Religion and the Moral Virtues in St. Thomas

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To describe religion as a virtue is certainly out of fashion in our culture. Even such an impressive overview of *The Ethics of Aquinas* as that edited by Stephen Pope lacks a chapter on religion while paying due attention to the other virtues. It is not hard to find examples of scholars struggling to make sense of the traditional concept of religion. They insist that the scholastics did not use the word in the modern sense. Ilaria Morali, summarising her findings on St. Thomas's contribution to dialogue with non-Christian religions, indicates some genuine difficulties. In the Middle Ages the range of the word "religion" applied first to the internal life of Christianity: it was then used to designated the life-style of those belonging to religious orders: it could also mean the Christian life itself that began with conversion and Baptism. Its widest significance referred to the set of doctrines, institutions, and the whole way of life that characterised Christendom. Morali identified the great hurdle to dialogue in the following statement: "From a speculative point of view, it must finally be recalled that St. Thomas placed religion among the moral virtues, not among the theological virtues. There was, then, no basis at this level for a theological encounter among religions".[1] Despite Morali's considerable contributions to a theology of religions, she appears to have overlooked the recent revival of virtue theory in philosophy, and the fact that the moral virtues are a constitutive component of Thomas's theological synthesis.

St. Thomas and Contemporary Issues

Max Seckler shares much the same concerns in his fundamental theology. The modern disciplines of the history and phenomenology of religion want to delineate an autonomous sphere of human existence that separates it from the economy, science, politics, and so on. This sphere is concerned mainly with the sentiments that induce humans to prostrate themselves before the *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum,* made famous by Rudolf Otto.

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[1] Ilaria Morali, "Religions and Salvation", in *Catholic Engagement with World Religions*, Karl. J. Becker and Ilaria Morali (eds.), Orbis, New York 2010, 68.

Without compromising any scientifically verified findings, Seckler reasons that the phenomenological method remains limited when judged by the criteria of fundamental theology. This discipline must, first, give an account of religion, as a human reality and then as rationally coherent and universally valid. These are basic conditions for the formulation of a theology of religion. Inspired by St. Thomas, Seckler defines religion as an *ordo* that natural dimension of the *humanum* that orders and directs everything to God. "Religio proprie importat ordinem ad Deum" (ST II–II. 81. 1.). Precisely this *ordo ad Deum* identifies and defines religion.[2]

Thomas's insights spelled out this order implanted into reality by God at creation and saved by Christ. He could not pretend to employ the modern scientific method before its invention, even if his ideas do not necessarily conflict with it. Thomas constructed his synthesis over many years according to the criteria of Aristotle's *ordo disciplinae*. The idea of religion as a moral virtue was present from the beginning of his career. It was the starting point for his wider consideration of religion, and became the stable point of reference whenever he wrote on this topic. Among his works *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* (1257) defended the Mendicant Orders against the secular masters in the University of Paris. The virtue of faith shared by all the faithful is not the same as the religious life of the friars. A year later in his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate* q. 3. a. 2 he highlighted the formal difference between the virtues of faith and religion. In his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* he accepts Cicero's classification of the potential parts of the virtue of justice, the first of which is religion (3 Sent. d. 33, q. 3, a. 4, qc. 1). In this regard, we should never forget the influence of his personal life of devotion, and that he composed the liturgy for Corpus Christi (1264).

The Moral Virtue of Religion

Father Tito Centi focuses on Thomas's originality in the *Summa Theologiae*.[3] No one before him had formulated a complete and comprehensive

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[2] Max Seckler, "Der theologische Begriff der Religion", in *Handbuck der Fundamentaltheologie*, W. Kern, H. Pottmeyer, and M. Seckler (eds.), Herder, Freiburg 1985, 178.

[3] See his introduction to *La virtù di religione*, in *La Somma Teologica*, vol. XVIII, Salani, Siena 1967, 8. Centi identified, "S. Tommaso come la fonte primaria del trattato *De Religione*. Si risale a lui perché egli ha avuto il merito di costruire per la prima volta, e quasi d'inventare l'argomento…Non c'è dubbio che, già prima di S. Tommaso, molto si era parlato di devozione, di adorazione, di preghiera, di sacrificio, di voti e giuramenti:

tract on religion; he expounded its various aspects in terms of a unitary conception. He gives an account of his sources in ST II–II, 80. These include in particular Cicero, St. Augustine, St. Isadore of Seville, and the Scriptures. He wanted to bring the virtues described by these authors, e.g., piety, gratitude, observance, obedience, fidelity, truthfulness, liberality, kindness and holiness, etc., into an organic synthesis. He achieved this by distinguishing different types of virtue within this grouping. It took real genius to organise this rather untidy field. St. Thomas saw an analogy between the distinction of human powers and abilities, and the cardinal virtues. Cicero's description of three ways of considering a virtue according to its, "components, species and accessories",[4] inspired his breakthrough. Now Thomas could treat a virtue as an integral part of a whole, as the species of a genus, or as an individual annexed to a main virtue that performed as "head of the family".

He classified religion under the cardinal virtue of justice, as part of its extended family. Some virtues fall short of the standard of justice either because the debt owed is not equivalent, or not owed in a strict sense. What religion owes to God, piety to parents, and respect to persons of worth, are all debts not owed in a strict sense. They fulfil the moral obligation of what decency requires, e.g., truthfulness or gratitude, rather than a legal debt laid down by the law. In a similar manner friendliness and generosity surpass what honour requires. All of these belong to the great family of general justice, while equity is allied to legal justice.

Religion in this tradition meant giving God what we owe him as his due. It referred primarily to the cult (*cultus*) or worship practiced by a people in order to honour God. It consisted in performing rites or services in honour of the divinity and corresponded to the classic definition of virtue as what makes "men and their actions good". Rendering our due to God achieves a genuine good that transforms our life. We honour people for their greatness, excellence or achievements. God's excellence, however, surpasses every other and we can never repay him adequately for what he has done in creation and redemption. "Deo autem competit singularis excellentia, in quantum omnia in infinitum trascendit secundum omni-

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ma non era chiaro il legame di tutti questi atti come esercizio di un'unica virtù, specificamente distinta da quelle teologali e dalle altre virtù morali".

[4] See Thomas Gilby's comment on ST. II–II, 48, in the volume on Prudence in the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa,* Eyre and Spottiswoode, London1974, 52, note a. See also ST I, 76, 8: and II–II. 80, 128, 143.

modum excessum" (ST II–II, 81, 4 in c.). There can never be a question of true equality with God or of giving him his full due in matters of strict justice. This renders religion a special virtue distinct from justice in general. "Ad religionem autem pertinent exhibere reverentiam uni Deo secundum unam rationem, in quantum scilicet est primum principium creationis et gubernationis rerum" (ST II–II, 81, 3 in c.). It acknowledges God as Lord and Father of the whole world and his all–embracing providence. The virtue of religion is rooted in the third inclination (cf. ST, I–II. 94. 2), and builds in a particular way on our natural tendency to submit and to give thanks to God for all his gifts. Religion expresses and is governed by the principles of the natural law.

The Moral Virtues in the Christian Dispensation

This brings us to the nub of the issue of how religion relates to the other moral virtues. Everything we do, if done for the glory of God, is an action subject to the command of religion, even if not primarily an exercise of religion. For only those deeds are primary exercises of religion which are defined as acts of reverence for God. This is even clearer in Thomas's own words: "Omnia, secundum quod in gloriam Dei fiunt, pertinent ad religionem, non quasi ad elicietem sed ad imperantem, illa autem pertinent ad religionem elicientem quae secundum rationem suae speciei pertinent ad reverentiam Dei" (ST II–II, 81, 4 ad 2).

St. Thomas proceeds to explain how this *ordo ad Deum* truly constitutes the Christian dispensation. He repeats St. Augustine's contention that the theological virtues of faith, hope and love can command acts of religion as acts of reverence before God. In this way charity, the form of all the virtues, animates the natural virtue of religion infusing it with grace. God is both the proper object of faith, hope and love and at the same time the end or *finis* of all religious activity. "Virtutes autem theologicae, scilicet fides, spes et charitas, habent actum circum Deum sicut circum proprium objectum; et ideo suo imperio causant actum religionis, quae operatur quaedam in ordinem ad Deum" (ST. II–II. 81, 5 ad 1). Charity thus directs all acts of religion to become effective means of reaching God. The theological virtues embrace God as their object; religion with the moral virtues provide the means of reaching the last end.

What place do the moral virtues occupy in the Christian dispensation? In the *Sed contra* to ST. II–II. 81, article 6, Thomas appeals to revelation to throw light on the rational order among the moral virtues in God's plan. The Ten Commandments given by God to Israel in Exodus 20 establish the

priorities among a believer's moral obligations. These norms specify how Israel is to live in covenant obedience to God in every circumstance of life itself, sex, marriage, family, property, reputation and social relations (cf. ST. II-II. 122). The highest norms are religious, i.e. the first three Commandments in fact. Religion is not just the instrument used by faith, hope and charity to direct humanity to God as the goal of its happiness and perfect beatitude. Thomas also teaches that the order of the precepts corresponds to the order of the virtues. Religion set down priorities for personal and social life in view of what God wants. The Commandments and their accompanying precepts put the virtues into practice. Such practices enable us to discover the capacities for action that make the agent and his action good. The moral virtues are concerned with everything done to serve the ultimate goal, that is, God. Religion approaches God more closely than the other moral virtues, since what it does directly and immediately honours God. Its position in the moral life is crucial since it is the greatest and highest of the moral virtues.

Holiness and Reverence for God

Acts of reverence cannot add to God's glory, but benefit us by establishing the order that should prevail in our lives. The world of sense can induce the human mind to adore God. This means using bodily things as signs and symbols to arouse in our spirit acts that unite us to God. The interior acts of religion, its motive force, spring from devotion and raising the mind to God in prayer. The external acts are secondary to these interior acts and should be their outer expression, e.g. in sacrifice, offerings, tithing, vows, etc. The Church can consecrate persons to God, as well as material objects like churches and chalices. We call such persons holy because they have dedicated their whole existence to God's service.

Holiness is the result of the practice of the virtue of religion. It is not a separate virtue but the same one under the formality that it not only offers God works of virtue, but every work of virtue. It therefore totally embraces a person's life and style of life, whether it be active or contemplative. Religion as holiness is a general virtue in as far as it directs the acts of all the other virtues in the way that legal or general justice directs all of them to the general good. Sanctity, "Habet autem quamdam generalitatem secundum quod omnes virtutum actus per imperium ordinat in bonum divinum: sicut et justitia legalis dicitur generalis virtus inquantum ordinat omnium virtutum actus in bonum commune" (ST. II-II. 81. 8 ad 1).

Thus arises the distinction between the active and contemplative life. This clearly does not mean that some persons would exclusively occupy

themselves with contemplative matters, while others would completely immerse themselves in practical activities. Father Bonino expresses what is at stake quite well. "The meaning of the distinction, rather, is that of the difference in the choice, deliberate and cultivated, of a general orientation of one's life. A contemplative is one who applies the totality of his or her strength and orders his or her entire life to contemplation. Conversely, the active person is one who orders life directly to action".[5]

Thomas never ceases repeating that Christian life "consists principally in charity, by which the soul is united to God" (ST. II–II. 184, 1 ad 2). Charity can grow or diminish and has degrees. The fullness of Christian life for everyone, active or contemplative, consists in the complete love of God and neighbour. A Christian directs every aspect of life and every virtue, at least habitually, to God (ST. II–II. 184. 2). Such love is mandatory on all the faithful whatever their state of life.[6] In a word play on St. Augustine he says, "He is perfect in charity who loves God to the point of despising himself and all that belongs to him".[7] The liberating practice of the evangelical counsels are a privileged instrument of charity. Religious make this vowed commitment in spiritual freedom. Although the counsels are part of the Church's structure of holiness, she cannot impose them as necessary or obligatory. Two publically established institutions embody the state of perfection in the Church: the episcopacy (ST. II–II. 185) and religious life (ST. II–II, 186–189). The expression "religious" life indicates a particular affinity between this state and the moral virtue of religion whereby one is devoted to the service of God through worship.

The Challenge of Lay Spirituality

Thomas perceived the public expression of sanctity primarily in terms of episcopal ministry or of religious life in the Church. He could never imagine that the world of the laity might remain untouched by charity. He maintained that this world was intrinsically good, and endowed with virtues that were means for sanctity and union with God. He was no ad-

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[5] S–T Bonino, O.P., "Charisms, Forms, and States of Life, (IIa IIae, qq 171–189)", in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, Stephen Pope (ed.), Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C. 2002, 340.

[6] See Vatican II, LG, chapter 5 for how this is the base for the universal call to holiness in the Church.

[7] *In Mattheum*, 19, n. 1592: "Ille ergo est perfectus in caritate, qui diligit Deum usque ad contemptum sui et suorum" (Marietti, 244).

vocate of an exaggerated *contemptus mundi* mentality, but was open to a lay spirituality based on secular human virtues. Walter Principe has extended Thomas's insights, asserting that his doctrine of creation, "leads to a profound revolution in one's attitude regarding temporal secular realities. God is glorified when created realities are lead to their perfection. In this one can find a help for a theology of work, of human creativity, of Christian participation in building a secular society and culture". Principe was firmly convinced that Thomas, "cuts through the tension between the spiritual and the temporal, for the temporal is "given its due" even while being ordered finally to the spiritual, but without its own finalities being destroyed or minimized, as if doing so would give greater glory to God".[8]

A Unified Concept of Religion?

Max Seckler by grappling with Thomas's rich theology of religion tried to prove its relevance to fundamental theology. He noted the phenomenologists' frustration as they set out to determine the range and limits of their field of research, something that left the definition of religion rather uncertain. Religion cannot be completely privatised for it is found in all cultures and permeates all social institutions and aspects of life such as law, medicine, education and the economy, even after modernity had declared their autonomy. It possesses the features of what J-L Marion named a "saturated phenomenon", with excess meaning that escapes scientific rationalisation. Seckler concluded that religion is both theo- and anthropo-centric. When defined as *ordo ad Deum*, God becomes the absolute uncompromising centre of attention. In an anthropological perspective, however, religion defines the totality of human existence in relation to God, i.e., *ordo **hominis ad Deum***. Everything now revolves around the issue of redemption, because religion is "for us men and our salvation". This salvific relationship is often either unformulated or inexpressible in culturally specific terms.

Wishing to enter into dialogue with the religious pluralism typical of our times, Seckler viewed religion as a cultural product with the following qualities:

1. As theological acts: Faith, hope and charity are the foundation for the religious acts whereby humanity enters into a saving relationship with God. This relationship is open and available to all peoples because of God's universal salvific will. This, however, in no way implies that a particular

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[8] Walter Principe, *Thomas Aquinas's Spirituality*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1984, 22.

culture is capable of expressing the truth and reality of this relationship in a way clearly accessible to phenomenology. The *religio christiana* makes God's Word made flesh in Christ available to the world through the Church's preaching.

2. As anthropological acts: These witness to our relationship with God, e.g., "oratio", "cultus", "pietas", etc. According to Seckler, Thomas had these practices in mind when he spoke of *religio* concretely in his age. Since they can all be summarised as *justitia,* they always involve an ethico-juridic dimension. A society often expresses its religiosity through rituals, signs and symbols that lay down the basis for the Christian sacraments.

We may praise this approach for what it draws from Thomas. Seckler has demonstrated with reference to Thomas that religion is a highly anal-ogous concept. His thinking on this virtue helps us discriminate between true and false religion, and discern the authentically religious elements in a culture. This concept can apply to fervently sacral communities, and to secular societies determined to abolish religion, to cultures that explicitly acknowledge God in public, and to those that still lack a word for God. What strikes the reader, however, is the near disappearance of "virtue" as the key to analysis and interpretation of these instances. Our author strong-ly stresses the division between the explicit and the hidden characteristics in a culture, between the transcendental and the categorical. A unified idea of religion then comes under such strain that we feel compelled to query its validity. On the other side, consider how Thomas balanced and harmon-ised the following elements in his synthesis. 1. The virtue of religion itself, *ordo ad Deum*; the internal acts of devotion and prayer; the external acts of adoration, sacrifice, tithing, vows etc. 2. The vices opposed to religion whether by excess or defect, and false religion; the acts of idolatry, super-stition, simony etc. 3. The movement of the Spirit, the transcendent gift of piety that brings the virtue of religion to full blossom by God's action in the soul. When theology began to divide the natural from the theologal virtues, handing the gifts of the Spirit over to spirituality, this synthesis started to fragment into separate tracts based on discrete phenomena. That brought the unified conception of an *ordo **hominis** ad Deum* into crisis.

Grace beyond Evangelisation and Outside the Church

Current theology wants to go beyond a closed perspective locked within the limits of Christendom and its concerns, to study religion in its global dimensions. It asks if the holiness proclaimed above by the *religio christiana* might not be available in and through other religions. The urgent question now extends to the salvation and access to grace of those who,

because of the moment or place of birth, have not encountered the means of salvation stipulated by Scripture and Church doctrine as ordinary. This occurs without fault or culpability on their part. While we cannot adequately treat these questions here, some observations, however, are in place. Salvation for people who had not heard the Gospel did not attract much attention in the thirteenth century. Thomas viewed the history of religion in terms of the history of salvation that reached its fullness in Christ. History was a teacher that used the law, whether natural or as revealed to Moses, or in the New Law of the Holy Spirit, to lead humanity to Christ. Therefore there is only one history of religion, there being only one *ordo* of salvation to which it belongs. The *religio christiana* as the primary analogue sets the standard by which we judge all the stages and forms of religion. Thomas's assessment of non-Christian religions is very sporadic, not highly developed but nuanced. He did not conceive of them primarily as an insult to the deity, the accepted medieval view. "Although non-believers in their rites may sin, these rites can be tolerated because of some good coming from them" (ST. II–II, 10. 11). Father Thomas F. O'Meara's following robust assertion helps us grasp the premises on which his master proceeded: "Since all men and women are primarily predestined and subsequently redeemed, they have a certain access to grace".[9] Thomas had struggled with the question of how God could save a person *nutritus in silviis*, that is, a person *de facto* outside of the range of the Church's evangelising mission; could it be by a special divine revelation or intervention, by the sending of a preacher, as in the case of Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles? After long reflection on human destiny and life as a journey, O'Meara concludes that Thomas came to the conviction that, "the last word touches interior direction and God's assistance".[10] God works interiorly in the human heart, not through miracles or extraordinary interventions, but through a good moral life where a person stands before God in their conscience.[11] Grace permeates the practice of religion linked to the other moral virtues as a destiny willed by God. Thomas says that salvation is available to such people in the terms set down

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[9] Thomas F. O'Meara, O.P. "The Presence of Grace. Outside Evangelisation, Baptism and the Church in Thomas Aquinas' Theology", in *That Others may Know and Love*, Michael F. Cusato, OFM and F. Edward Coughlin OFM (eds.), The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, New York 1997, 111. This essay provides an overview of Thomas's treatment of the present problem.

[10] Ibid. 99.

[11] The Council repeated this traditional teaching. Cf. LG 16, NA 1, and GS 16.

by Scripture. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him" (Heb 11: 6). God saves people who seek him through a good moral life and draws them to himself through grace. This applies beyond the visibly defined limits of the Church but always in relation to it.

Religion in an Age After Virtue

In his masterful *After Virtue* Alasdair MacIntyre diagnosed the cultural malaise of modernity in a way relevant to our argument. As a philosopher, he confronted the crisis described above in a way that is enlightening for us. The endless discussion about the definition of religion seems to be but a variant of what occurred in professional ethics. The fundamental fault MacIntyre uncovered in ethics applies just as much to the study of religion: forgetfulness of *telos* means that we now lack a convincing rational explanation for how we move from what we are to what we can be and are meant to be.[12] *Telos* brings unity to our practices, our lives and to tradition, whether in ethics or religion.[13] MacIntyre claims that it is in these terms that we understand virtue today. We might add another dimension to MacIntyre's critique, the forgetfulness of the *means* to the end.[14] The intention of an end gives meaning to the means proportionate to achieve it. We understand this type of *ordo* by identifying the means necessary to achieve an already established end. The activity of religion is a necessary means that we can never renounce in striving for our last end. What makes the *ordo hominis ad Deum* specifically religious is the fact that God is both this last end, the *finis* of the acts of religion, and the *objectum* or object of faith, hope and charity as well. This *ordo,* that realises the means-end relationship inherent in the virtue of religion, is complete only when it grasps God, the direct and immediate object of the theological virtues. The virtue of religion links our moral life, i.e., all the moral virtues into this *ordo hominis ad Deum*. It gives expression to the reverence and veneration we feel for our Creator and Redeemer as we journey to happiness in him. The natural moral virtue infused with grace is necessary in this adventure.

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[12] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame IN, 1981, chapter 5, "Why the Enlightenment Project of Justifying Morality Had to Fail", 49–59.

[13] Ibid. chapter 15, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Life and the Concept of a Tradition", 190–209.

[14] MacIntyre is quite aware of means–end relationships but not under this aspect.

Religion in a Secular Society

How does this religious vision hold up in contemporary society? Charles Taylor, a Catholic philosopher and leading exponent of the phenomenological method,[15] has photographed the alleged decline of religion in the Western developed world. His massive *A Secular Age* raises the question of "why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy but even inescapable?" He finds religious values hidden in unexpected places in the historical development of an ostensibly unbelieving culture. So various forms of secularism are silent carriers and conveyors of religious values. His phenomenology ascribes an unacknowledged ontological depth to cultures revealed through the "the goods" they are seeking to realise. In fact, he discerns a priority among these goods whereby their relationship to each other constitutes the "moral order". *A Secular Age* focuses on the process of secularisation, and the image it projects is, as it were, the photographic negative of society's religious state. This inversion comes out in the three meanings Taylor attributes to secularisation today.

1. The diminishing influence of Christianity in public spaces, "that have been emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality". This is particularly evident in politics. It is due to how science, law, education, business have progressively become independent and autonomous. "Churches are now separate from political structure … Religion or its absence is largely a private matter. The political society is seen as that of believers (of all stripes) and non-believers alike".

2. The second sense is the falling-off of religious practice even when people may still be believers. Here "turning away from God" actually implies "no longer going to Church". This is what people usually mean when they recall "earlier ages of faith and piety".

3. The third sense has to do with "the conditions of belief". It involves "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace". Here belief is a deliberated

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[15] See Charles Taylor, "The Moral Typology of the Self", in *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, S.B. Messer, L.A. Sass and R.L. Woolfolk (eds.), Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1988, 289-320. See also Michael Paul Gallagher's *Faith Maps*, chapter 8, for an appreciation of his implied theology.

personal choice when the society presents many other possibilities. "Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives", asserts Taylor.[16]

His phenomenology therefore concentrates on "the conditions of belief", where secularisation is the predominant condition in society. It makes the commitment of faith and the practice of religion hard today. Despite the negative image projected by secularisation, in fact, it challenges us to discover new possibilities of expressing faith, and of inventing new ways of living it in a profoundly changed context. Critical observers of Taylor's work cannot escape noticing that his mental framework and the coordinates of his thinking have grown out of a traditional Christian conception of religion. His vision is rooted in and motivated by a faith commitment: it consists of practices of prayer and worship, etc. that bring unity to a person's life; Religion is a social reality embedded in the civil community with its own rituals and meaning systems present in the public square.

What may we learn from Taylor's research? One fact stands out conspicuously: The phenomenology of religion is not neutral, but depends on the "goods" inherent to a culture. They enjoy genuinely normative force, and fix the criteria for interpreting the meaning of religious phenomena. As Max Seckler teaches, the theology of religion does not impose faith on religious phenomena from outside but indeed discovers it within its object.[17] Without theological principles drawn from faith, we cannot appreciate religion properly, nor assess its truth claims. The truth contained in religion leads us back to the depth of humanity.

Conclusion

When the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council came to discuss the Church's relation to non-Christian religions they had to decide how to proceed. What do we have in common? Then something truly remarkable happened. The Fathers suddenly recognised that they could realise the great project bequeathed them by Pope St. John XXIII. They could actually address the whole of humanity. Ilaria Morali[18] explained the Council's

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[16] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, Harvard Mass. 2007, 1–3 for these citations.

[17] M. Seckler, op. cit. 189-193, "Zum Zusammenhang von Gottesfrage, Religion und Antropologie".

[18] See Ilaria Morali, "Grazia, Salvezza e Religioni secondo la Dottrina del Concilio Vaticano II", in *Revista Española de Teologia* 64 (2004) 371–372. The Fathers intended to, "evidenziare solo il vincolo tra uomini e religioni, che è il fondamento del dialogo e della cooperazione". See also Roman A. Siebenbrock, "Theologischer Kommentar

stance in this way: religion brings humanity into contact with its deepest mystery where the human race becomes one and whole. Religion is indeed the highest moral virtue and value, the starting-point for humanity's adventure with God. Here all human capacities and virtues join in adoration of the one true God. That is why the Council Fathers solemnly declared this fundamental principle at the beginning of their dialogue with the non-Christian religions: "All men form one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the whole earth (cf. Acts 17: 26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God" (NA. no 1).

zur Erkl rung über die Haltung der Kirche zu den nichtchristkischen Religionen" in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, P. Hünermann und B. J. Hilderath (eds.), Herder, Freiburg 2005, 647. "In der Gegenwartsanalyse ("Nostra aetate") wird das Zusammenwachsen der Menschheit deshalb betont, weil es den Kontext dieser Erkl rung beschreibt". And the document emphasises forcefully, "das allen Menschen Gemeinsame, um die bestehende Gemeinsamkeit zu st rken, und um eine Grundlage für Zusammen arbeit zu legen".