIae*, q. 121, a. 1, ad 2: “Exhibere cultum Dei ut Creatori, quod facit religio, est excellentius quam exhibere cultum patri carnali, quod facit pietas quae est virtus. Sed exhibere cultum Deo ut Patri est adhuc excellentius quam exhibere cultum Deo ut Creatori et Domino. Unde religio est potior pietati virtute: sed pietas secundum quod est donum, est potior religione”.

devotions and recognising new ones invented by the faithful, but the pastors always need to look further ahead and with greater depth. If they fail to do this and yet engage in customary practices, only because this is what has always been done, because this is what the people desire or because this boosts their self-esteem, the clergy are then guilty of the sin of worldliness. The pastor's words are not only to stimulate social movement and the organization of events. He must be a teacher of faith profiting from occasions offered by popular religiosity so as to communicate the sacred teaching of the Gospel, being constantly aware that the life of faith in its essence is supernatural, coming from God and not from the genius of the preacher's words.

Faith is confirmed and deepened not only through academic discourses, but also by religious gestures and events that are both personal and public. When expressions of religiosity are truly animated by faith, they contribute to the awakening of the faith of lukewarm bystanders. The witnessing is then not to self, but to Christ, and so it strengthens the faith of others. The affirmation of popular religiosity by Pope Francis is an urgent plea addressed to the clergy that they should not disregard and treat with condescending disdain the expressions of faith of the poor and uneducated. Pastoral ministry needs to serve popular religiosity and nourish its life of faith, without stifling it with excessive control. It must not focus uniquely on its own clarity, precise formulations and erudite professionalism. If this were to be the prime intent of preaching, it would then be only a rigid, dry and suffocating pontification. This does not mean that words are to be void of content and indifferent to truth. But the way how they are expressed, the attentiveness to whom they are addressed and the recognition of the primacy of grace are essential.

Aquinas's distinction between faith and religiosity, between faith as an infused reality and the enunciations of faith, between interior acts of faith and their exterior confession, between the first and the second element of the New Law of grace, and between sacred teaching and the discourse of philosophy offers a valid clarification. Exterior supports are necessary for the interior supernatural life, and they are not in a permanent opposition towards it, but too much stress is not to be attributed to them. A shift in focus runs the risk of a petrification of the supernatural life. This is a trap into which not only catechesis and pastoral ministry, but also lay, grass-roots forms of religiosity may fall. Traditional expressions of popular religiosity may also turn out to be mundane and empty. Advance in the spiritual life requires therefore an attentive and constant purification of all religious supports of faith.

An “examination of conscience” of these various supports of the supernatural life may be conducted through the prism of the great religions of the world. Natural religiosity, as was said above, is respected, because of its intrinsic moral value and because, it is possible that at times, it may include a true supernatural life, infused by God. This does not mean that the divine gifts of grace are automatically and equally given to all outside the visible structure of the Church. Nor does it mean that the moral value of natural religions is not endangered by distortions. The great religions of the world express reverence to the Transcendent, but often they do this in ways that are profoundly deformed. Their specificity may thus serve as a helpful tool in the phenomenological individuation of hidden distortions within Christian religiosity. There are Christians who are tempted to derail their faith in a Hindu-type religiosity, in which the clarity of the enunciations of faith is avoided in the name of an all-inclusive toleration of contradictory claims and ideologies, all of them viewed as being a new equally valid incarnation of some ineffable, unknowable spiritual reality. There are others, who are tempted to identify Christianity with a Buddhist-type concentration on self, on delectation of one’s own psychic states and experiences with indifference towards revealed truth and even towards the objective reality of nature. And there are those, who in their religiosity are tempted to attribute a central role to an angry Islamic-type fundamentalism in which the condemnation of others and the imposition of external controlling moral rules seems to be the prime concern.

The purity of faith within Christian religiosity is of fundamental importance. It is through faith in Christ that we are saved, and so, that faith has to be free from conscious and unconscious manipulations.