

QUESTION 85

Sacrifice

Next we have to consider the acts by which certain exterior things are offered to God. There are two sorts of consideration with respect to such things. One has to do with things that are given to God by the faithful (questions 85-87), and the other has to do with vows, by which certain things are promised to Him (questions 88-91). On the first point we have to consider sacrifices (*sacrificia*) (question 85), oblations and first-fruits (*oblaciones et primitiae*) (question 86), and tithes (*decimae*) (question 87).

As regards sacrifices (*sacrificia*), there are four questions: (1) Is the offering of sacrifice to God part of the law of nature? (2) Is sacrifice to be offered to God alone? (3) Is the offering of sacrifice a specific act of virtue? (4) Is everyone obligated to offer sacrifice?

Article 1

Is the offering of sacrifice to God part of the law of nature?

It seems that the offering of sacrifice to God is not part of the law of nature (*non sit de lege naturae*):

Objection 1: What is naturally right (*quae sunt iuris naturalis*) is common to everyone. But this is not so with sacrifices. For we read that some have offered bread and wine in sacrifice, as is said of Melchizedech in Genesis 14:18, and that some have offered *these* animals and that others have offered *those* animals. Therefore, the offering of sacrifice is not part of what is naturally right (*non est de iure naturali*).

Objection 2: Everyone who just observes that which belongs to what is naturally right. But we do not read that Isaac offered sacrifice—or even Adam, of whom Wisdom 10:2 nonetheless says that wisdom “led him out of his sin.” Therefore, the offering of sacrifice is not part of what is naturally right (*non est de iure naturali*).

Objection 3: In *De Civitate Dei* 10 Augustine says that sacrifices are offered in order to signify something. But spoken words (*voces*), which, as the same Augustine says in *De Doctrina Christiana*, are the most important signs, “do not signify naturally but instead signify by convention (*ad placitum*),” according to the Philosopher. Therefore, sacrifices are not part of the natural law.

But contrary to this: There has always been some sort of offering of sacrifices in all ages and among every nation of men. But what is the case among all peoples seems to be natural. Therefore, the offering of sacrifice is likewise part of what is naturally right.

I respond: Natural reason dictates to man that he should be subject to some higher being—this because of the defects that he senses within himself and because of which he needs to be assisted and directed by a higher being. And whatever this being might be, it is called a God by everyone.

Now just as among natural things the lower are naturally subject to the higher, so, too, natural reason dictates to man, in accord with his natural inclination, that he should in his own mode exhibit subjection and honor to what is above him. But the mode that is appropriate for man is that he use sensible signs in order to express something, since he receives his cognition from sensible things. And so it follows from natural reason that man should make use of certain sensible things by offering them to God as a sign of the subjection and honor that he owes, in the manner of those who offer certain things to their masters in recognition of their lordship. But this pertains to the nature of sacrifice. And so the offering of sacrifice is part of what is naturally right.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 95, a. 2), some things belonging in common to what is naturally right are such that their determinations are part of positive law; for instance, the natural law dictates that evildoers should be punished, but it is determined by divine or human decision that they should be punished by such-and-such a punishment. Similarly, the offering of sacrifice

belongs in common to the natural law, and so everyone agrees in this. But the determination of sacrifices is by human or divine decision, and so people differ on this.

Reply to objection 2: Adam and Isaac, like other just men, offered sacrifice to God in a manner that was in keeping with their times; this is clear from Gregory, who says that among the ancients original sin was remitted for the children by the offering of sacrifices. Yet Scripture does not make mention of all the sacrifices offered by the just; instead, it mentions only those that happen to involve something special.

However, there might be a reason why Adam is not said to have offered sacrifices, viz., lest, given that the origin of *sin* is noted in him, it be signified at the same time that the origin of *sanctification* likewise lies in him. Isaac, on the other hand, signified Christ insofar as he himself had been offered in sacrifice. Hence, it was unnecessary to signify him as offering sacrifice.

Reply to objection 3: It is natural to man to signify his thoughts, but the fixing of the signs is by human convention.

Article 2

Should sacrifice be offered only to the most high God?

It seems that sacrifice need not be offered only to the most high God:

Objection 1: Since sacrifice should be offered to God, it seems that sacrifice should be offered to all those who have become partakers of the divine nature (*qui fit divinitatis consortes fiunt*). But as 2 Peter 1:4 says, holy men “are made partakers of the divine nature.” Hence, Psalm 81:6 says of them, “I have said, ‘You are gods.’” Likewise, as is clear from Job 1:6, the angels are called sons of God. Therefore, sacrifice should be offered to all of these.

Objection 2: The greater someone is, the greater the honor that should be shown to him. But the angels and the saints are much greater than any earthly princes, and yet the subjects of these earthly princes give much greater honor to them—prostrating themselves in their presence and offering gifts—than the offering of an animal or some other thing in sacrifice. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the angels and the saints can be offered sacrifices.

Objection 3: Temples and altars are set up in order to offer sacrifices. But temples and altars are set up to the angels and the saints. Therefore, sacrifices can likewise be offered to them.

But contrary to this: Exodus 22:20 says, “Anyone who offers sacrifices (*immolat*) to gods other than the Lord shall be put to death.”

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), sacrifice is offered in order to signify something. Now the sacrifice that is offered exteriorly signifies an interior spiritual sacrifice by which the soul offers itself to God—this according to Psalm 50:19 (“A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit”)—since the exterior acts of [the virtue of] religion are ordered toward the interior acts.

Now the soul offers itself in sacrifice to God as the source of its creation and the end of its beatification. But according to the true Faith, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 90, a. 3 and q. 118, a. 2), God alone is the creator of our souls, and it is likewise in Him alone that the beatitude of our soul consists. And so just as we offer spiritual sacrifices to God the most high alone, so, too, we should also offer exterior sacrifices to Him alone—in the same way that “when praying and praising, we direct our meaningful words to Him to whom we offer the very things in our hearts that we are signifying,” as Augustine puts it in *De Civitate Dei* 10.

We likewise see it observed in every republic it is observed that they honor the highest ruler by some singular sign which, if it were shown to anyone else, it would be a crime of high treason (*esset crimen laesae maiestatis*). And so in divine law the death penalty is established for those who present

divine honor to others.

Reply to objection 1: The name ‘divine nature’ (*divinitas*) is communicated to certain individuals not through *equality*, but through *participation*. And so it is not the case that equal honor is owed to them.

Reply to objection 2: In the offering of a sacrifice what is taken into account is not the price of the killed animal, but the signification with which this sacrifice is made in honor of the highest ruler of the whole universe. Hence, as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 10, “The demons (*daemones*) rejoice not in the stench of corpses, but in receiving divine honors.”

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 8, “We do not set up temples and priests to the martyrs. For it is not they, but their God, who is our God. Hence, the priest does not say, ‘I offer sacrifice to you, Peter (or Paul).’ Instead, he gives thanks to God for their victories and we are encouraged to imitate them.”

Article 3

Is the offering of sacrifice a specific act of virtue?

It seems that the offering of sacrifice is not a specific act of virtue:

Objection 1: In *De Civitate Dei* 10 Augustine says, “True sacrifice is every work that is done in order that we might cling to God in a holy relationship (*ut sancta societate inhaereamus Deo*).” But it is not the case that every good work is a specific act of some determinate virtue. Therefore, the offering of sacrifice is not a specific act of some determinate virtue.

Objection 2: The mortification of the body that is done by fasting belongs to [the virtue of] *abstinence*, but the mortification of the body that is done by continence belongs to [the virtue of] *chastity*, whereas the mortification of the body that is done in martyrdom belongs to [the virtue of] *fortitude*. Yet all of these things seem to be included under the offering of sacrifice—this according to Romans 12:1 (“Present your bodies as a living sacrifice (*hostiam viventem*)”). Again, in Hebrews 13:16 the Apostle says, “Do not forget to do good and foster communion, since by such sacrifices God’s favor is obtained.” But doing good and fostering communion belong to [the virtues of] *charity*, *mercy*, and *generosity*. Therefore, the offering of sacrifice is not a special act of some determinate virtue.

Objection 3: A sacrifice seems to be something that is presented to God. But there are many things presented to God, e.g., *devotion*, *prayer*, *tithes*, *first-fruits*, *oblations*, and *holocausts*. Therefore, sacrifice does not seem to be a special act of some determinate virtue.

But contrary to this: As is clear from the beginning of Leviticus, many specific precepts about sacrifices are given in the Law.

I respond: As was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 18, aa. 6-7 and q. 60, a. 3), when the act of one virtue is ordered toward the end of another virtue, it in some way participates in the species of that virtue—just as, when someone steals in order to commit fornication, the stealing itself in some sense takes on the deformity of fornication, so that even if it were not a sin on other grounds, it would now be a sin by the fact that it is ordered toward fornication.

So, then, sacrifice is a certain specific act that is praiseworthy because it is done out of reverence for God (*ex hoc quod in divinam reverentiam fit*). For this reason, it belongs to a determinate virtue, viz., the virtue of religion.

Now it also happens that what is done in accord with other virtues is ordered toward reverence for God, e.g., when someone gives alms out of his own property for the sake of God, or when someone subjects his own body to affliction because of reverence for God. And, accordingly, the acts of other virtues can likewise be called ‘sacrifices’.

On the other hand, there are certain acts that are not praiseworthy for any reason other than that they are done because of reverence toward God. And these acts are called ‘sacrifices’ properly speaking, and they belong to the virtue of religion.

Reply to objection 1: The very fact that we want to cling to God in a certain spiritual relationship pertains to reverence for God. And so the act of any virtue takes on the nature of sacrifice by the fact that it is done in order that we might cling to God in a holy relationship.

Reply to objection 2: There are three sorts of human good. The first is the *good of the soul*, which is offered to God by a sort of interior sacrifice through devotion and prayer and other interior acts of this kind. And this is the most important sort of sacrifice (*hoc est principale sacrificium*).

The second is the *good of the body*, which is offered in some manner to God by martyrdom and by abstinence or continence.

The third is the *good of exterior goods*, the sacrifice of which is offered *directly* to God when we offer our possessions immediately to God, and *indirectly (mediate)* when we share them with our neighbors because of God.

Reply to objection 3: There are sacrifices (*sacrificia*) properly speaking when something is done to the things that have been offered to God; for instance, animals used to be killed, bread is broken and eaten and blessed. The very name suggests this, since ‘sacrifice’ derives from the fact that man *makes something sacred (facit aliquid sacrum)*.

By contrast, there is said to be an ‘offering’ (*oblatio*) in a direct sense when something is offered to God, even if nothing is done to it; for instance, money or food are said to be offered at the altar, and nothing is done to them.

Hence, every sacrifice is an offering, but not vice versa. First-fruits are offerings, since, as Deuteronomy 26 reports, they were offered to God, but they were not sacrifices, since nothing sacred happened with them. On the other hand, tithes are, properly speaking, neither sacrifices nor offerings, since they are offered immediately not to God, but to the ministers of the divine worship.

Article 4

Is everyone obligated to offer sacrifices?

It seems that not everyone is obligated to offer sacrifices:

Objection 1: In Romans 3:19 the Apostle says, “Whatever the Law says, it is speaking to those who are under the Law.” But the law about sacrifices was not given to everyone; instead, it was given to the Hebrew people alone. Therefore, sacrifices were not obligatory for everyone.

Objection 2: Sacrifices are offered to God in order to signify something. But not everyone understands significations of this sort. Therefore, not everyone is obligated to offer sacrifices.

Objection 3: Priests are so called because they offer sacrifices to God. But not everyone is a priest. Therefore, not everyone is obligated to offer sacrifices.

But contrary to this: As was established above (a. 1), offering sacrifice is part of the law of nature. But everyone is obligated to do those things that are part of the law of nature. Therefore, everyone is obligated to offer sacrifice.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 2), there are two sorts of sacrifice:

The first and most important sort is *interior* sacrifice, which everyone is obligated to offer, since everyone is obligated to offer a devout mind to God.

The second sort is *exterior* sacrifice, which is divided into two:

(a) There is an exterior sacrifice that is praiseworthy only because something is offered to God as a declaration of subjection to God. As regards this sort of exterior sacrifice, those who are under the New

Law or the Old Law are obligated in one way, whereas those who are not under the Law are obligated in a different way. For those who are under the Law are obligated to offer determinate sacrifices in accord with the precepts of the Law. By contrast, those who were not under the Law were obligated to do certain things exteriorly—but not *these* or *those* things in particular—in honor of God, in accord with what was appropriate for those among whom they lived.

(b) There is another sort of exterior sacrifice when exterior acts of the other virtues are taken up into reverence for God. Some of these acts fall under precepts, and everyone is obligated to do them, whereas others are supererogatory and such that not everyone is obligated to do them.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained, not everyone was obligated with respect to the determinate sacrifices that were commanded in the Law; however, as has been explained, they were indeed obligated to offer certain interior and exterior sacrifices.

Reply to objection 2: Even though not everyone knows the virtue of sacrifice explicitly, they still know it implicitly—in the same way that, as was established above (q. 2, aa. 6-8), they have implicit faith.

Reply to objection 3: Priests offer sacrifices that are specifically ordered toward the worship of God (*specialiter ordinata ad cultum divinum*), not only for themselves but also for others. However, as is clear from what has been said above (a. 2 and the present article), there are other sacrifices that anyone can offer on his own behalf to God.