

THE FINAL END OF THE HUMAN BEING AND THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION IN THE THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS OF THOMAS AQUINAS

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Introduction

Pope Francis, then-cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, in his notes addressed to his fellow cardinals during the congregations of cardinals preceding the 2013 conclave, named what he regarded then and what he arguably still regards as the central existential peripheries to which the Catholic Church is called to evangelize: the peripheries of the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance – and, of doing without religion. Arguably, “doing without religion” is an increasingly widespread *modus vivendi* in the so-called advanced secular societies of the Western Hemisphere. For very good reasons Pope Francis identifies this *modus vivendi* as an existential periphery, for it is neither neutral nor benign. Rather, “doing without religion” constitutes a significant impediment to attaining the surpassing final end to which humanity is ordered, the perfect and everlasting happiness in union with God (CCC §1). But why does “doing without religion” constitute an existential periphery? Why exactly is “doing without religion” an impediment to attaining the final end to which humanity is ordered? In order to address these questions in a theologically sound way, it is necessary, first, to recover a full appreciation of a virtue that has been all too long neglected in the theological discussion of the last fifty years, the virtue of religion, and second, clarify the relationship between the virtue of religion and the ultimate end to which humanity is ordained.

But first a brief lexical clarification and a preliminary account of *religio* are in order. There are at least four currently dominant uses of the term “religion” from which *religio* and the virtue of *religio* must be clearly distinguished. The first conventional use is the relatively recent but now widespread secularist notion of “religion” as it presently dominates the secular media. This notion is so utterly influential because it is part of the conceptual framework of a normative procedural secularism by way of which the media frame public discussion in virtually all Western societies. The contrastive term to this use of “religion” is “secular reason” or “secular discourse”. “Religion” stands for sets of beliefs that are presumably more

or less arbitrary in nature, beliefs that cannot be warranted and adjudicated rationally, beliefs that therefore – in order to secure the peace of the public square – must be relegated strictly to the private realm. While in virtually all Western societies there obtains a constitutional right to religious freedom, but this freedom is respected as long as it operates within the categorical distinction of private versus public. The public belongs to secular discourse, while religious belief and practice is an essentially private affair. In this use of the term, “religion” constitutes the potentially perilous other to “secular reason” or “secular discourse”, the other to a “reason” that allegedly is able to offer public warrants, create public consensus, and serves as the guardian of public peace. This secularist notion of “religion” is a central part of what Pope Francis has identified as the colonization of the mind.

There is a second conventional use of the term “religion” alive among certain strands of Protestantism: Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism, and new post-denominational and post-institutional Christian movements. Like the first, this use also has a negative connotation. Here “religion” means “organized religion”, a linguistic marker to identify negatively institutional management, dissemination, imposition, and control of beliefs and behavior. “Religion” in this sense is contrasted with the positive ideal of non-institutional, intuitive, free spirituality.

A third conventional use of the term “religion”, different from the first two, refers to a type of comprehensive world-view that pertains to ultimate matters and that answers “Life Questions” like “What should I live for, and why?”, “What should I believe, and why should I believe it?”, “What kind of person should I be?”, “What is meaningful in life, and what should I do in order to lead a fulfilling life?”¹ Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, together with innumerable other religions are seen as kinds or species of the overarching genus “religion”. These various species or kinds of “religions” can be the object of study in so-called departments of religion in contemporary secular colleges and universities and have become part of the late modern consumer world.

A fourth conventional use of the term “religion” has become prevalent in the Barthian strand of 20th century Protestant theology, where “religion” serves the function of a contrast term to “revelation”. The lat-

¹ I borrow these questions from Brad S. Gregory who in the introduction to his important study, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012] advances an astute discussion of these life questions.

ter stands for God's salvific Trinitarian self-communication, the former for the perennial post-lapsarian strategy of fallen humanity to placate and manipulate God. "Religion" is a fundamental dynamic arising from the condition of sin – natural theology allegedly its purest expression – that can only be overcome by God's own definitive self-revelation in Christ. This hyper-Augustinian Barthian notion of "religion" meant to identify a recurring dynamic of an attempted human usurpation of God in every religion, including Christianity, a dynamic from which especially Christianity must be purged again and again by an ever renewed turn to the God of the Gospel of Christ.²

Religio as it comes to be referred to in the virtue of religion cannot be subsumed under any of these four dominant conventional uses of the term "religion". Rather, *religio* defies the modern distinction between public and private; it also defies the questionable opposition between organized religion and personal spirituality; nor can the acts of the virtue of *religio* be reduced to world-view options all of which allegedly constitute the genus "religion", the delivery system of possible answers to ultimate questions. Finally, the Barthian critique of "religion" does not affect at all the virtue of *religio* in its surpassingly perfected form as an infused virtue, for precisely as infused virtue it is a gift of grace that presupposes divine and justifying faith which in turn presupposes the temporal missions of the Son and Spirit and the gratuitous sacramental mediation of grace.

Thomas Aquinas advances a theologically profound, philosophically robust, and utterly relevant account of the virtue of religion and its centrality for attaining the final end. To put his position in a nutshell: The attainment of the gratuitous ultimate end of perfect and everlasting participation in the divine life – the beatific vision – is utterly inconceivable without the *viator* living the virtue of religion, the inner disposition, formed by charity, to submit one's will to the Triune God in the interior act of devotion, to direct one's mind completely to the Triune God in the interior act of prayer, and to render one's due honor and reverence to God in exterior acts of adoration, sacrifice, oblation, tithes, and vows. The relationship *secundum mentem S. Thomae* between the final end and the virtue of religion may usefully be cast into this syllogism:

² For the by now classical expression of this notion of "religion", see Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, § 17, "Gottes Offenbarung als Aufhebung der Religion" (Zürich: TVZ, 1940), 304–397.

- (1) If humanity is ordained to the gratuitous supernatural final end of union with God, then the virtue of religion is indispensable for the attainment of this end.
- (2) Humanity is ordained to the gratuitous supernatural final end of union with God.
- (3) Consequently, the virtue of religion is indispensable for attaining this end. “Doing without religion” constitutes a grave impediment in regard to attaining the ultimate end and places one therefore on an existential periphery.

The major premise encapsulates the crucial claim. In the following I shall advance a brief systematic *re-lecture* of Aquinas’s warrant for this premise. Significantly, Aquinas regards the virtue of religion to be “the chief among the moral virtues” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 6. s.c.).³ *Religio* acquires its surpassing preeminence among the moral virtues from its relationship to the end to which the agent is ordered. The closer something is to this end, the greater is its goodness. Since *religio*, whose acts are directly ordered to the honor of God, approaches nearer to God than any other moral virtue, this virtue holds a position of preeminence among all the moral virtues. *Religio* denotes both interior and exterior acts by way of which the human being renders what is due to the source of all being and life, to the Creator of creation – interior acts of devotion and prayer and exterior acts of adoration, sacrifice, oblation, tithes, vows etc. Because these acts denote a human excellence and have a common object, the *habitus* that enables and facilitates these specific acts constitutes a virtue. This virtue is akin to the virtue of justice, which Aquinas defines as “rendering to everybody his [or her] due by a constant and perpetual will” (*ST II-II*, q. 58, a. 1). But since justice is “the virtue of actions among equals” (*ST I-II*, q. 61, a. 3, ad 2), constitutively asymmetrical relationships – children to parents, citizens to their homeland, and, first and foremost, rational creatures to their Creator cannot pertain to justice. For the constitutive inequality characteristic of these relationships makes it impossible to render the proper due. The virtues of “piety” (*pietas*; *ST II-II*, q. 101) and “observance” (*observantia*; *ST*

³ “[E]a quae sunt ad finem sortiuntur bonitatem ex ordine in finem, et ideo quanto sunt fini propinquiora, tanto sunt meliora. Virtutes autem morales, ut supra habitum est, sunt circa ea quae ordinantur in Deum sicut in finem. 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 praeeminet inter alias virtutes morales” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 6).

II-II, 1. 102) are the virtues that facilitate those acts of rightly acknowledging what is due and what cannot be rendered according to the order of justice in the constitutively unequal relationship all human beings have to their parents and to their homelands. *A fortiori*, no rational creature is able to render what is justly due to God. The virtue of *religio* enables human beings to attend quasi-justly to the most asymmetrical relationship of all, the rational creature to the Creator of creation.⁴ But what exactly makes *religio* indispensable for attaining the ultimate end?

The Ultimate End of the Human Being – Perfect and Everlasting Beatitude

In Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, questions 1-5 of the *Prima Secundae* are structurally parallel to question 1-26 of the *Prima Pars*. Both treat the *actus* of *intellectus* or *nous*, its finality, and its beatitude. Indeed, in the whole *Prima Pars* Aquinas considers the *actus ad intra* and the *actus ad extra* of the exemplar, God, and in the whole *Secunda Pars* the structure of the *actus* of the image as *viator* toward beatitude.⁵ The universal principle of causality and the priority of the final cause apply, albeit analogically according to the difference between the transgeneric order of divine causality and the contingent order of secondary causality, to both the exemplar and the image. The end or purpose that an intelligence (*intellectus; nous*) conceives, constitutes the final cause according to which efficient causes are ordained. Consequently, in the order of execution the end that in the order of intention was conceived first will be accomplished last. Final causality presupposes rational agency, not proximately, but ultimately. The transcendent universal First Cause of Aquinas's five ways is necessarily also the transcendent uni-

⁴ “[V]irtus est quae bonum facit habentem et opus eius bonum reddit. Et ideo necesse est dicere omnem actum bonum ad virtutem pertinere. Manifestum est autem quod reddere debitum alicui habet rationem boni, quia per hoc quod aliquis alteri debitum reddit, etiam constituitur in proportione convenienti respectu ipsius, quasi convenienter ordinatus ad ipsum; ordo autem ad rationem boni pertinet, sicut et modus et species, ut per Augustinum patet, in libro de natura boni. Cum igitur ad religionem pertineat reddere honorem debitum alicui, scilicet Deo, manifestum est quod religio virtus est” (*ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 2). (The Latin citations of Aquinas's works are from the *Corpus Thomisticum* www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html).

⁵ “Quia, sicut Damascenus dicit, homo factus ad imaginem Dei dicitur, secundum quod per imaginem significatur *intellectuale et arbitrio liberum et per se potestativum*; postquam praedictum est de exemplari, scilicet de Deo, et de his quae processerunt ex divina potestate secundum eius voluntatem; restat ut consideremus de eius imagine, idest de homine, secundum quod et ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem” (*ST* I-II, proem.).

versal Final End.⁶ Since the transcendent universal First Cause must contain in a surpassingly eminent way all the perfections extant in the universe, and since *intellectus* is one such perfection, the universal transcendent First Cause must in a surpassingly eminent way be *intellectus* (*ST I*, q. 14, a. 4).

Two important consequences follow. First, because beatitude is the perfect good of an intellectual nature, “beatitude belongs to God in the highest degree”.⁷ The perfection of an intellectual nature is its intellectual operation by which it grasps (*capit*) in some way everything. Hence the beatitude of an intellectual nature consists in understanding (*intelligendo*). Because in God *intellectus* and *esse* are identical, “beatitude must be assigned to God in respect to his *intellectus*”. Aquinas adds significantly: “as also to the blessed, who are called blessed (*beati*) by reason of the assimilation to His beatitude” (*ST I*, q. 26, a. 2).⁸

Second, the final end of all God’s acts *ad extra*, must be God: “God wills Himself as the end, and other things as ordained to that end; inasmuch as it befits divine goodness that other things should be partakers therein” (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 2).⁹ Divine goodness is the final end to which the divine will

⁶ “Videmus enim quod aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem, quod apparet ex hoc quod semper aut frequentius eodem modo operantur, ut consequantur id quod est optimum; unde patet quod non a casu, sed ex intentione perveniunt ad finem. Ea autem quae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante. Ergo est aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem, et hoc dicimus Deum” (*ST I*, q. 2, a. 3).

⁷ “[B]eatitudo maxime Deo competit. Nihil enim aliud sub nomine beatitudinis intelligitur, nisi bonum perfectum intellectualis naturae; cuius est suam sufficientiam cognoscere in bono quod habet; et cui competit ut ei contingat aliquid vel bene vel male, et sit suarum operationum domina. Utrumque autem istorum excellentissime Deo convenit, scilicet perfectum esse, et intelligentem. Unde beatitudo maxime convenit Deo” (*ST I*, q. 26, a. 1).

⁸ “[B]eatitudo, sicut dictum est, significat bonum perfectum intellectualis naturae. Et inde est quod, sicut unaquaeque res appetit suam perfectionem, ita et intellectualis natura naturaliter appetit esse beata. Id autem quod est perfectissimum in qualibet intellectuali natura, est intellectualis operatio, secundum quam capit quodammodo omnia. Unde cuiuslibet intellectualis naturae creatae beatitudo consistit in intelligendo. In Deo autem non est aliud esse et intelligere secundum rem, sed tantum secundum intelligentiae rationem. Attribuenda ergo est Deo beatitudo secundum intellectum, sicut et aliis beatis, qui per assimilationem ad beatitudinem ipsius, beati dicuntur” (*ST I*, q. 26, a. 2).

⁹ “Deus non solum se vult, sed etiam alia a se. Quod apparet a simili prius introducto. Res enim naturalis non solum habet naturalem inclinationem respectu proprii boni, ut acquirat ipsum cum non habet, vel ut quiescat in illo cum habet; sed etiam ut proprium bonum in alia diffundat, secundum quod possibile est. Unde videmus quod

directs all the eternal divine decrees that efficaciously unfold the extant order of divine providence: creation, salvation, and divinization, the diverse modes of participation in the divine goodness. Hence, due to the intrinsic, divinely ordained finality of creation every created agent, constituted by a specific nature, acts for an end that is proportionate to and perfective of that nature and is thereby directed to the final end of the whole universe. Due to its specific nature, the *animal rationale* acts in a specific way for the end proportionate to its nature, and in an analogous way for its gratuitous supernatural end. In the irrational creature, the specific end is effected by the natural appetite or instinct. In the *animal rationale*, by contrast, the determination to one, that is, to the specific end is conceived by the *intellectus* and effected by the rational appetite, the will. Now the order of ends to which the rational appetite, the will, is directed is an essential or a *per se* order. Contrary to an accidental order, in an essential order of ends each end is intrinsically ordered to another end; remove one and the whole order of ends collapses.

In an essential, or *per se* order, all other ends are subordinated to this last or ultimate end. If there were no single end to the human life, the purposes of human agency would only accidentally interconnect. But such a merely accidental connection of purposes would immediately destroy the structure of an intelligible act which is the most basic unit of a human act (*actio humana*; *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 1).¹⁰ For every act receives its end and thereby its intelligibility from being embedded—not chronologically but actually—in a wider essential order of intelligible purposes. Without the last end being actually (but not necessary consciously) present, there would be no reason to initiate any intelligible, purposeful action. Absent this essential order of

omne agens, in quantum est actu et perfectum, facit sibi simile. Unde et hoc pertinet ad rationem voluntatis, ut bonum quod quis habet, aliis communicet, secundum quod possibile est. Et hoc praecipue pertinet ad voluntatem divinam, a qua, per quamdam similitudinem, derivatur omnis perfectio. Unde, si res naturales, in quantum perfectae sunt, suum bonum aliis communicant, multo magis pertinet ad voluntatem divinam, ut bonum suum aliis per similitudinem communicet, secundum quod possibile est. Sic igitur vult et se esse, et alia. Sed se ut finem, alia vero ut ad finem, in quantum condecet divinam bonitatem etiam alia ipsam participare” (*ST* I, q. 19, a. 2).

¹⁰ Following the original insight of Aristotle and Aquinas, G.E.M. Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre have made the case in the modern context that intelligible actions are the basic units of human moral agency. (G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed. [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963]; Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Intelligibility of Action”, in *Rationality, Relativism, and Human Sciences*, ed. J. Margolis, M. Krausz, and R. M. Burián [Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986], 63-80).

finality, human acts would lose their intelligibility and thus become indistinguishable from what Aquinas calls “acts of man” (*actiones hominis*; *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 1), like scratching one’s head.¹¹

¹¹ In the proper essential order of ends, human beings *actually* desire everything for the sake of one ultimate end, although they do not always think of the ultimate end when desiring or doing something particular. All human beings agree that “happiness means the acquisition of the last end” (*ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 8), although they differ widely about what this end consists in and therefore how happiness is achieved. (“[F]inis dupliciter dicitur, scilicet ipsa res quam adipisci desideramus; et usus, seu adeptio aut possessio illius rei. Si ergo loquamur de ultimo fine hominis quantum ad ipsam rem quam appetimus sicut ultimum finem, impossibile est quod ultimus finis hominis sit ipsa anima, vel aliquid eius. Ipsa enim anima, in se considerata, est ut in potentia existens, fit enim de potentia sciente actu sciens, et de potentia virtuosa actu virtuosa. Cum autem potentia sit propter actum, sicut propter complementum, impossibile est quod id quod est secundum se in potentia existens, habeat rationem ultimi finis. Unde impossibile est quod ipsa anima sit ultimus finis sui ipsius. Similiter etiam neque aliquid eius, sive sit potentia, sive habitus, sive actus. Bonum enim quod est ultimus finis, est bonum perfectum complens appetitum. Appetitus autem humanus, qui est voluntas, est boni universalis. Quodlibet bonum autem inhaerens ipsi animae, est bonum participatum, et per consequens particulatum. Unde impossibile est quod aliquod eorum sit ultimus finis hominis. Sed si loquamur de ultimo fine hominis quantum ad ipsam adeptionem vel possessionem, seu quemcumque usum ipsius rei quae appetitur ut finis, sic ad ultimum finem pertinet aliquid hominis ex parte animae, quia homo per animam beatitudinem consequitur. Res ergo ipsa quae appetitur ut finis, est id in quo beatitudo consistit, et quod beatum facit, sed huius rei adeptio vocatur beatitudo. Unde dicendum est quod beatitudo est aliquid animae; sed id in quo consistit beatitudo, est aliquid extra animam” [*ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 7]). Aquinas takes this disagreement to be a factual, perennial human phenomenon of fallen, post-paradisiacal life. This disagreement comes to an end concretely but tenuously for the person who pursues the wisdom afforded by *prima philosophia* and who will come to understand God, the *prima cause* and *summum bonum* to be the ultimate end but will remain uncertain about how to attain this end permanently. This disagreement comes to an end concretely and definitively for the person who has divine faith and who pursues the wisdom afforded by *sacra doctrina* (let alone the person who receives the surpassing wisdom of infused contemplation). For these God is indisputably the thing in which the aspect of the ultimate end is realized and in union with whom alone perfect beatitude is attained: “[I]mpossibile est beatitudinem hominis esse in aliquo bono creato. Beatitudo enim est bonum perfectum, quod totaliter quietat appetitum, alioquin non esset ultimus finis, si adhuc restaret aliquid appetendum. Obiectum autem voluntatis, quae est appetitus humanus, est universale bonum; sicut obiectum intellectus est universale verum. Ex quo patet quod nihil potest quietare voluntatem hominis, nisi bonum universale. Quod non invenitur in aliquo creato, sed solum in Deo, quia omnis creatura habet bonitatem participatam. Unde solus Deus voluntatem hominis implere potest; secundum quod dicitur in Psalmo CII, *qui replet in bonis desiderium tuum*. In solo igitur Deo beatitudo hominis consistit” (*ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 8).

In order to take into consideration the ultimate ontological incommensurability between the transcendent First Cause, the very plenitude and infinite *actus* of being, *ipse esse subsistens*, and the contingent creature that receives its existence and its essence from another, Aquinas draws upon Aristotle's distinction between the *objective* and the *subjective* end, between the thing itself and its use (*Ethica megala* I, 3): while God is indeed the *objective* ultimate end of the rational creature, the *subjective* ultimate end cannot be the uncreated absolute beatitude of God but must be a created beatitude, the use or fruition of the *objective* ultimate end (*ST I*, q. 26, a.3, ad 2). The two faculties of the rational creature that make this fruition possible are the intellect and its appetite, the will. Like the senses and the sense appetites, intellect and will are ordered to their respective proper object, the intellect to universal truth, the will to universal good and to its fruition, perfect happiness. Significantly, the human will is constitutively directed to will happiness; it is "hardwired" to happiness. (*ST I*, q. 82, a. 1) Happiness is the epitome of those things which "the will is incapable of not willing".¹² Whether this happiness is imperfect or perfect depends on the way in which the human intellect participates in the objective ultimate end, God. If the participation is mediated and transitory, the corresponding happiness is imperfect, albeit genuine.¹³ If the participation is unmediated and everlasting, the

¹² Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), 21. (*ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2: "homo non potest non velle esse beatus".) "Man craves by nature happiness and bliss" (Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 20). Consider Pieper's felicitous rendition, "[The human being], as a reasoning being, desires his own happiness just as the falling stone 'seeks' the depths, as the flower turns to the light and the beast hunts its prey" (Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 21). "[S]icut philosophus dicit in II Physic. et in V Metaphys., finis dupliciter dicitur, scilicet cuius, et quo, idest ipsa res in qua ratio boni invenitur, et usus sive adeptio illius rei. Sicut si dicamus quod motus corporis gravis finis est vel locus inferior ut res, vel hoc quod est esse in loco inferiori, ut usus, et finis avari est vel pecunia ut res, vel possessio pecuniae ut usus. Si ergo loquamur de ultimo fine hominis quantum ad ipsam rem quae est finis, sic in ultimo fine hominis omnia alia conveniunt, quia Deus est ultimus finis hominis et omnium aliarum rerum. Si autem loquamur de ultimo fine hominis quantum ad consecutionem finis, sic in hoc fine hominis non communicant creaturae irrationales. Nam homo et aliae rationales creaturae consequuntur ultimum finem cognoscendo et amando Deum, quod non competit aliis creaturis, quae adipiscuntur ultimum finem in quantum participant aliquam similitudinem Dei, secundum quod sunt, vel vivunt, vel etiam cognoscunt" (*ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 8).

¹³ This scenario pertains to the person who pursues the acquired wisdom of *prima philosophia*. Quite different is the situation of the person who has *fides divina* formed by charity. In the latter scenario, the intellect is still bereft of the *visio beatifica*, for the *lumen*

corresponding beatitude is perfect.¹⁴ Hence according to Aquinas the beatitude of the *animal rationale* is twofold (*duplex*): The imperfect and transitory happiness is proportionate to human nature and thus the *animal rationale* has the natural potency to obtain this beatitude and so *can* obtain it. The perfect and everlasting beatitude surpasses the capacity of human nature and can be obtained “by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the

gloriae does not yet actualize the possible intellect such that the likeness of the divine essence is in it. For recall, the intellect’s act attains completion when the object’s likeness is in it. The will’s act, on the contrary, attains perfection “ex eo quod voluntas inclinatur ad ipsam rem prout in se est” (ST I, q. 82, a. 3c.; see also ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad 2; ST II-II, q. 27, a. 4c). “[C]aritas operatur formaliter. . . . coniungit animam Deo iustificando ipsam” (ST II-II, q. 23, a. 2, ad 3). And for this reason “caritas viae immediate Deo adhaeret” (ST II-II, q. 27, a. 4, s.c.). “[C]aritas est quae, diligendo, animam immediate Deo coniungit spiritualis vinculo unionis”. (ST II-II, q. 27, a. 4, ad 3). Because of the inclination of charity, the will is already united with the *res ipsa, prout in se est* and consequently already attains its ultimate perfection. And therefore such a person is in a state of inchoative beatitude, the immediate consequence of which is spiritual joy (*spiritual gaudium*): “Caritas autem est amor Dei, cuius bonum immutabile est, quia ipse est sua bonitas. Et ex hoc ipso quod amatur est in amante per nobilissimum sui effectum, secundum illud I Ioan. IV, *qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet et Deus in eo*. Et ideo spirituale gaudium, quod de Deo habetur, ex caritate causatur” (ST II-II, q. 28, a. 1). The perfect beatitude that is achieved when the intellect receives in itself the likeness of the First Truth is anticipated in the inchoative spiritual joy that issues from the charity-engendered spiritual union between God and the soul.

¹⁴ Aquinas draws an important distinction between imperfect happiness that can be had in this life on the one hand and on the other hand the perfect happiness that consists in the vision of God’s essence: “[B]eatitudo imperfecta quae in hac vita haberi potest, potest ab homine acquiri per sua naturalia, eo modo quo et virtus, in cuius operatione consistit, de quo infra dicitur. Sed beatitudo hominis perfecta, sicut supra dictum est, consistit in visione divinae essentiae. Videre autem Deum per essentiam est supra naturam non solum hominis, sed etiam omnis creaturae, ut in primo ostensum est. Naturalis enim cognitio cuiuslibet creaturae est secundum modum substantiae eius, sicut de intelligentia dicitur in libro de causis, quod *cognoscit ea quae sunt supra se, et ea quae sunt infra se, secundum modum substantiae suae*. Omnis autem cognitio quae est secundum modum substantiae creatae, deficit a visione divinae essentiae, quae in infinitum excedit omnem substantiam creatam. Unde nec homo, nec aliqua creatura, potest consequi beatitudinem ultimam per sua naturalia” (ST I-II, q. 5, a. 5). The most eminent way of attaining imperfect happiness is to pursue the wisdom of *prima philosophia*. For such a person the subjective attainment of the ultimate end will issue in a genuine, but transient and imperfect beatitude of a natural contemplation of the First Cause as mediated by the created effects. Only for the person elevated to the beatific vision, the intellectual and volitional union with the Triune God will the subjective attainment of the ultimate end issue in a surpassing fruition, everlasting perfect beatitude.

Godhead, about which it is written (2 Pet. 1:4) that by Christ we are made partakers of the Divine nature” (*ST I-II*, q. 62, a. 1c).¹⁵

The perfect beatitude of the human being is the subjective fruition of the objective ultimate end by way of an unmediated direct union of the intellect and the will with God, who is the first cause of the soul’s creation and enlightenment and who also is the soul’s final end as the soul’s universal good.¹⁶ And since the soul is the substantial form of the body, it is the whole human being, soul and body, whose final end in the extant order of divine providence – gratuitously decreed from all eternity as merited by Christ – is to become a partaker of the divine nature and thus a partaker of the unfathomable bliss of the divine life (*ST I*, q. 26, a. 3).¹⁷

¹⁵ “[P]er virtutem perficitur homo ad actus quibus in beatitudinem ordinatur, ut ex supradictis patet. Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas, ut supra dictum est. Una quidem proportionata humanae naturae, ad quam scilicet homo pervenire potest per principia suae naturae. Alia autem est beatitudo naturam hominis excedens, ad quam homo sola divina virtute pervenire potest, secundum quandam divinitatis participationem; secundum quod dicitur II Petr. I, quod per Christum facti sumus consortes divinae naturae” (*ST I-II*, q. 62, a. 1c).

¹⁶ “Respondeo dicendum quod ultima et perfecta beatitudo non potest esse nisi in visione divinae essentiae. Ad cuius evidentiam, duo consideranda sunt. Primo quidem, quod homo non est perfecte beatus, quandiu restat sibi aliquid desiderandum et quaerendum. Secundum est, quod uniuscuiusque potentiae perfectio attenditur secundum rationem sui obiecti. Obiectum autem intellectus est quod quid est, idest essentia rei, ut dicitur in III de anima. Unde intantum procedit perfectio intellectus, inquantum cognoscit essentiam alicuius rei. Si ergo intellectus aliquis cognoscat essentiam alicuius effectus, per quam non possit cognosci essentia causae, ut scilicet sciatur de causa quid est; non dicitur intellectus attingere ad causam simpliciter, quamvis per effectum cognoscere possit de causa an sit. Et ideo remanet naturaliter homini desiderium, cum cognoscit effectum, et scit eum habere causam, ut etiam sciat de causa quid est. Et illud desiderium est admirationis, et causat inquisitionem, ut dicitur in principio *Metaphys.* Puta si aliquis cognoscens eclipsim solis, considerat quod ex aliqua causa procedit, de qua, quia nescit quid sit, admiratur, et admirando inquit. Nec ista inquisitio quiescit quousque perveniat ad cognoscendum essentiam causae. Si igitur intellectus humanus, cognoscens essentiam alicuius effectus creati, non cognoscat de Deo nisi an est; nondum perfectio eius attingit simpliciter ad causam primam, sed remanet ei adhuc naturale desiderium inquirendi causam. Unde nondum est perfecte beatus. Ad perfectam igitur beatitudinem requiritur quod intellectus pertingat ad ipsam essentiam primae causae. Et sic perfectionem suam habebit per unionem ad Deum sicut ad obiectum, in quo solo beatitudo hominis consistit, ...” (*ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8c).

¹⁷ As a commentator of Aquinas’s thought rightly emphasizes, “[Human beings] cannot know that they are capable of attaining the vision of God except through faith based on divine teaching. That God actually does ordain [human beings] to Himself is a revealed truth known only by faith. Only the believer can hope and pray for this divine

The Attainment of Perfect and Everlasting Beatitude, the Rectitude of the Will, and the Virtue of Religion

Significantly, there obtains an essential requirement for the attainment of this perfect and everlasting beatitude. In order to illustrate this essential requirement, Aquinas adduces a central principle of the philosophy of nature and puts it to analogical use in his theological argument of *convenientia*: “Matter cannot receive a form, unless it be duly disposed thereto” (*ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 4).¹⁸ Material cannot be shaped unless it is duly prepared. Wood must be cut and dried in order to receive the form of fire; iron must be heated in order to receive the form of a plow. Similarly, nothing achieves its end, unless it is well adapted to the end. And therefore nobody can attain perfect beatitude without a right good will.¹⁹ The rectitude of the will is, of course, necessarily a *concomitant* condition of attaining perfect happiness. For “happiness or bliss by which [the human being] is made most perfectly conformed to God, and which is the end of human life, consists in an operation” (*ST I-II*, q. 55, a. 2, ad 3)²⁰ and this operation that realizes the perfect conformity to God entails necessarily the *concomitant* rectitude of the will.

gift” (Denis J.M. Bradley, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas’s Moral Science* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997], 524f.). See also *Compendium theologiae* II, c. 7. Aquinas states explicitly: “The ultimate happiness [of the human being] consists in a supernatural vision of God: to which vision [the human being] cannot attain unless he be taught by God. ... Hence, in order that a [human being] arrive at the perfect vision of heavenly happiness, he [or she] must first of all believe God, as a disciple believes the master who is teaching him” (*ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3).

¹⁸ “[M]ateria non potest consequi formam, nisi sit debito modo disposita ad ipsam” (*ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 4).

¹⁹ “[R]ectitudo voluntatis requiritur ad beatitudinem et antecedenter et concomitanter. Antecedenter quidem, quia rectitudo voluntatis est per debitum ordinem ad finem ultimum. Finis autem comparatur ad id quod ordinatur ad finem, sicut forma ad materiam. Unde sicut materia non potest consequi formam, nisi sit debito modo disposita ad ipsam, ita nihil consequitur finem, nisi sit debito modo ordinatum ad ipsum. Et ideo nullus potest ad beatitudinem pervenire, nisi habeat rectitudinem voluntatis. Concomitanter autem, quia, sicut dictum est, beatitudo ultima consistit in visione divinae essentiae, quae est ipsa essentia bonitatis. Et ita voluntas videntis Dei essentiam, ex necessitate amat quidquid amat, sub ordine ad Deum; sicut voluntas non videntis Dei essentiam, ex necessitate amat quidquid amat, sub communi ratione boni quam novit. Et hoc ipsum est quod facit voluntatem rectam. Unde manifestum est quod beatitudo non potest esse sine recta voluntate” (*ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 4).

²⁰ “[F]elicitas sive beatitudo, per quam homo maxime Deo conformatur, quae est finis humanae vitae, in operatione consistit” (*ST I-II*, q. 55, a. 2, ad 3).

But the rectitude of the will, the will properly set on the ultimate end, is also an *antecedent* condition to attaining perfect beatitude. Why so? Could God not conceivably have created a rational creature that in the original state is endowed with a will rightly ordered to the ultimate end and that in the next instance after its creation would be elevated by God to the attainment of the ultimate end and to perfect and everlasting beatitude in the beatific vision? Because any answer to this question refers necessarily to the mystery of the divine wisdom and will, Aquinas advances an argument of *convenientia*, of what seems to be most fitting for divine wisdom. It is worth to be quoted at length:

[T]he order of Divine wisdom demands that it should not be thus; for as is stated in *De Caelo* ii. 12, *of those things that have a natural capacity for the perfect good, **one** has it without movement, **some** by one movement, **some** by several.* Now to possess the perfect good without movement, belongs to that which has it naturally; and to have Happiness naturally belongs to God alone. Therefore it belongs to God alone not to be moved towards Happiness by any previous operation. Now since Happiness surpasses every created nature, no pure creature can [fittingly] gain Happiness, without the movement or operation, whereby it tends thereto. But the angel, who is above [the human being] in the natural order, obtained it, according to the order of Divine wisdom, by one movement of a meritorious work ... ; whereas [the human being] obtains it by many movements of works which are called merits. Wherefore also according to the Philosopher (*Ethic.* i. 9), happiness is the reward of works of virtue (*ST* I-II, q. 5, a. 7).²¹

The reception of the gratuitous gift of perfect and eternal beatitude requires movement or operation by the embodied rational creature. And such movement – initiated by grace, ordered by the restored rectitude of

²¹ “Sed ordo divinae sapientiae exigit ne hoc fiat, ut enim dicitur in II de caelo, *eorum quae nata sunt habere bonum perfectum, aliquid habet ipsum sine motu, aliquid uno motu, aliquid pluribus.* Habere autem perfectum bonum sine motu, convenit ei quod naturaliter habet illud. Habere autem beatitudinem naturaliter est solius Dei. Unde solius Dei proprium est quod ad beatitudinem non moveatur per aliquam operationem praecedentem. Cum autem beatitudo excedat omnem naturam creatam, nulla pura creatura convenienter beatitudinem consequitur absque motu operationis, per quam tendit in ipsam. Sed Angelus, qui est superior ordine naturae quam homo, consecutus est eam, ex ordine divinae sapientiae, uno motu operationis meritoriae, ut in primo expositum est. Homines autem consequuntur ipsam multis motibus operationum, qui merita dicuntur. Unde etiam, secundum philosophum, beatitudo est praemium virtuosarum operationum” (*ST* I-II, q. 5, a. 7).

the will to God, and united inchoatively with God by way of the theological virtue of charity – merits the attainment of perfect and everlasting beatitude. Merit denotes the essential cooperation of rational creatures with divine grace in attaining the ultimate end and their perfect beatitude.²² Aquinas takes Augustine’s universally accepted axiom, “God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us”²³ as the guiding theological principle that accounts for the proper preparation of the rational creature to eternal union with God. The proper preparation of the created image, the *animal rationale*, to receive an essentially disproportionate, surpassing realization of its perfection – conformity to and union with the divine exemplar – are acts chosen and executed by a right good will. But the goodness of the will depends on the intention of the end. The last end of the human will is the sovereign good, God. Hence for the will to be good, the will has to be properly set on the ultimate end, God, the sovereign good. The sovereign good – God’s own infinite goodness – relates to the divine will as its proper object. In other words: God, always and in all, wills His own goodness, and God wills things apart from Himself by willing His own goodness (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 2, ad 2). Hence God wills also our will to be ordered to his sovereign goodness. And so for the rectitude of the human will to obtain, the human will must be properly conformed to the divine will.²⁴ Consequently, the rectitude of the human will, the intellectual appetite, depends on the intellect being instructed by the natural and the Divine law (*ST I-II*, q. 19, a. 4) and on the will being ordered by right reason and the acquired moral virtues to a due end (*ST I-II*, q. 55, a. 4, ad 4) and by sanctifying grace, the theological virtues, the infused moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the gratuitous ultimate end.

The rectitude of the will finds its proper realization in virtues that are about *operations*. The paradigm is the virtue of justice; it applies the will to

²² *ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2, esp. ad 2; q. 114, a. 2.

²³ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 11, 13 (*Patrologia Latina* 38, 923).

²⁴ “[B]onitas voluntatis dependet ex intentione finis. Finis autem ultimus voluntatis humanae est summum bonum, quod est Deus, ut supra dictum est. Requiritur ergo ad bonitatem humanae voluntatis, quod ordinetur ad summum bonum, quod est Deus. Hoc autem bonum primo quidem et per se comparatur ad voluntatem divinam ut obiectum proprium eius. Illud autem quod est primum in quolibet genere, est mensura et ratio omnium quae sunt illius generis. Unumquodque autem rectum et bonum est, in quantum attingit ad propriam mensuram. Ergo ad hoc quod voluntas hominis sit bona, requiritur quod conformetur voluntati divinae” (*ST I-II*, q. 19, a. 9).

its proper act (*ST I-II*, q. 59, a. 5), thereby realizing its rectitude *in actu*.²⁵ “Wherefore”, Aquinas concludes, “all such virtues as are about operations, bear, in some way, the character of justice” (*ST I-II*, q. 60, a. 3). The virtue of religion is a part of the virtue of justice, because it is about operations, but it is only a potential part of justice because its operations fall short of justice due to the impossibility to render what exactly is due in the relationship of the rational creature to the Creator.²⁶

Precisely because the virtue of religion is a potential part of the virtue of justice, the virtue that applies the will to its proper act and thereby actualizes the will’s rectitude, it would be a grave error to mistake the virtue of religion for some supererogatory moral excellence that is up to one’s personal discretion. Aquinas emphasizes that “it belongs to the dictate of natural reason that [the human being] should do something through reverence for God. But that [the human being] should do this or that determinate thing does not belong to the dictate of natural reason, but is established by Divine or human law” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3).²⁷ Natural reason dictates that reverence to God is due and this due is so necessary “that *without it moral rectitude cannot be ensured*” (*ST II-II*, q. 80 c.; my emphasis).²⁸ Hence, the virtue of religion presupposes some rudimentary awareness of God’s existence and God’s providence over all things. It is this mostly tacit and implicit knowledge of God that accounts for the integrity of the *formal* cause of the natural virtue of religion, the ordination of reason, and of its *ratio*, the judgment and command of reason to exercise acts of religion.

²⁵ “[I]ustitia est habitus secundum quem aliquis *constanti et perpetua voluntate* ius suum unicuique tribuit” (*ST II-II*, q. 58, a. 1; my emphasis).

²⁶ “[Q]uidquid ab homine Deo redditur, debitum est, non tamen potest esse aequale, ut scilicet tantum ei homo reddat quantum debet; secundum illud Psalm., *quid retribuam domino pro omnibus quae retribuit mihi?*” (*ST II-II*, q. 80c.). While the strict equality of commutative justice is out of the question, there must be some semblance of equality, because Aquinas after all understands the virtue of religion as a part of justice: “[R]eligio 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” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 3).

²⁷ “[D]e dictamine rationis naturalis est quod homo aliqua faciat ad reverentiam divinam, sed quod haec determinate faciat vel illa, istud non est de dictamine rationis naturalis, sed de institutione iuris divini vel humani” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3).

²⁸ “Quoddam enim est sic necessarium ut sine eo honestas morum conservari non possit, et hoc habet plus de ratione debiti” (*ST II-II*, q. 80 c.).

The material cause – everything taken up or chosen as offering in order to signify the honor that is due to God – may be more or less deficient due to the “status naturae corruptae” in which humanity finds itself after the fall (*ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2). *Nota bene*: The deficiency that might obtain in the material cause of the virtue of religion does not compromise its *formal* integrity as a moral virtue. And the rectitude of the will belongs to the *formal* integrity of the virtue of religion. The acquired natural virtue of religion differs from its infused analogue in that in the case of the latter the material cause is definitively perfected by way of divine and human instruction. According to Aquinas, the New Law of the Gospel and human law (that is, Christ’s commands and the additional determinations of the Church) establish what determinate things are to be done in reverence of God (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3). Furthermore, and more importantly, now the acts of the infused virtue of religion are commanded by the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity and are formed by the virtue of charity which already unites the person in some fashion with God through divine friendship. Moreover, the person receiving the infused virtue of religion also receives an imprinted seal or character on the soul that efficaciously capacitates him or her to the worship of the Triune God. This very seal or character that the rational soul receives is the effect of the sacraments, first and foremost, of baptism.²⁹

The theological virtues have God as their direct object; that is, faith and hope are directly engaged by God as their immediate object; and the theological virtue of charity already realizes a certain union with God, the perfect ultimate end. Higher virtues, like faith, hope, and charity can command the acts of lower virtues.³⁰ And so the acts of the virtue of religion – commanded by faith, hope, and charity (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1) – are not in reference directly to God (like believing God, hoping in God, loving God with God’s own shared love of charity) but rather are acts about things referred to the ultimate end; they are acts issued by faith, hope and charity and are done out of due reverence for God (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5).³¹

²⁹ “[S]acramenta novae legis [which derive their power especially from Christ’s passion, *ST III*, q. 62, a. 5] ad duo ordinantur, videlicet ad remedium contra peccata; et ad perficiendum animam in his quae pertinent ad cultum Dei secundum ritum Christianae vitae” (*ST III*, q. 63, a. 1).

³⁰ “Virtutes autem theologicae, scilicet fides, spes et caritas, habent actum circa Deum sicut circa proprium obiectum. Et ideo suo imperio causant actum religionis, quae operatur quaedam in ordine ad Deum” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1).

³¹ But how does the theological virtue of charity and the infused moral virtue of

The virtue of religion has two principal operations, both interior. Devotion is the first and is a special act of the will “to devote [oneself] to God, so as to subject [oneself] wholly to God” (*ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 1).³² The act of devotion is the purpose of all the other acts of religion, indeed, of all the infused moral virtues. The second principal operation of the virtue of religion is prayer, the surrendering of one’s mind to God by presenting the mind to God and asking becoming things of God (*ST II-II*, q. 83, a. 1; a. 3, ad 3).³³ Devotion and prayer are the interior constitutive acts of the infused virtue of *religio*.³⁴ Exterior acts of adoration, sacrifice, oblation, vows, tithes etc. become proper acts of the infused virtue of religion only by way of their mediation through the interior acts of devotion and prayer. Devotion holds the place of primacy in *religio* because it is the operation that actualizes the rectitude of the will in regard to the honor and reverence due to God.³⁵

religion relate exactly? By way of charity, the Christian adheres to God by a union of the spirit (*ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1); and for this reason, charity informs all the infused moral virtues, also the virtue of religion; but here the relationship goes deeper. For “ad caritatem pertinet immediate quod homo tradat seipsum Deo adhaerendo ei per quamdam spiritus unionem. Sed quod homo tradat seipsum Deo ad aliqua opera divini cultus, hoc immediate pertinet ad religionem, mediate autem ad caritatem, quae est religionis principium” (*ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1).

³² “[M]ovens imponit modum motui mobilis. Voluntas autem movet alias vires animae ad suos actus, et voluntas secundum quod est finis, movet seipsam ad ea quae sunt ad finem, ut supra habitum est. Et ideo, cum devotio sit actus voluntatis hominis offerentis seipsum Deo ad ei serviendum, qui est ultimus finis, consequens est quod devotio imponat modum humanis actibus, sive sint ipsius voluntatis circa ea quae sunt ad finem, sive etiam sint aliarum potentiarum quae a voluntate moventur” (*ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 1, ad 1).

³³ “[O]rando tradit homo mentem suam Deo, quam ei per reverentiam subiicit et quodammodo praesentat, ut patet ex auctoritate Dionysii prius inducta. Et ideo sicut mens humana praeeminet exterioribus vel corporalibus membris, vel exterioribus rebus quae ad Dei servitium applicantur, ita etiam oratio praeeminet aliis actibus religionis” (*ST II-II*, q. 83, a. 3, ad 3).

³⁴ As one interpreter of Aquinas rightly stresses: “As the first and principal act of religion, inward devotion must be in every religious act, otherwise it will not be a true act of religion at all, though it may have the external appearance” (Kevin D. O’Rourke, O.P., in: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 39 (2a2ae 80–91): *Religion and Worship* [New York/London: Blackfriars in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company and Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964], 257).

³⁵ The readiness to do any other act of religion has its root in devotion to God (*ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 2). The rectitude of the will in relation to the perfect final end is concretely exercised in the act of devotion.

Devotion applies the will to its proper act, namely to refer all the other moral virtues to the service of God, who is the ultimate end. Devotion, the principal act of *religio* (that is, of actualizing the will's rectitude regarding what is due to God) ensures that the service of God constitutes the end or purpose of all the other acts of religion and, indeed, of all the other moral virtues.³⁶ The virtue of religion is analogous to the virtue of charity in that, similar to the way charity informs all of the other virtues (by uniting them already now with the last end) and commands acts of all the other virtues, the virtue of *religio* unites all the moral virtues by submitting their acts to the interior worship of God.

The Insufficiency but Indispensability of the Virtue of Religion for the Attainment of Perfect, Everlasting Beatitude

Religio actualizes the will's rectitude through acts of honor and reverence due to God. Commanded by charity, these acts are meritorious and thus contribute essentially to preparing the *viator* for attaining the ultimate end and perfect beatitude as *comprehensor*. On the other hand, the omission of acts of *religio* and acts contrary to *religio* demerit and weaken the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Not only will charity, the union in spirit and thus friendship with God, be affected negatively, but the will's rectitude will be corrupted. For friendship with God through Christ presupposes that one renders to God what is due to God *qua* Creator. Grace presupposes nature; and so the supernatural life of charity entails that one renders the due demanded by natural reason and by divine law to God the Creator. Where the honor due to God the Creator is neglected and *religio* foregone, divine friendship with God the Redeemer cannot flourish but must wilt and eventually die.

Minimally, "doing without religion" is a failure at doing justice to the most fundamental and most essential relationship, that of the rational creature to the Creator. But for a baptized and confirmed Christian not to practice the acts of the virtue of religion due to neglect or indifference is a serious sin of omission, and to commit intentional acts of irreligion and

³⁶ "[V]oluntas movet alias potentias animae in suum finem, sicut supra dictum est. Et ideo religio, quae est in voluntate, ordinat actus aliarum potentiarum ad Dei reverentiam. Inter alias autem potentias animae, intellectus altior est et voluntati propinquior. Et ideo post devotionem, quae pertinet ad ipsam voluntatem, oratio, quae pertinet ad partem intellectivam, est praecipua inter actus religionis, per quam religio intellectum hominis movet in Deum" (*ST* II-II, q. 83, a. 3, ad 1).

irreverence is a grave sin of commission (*ST II-II*, q. 97 prooem. and q. 122, a. 3).³⁷ Since the acts of religion are commanded by God – they fall under the precepts of justice and are expressed as revealed divine law in the 2nd commandment of the Decalogue where they make explicit a dictate of natural reason (*ST II-II*, q. 122, a. 3) – intentional acts of irreverence and irreligion cause persons who know the precept lose friendship with God and do damage to the rectitude of their will and consequently err from the path to perfect and everlasting beatitude.

Nel mezzo del cammin di loro vita si ritrovarono per una selva oscura, che la diritta via era smarrita. Midway upon the journey of their lives, having wandered from the straight and true and thus finding themselves lost in a dark and hard wood of indifference, irreverence, and irreligion, these persons still desire happiness. They seek the universal good to which their will is hard-wired, but with the rectitude of the will diminished they will not find what they crave even in fame, wealth, pleasure, or healthy longevity. Because these are at best only aspects of the universal good, their will still desires the universal good *in toto*. Short of attaining it, they will fail in finding perfect and everlasting beatitude. By “doing without religion”, they will rather find themselves lost in the dark and hard wood of a precarious existential periphery.

Recall the major premise: (1) If humanity is ordained to the gratuitous supernatural final end of union with God, then the virtue of religion is indispensable for the attainment of this end. The systematic *re-lecture* of Aquinas has yielded a coherent and indeed compelling warrant for this premise. It has also afforded a Thomistic recapitulation of Pope Francis’s identification of a pervasive contemporary existential periphery in the Western Hemisphere, “doing without religion”. In the practical order, where the mandate and challenge of a new evangelization is paramount, Pope Francis exemplifies in his own papal ministry a crucial insight of Aquinas’s treatment of man’s final end: the subjective attainment of beatitude, fruition,

³⁷ “Deinde considerandum est de vitiis religioni oppositis per religionis defectum, quae manifestam contrarietatem ad religionem habent, unde sub irreligiositate continentur. Huiusmodi autem sunt ea quae pertinent ad contemptum sive irreverentiam Dei et rerum sacrarum” (*ST II-II*, q. 97 prooem.). “Quod oportet prius impedimenta verae religionis excludere in eo qui instituitur ad virtutem, quam eum in vera religione fundare. Opponitur autem verae religioni aliquid dupliciter. Uno modo, per excessum, quando scilicet id quod est religionis alteri indebite exhibetur, quod pertinet ad superstitionem. Alio modo, quasi per defectum reverentiae, cum scilicet Deus contemnitur, quod pertinet ad vitium irreligiositatis” (*ST II-II*, q. 122, a. 3).

is necessarily accompanied by joy. And insofar as the theological virtue of charity brings about an inchoative participation in the life of God, in the final attainment of everlasting beatitude, the Christian life, even in the midst of profound suffering, is one of deep joy, a joy that arises from the inchoative union with God in charity (*ST* II-II, q. 28, a. 1). That is why the deep joy of the saints attracts almost irresistibly. Indifference, irreverence, and irreligion might be countered best with the joy flowing from the inchoative beatitude that arises from the union of charity with God and that has its first and concrete act in a joyful submission of the will to God – from which all other acts of *religio* flow – as joyfully as devoutly, as the Psalmist says: “Ho piegato il mio cuore a compiere i tuoi decreti, in eterno, senza fine” (Psalm 119:112).³⁸

³⁸ “I incline my heart to perform thy statutes, forever, to the end” (Psalm 119:112; RSV).