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Question 108 (Partial): Things That Are Contained in the New Law

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By Thomas Aquinas

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Things That Are Contained in the New Law

1. Should the New Law prescribe or forbid any outward works?
2. Does the New Law make sufficient provision in prescribing and forbidding external acts?
3. [OMITTED] Does it direct man sufficiently in the matter of internal acts?
4. Does it fittingly add counsels to precepts?

Article 1. Whether the New Law ought to prescribe or prohibit any external acts?

[Objection 1 omitted]

Objection 2. [It would seem that the New Law should not prescribe or prohibit any external acts. For] the New Law is "the law of the Spirit" (Romans 8:2). But "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). Now there is no liberty when man is bound to do or avoid certain external acts. Therefore the New Law does not prescribe or forbid any external acts.

[Objections 3 and 4 omitted]

I answer that, As stated above (Question 106, Articles 1 and 2), the New Law consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is shown forth by faith that worketh through love. Now men become receivers of this grace through God's Son made man, Whose humanity grace filled first, and thence flowed forth to us. . . . Consequently it was becoming that the grace that flows from the incarnate Word

should be given to us by means of certain external sensible objects [the sacraments]; and that from this inward grace, whereby the flesh is subjected to the Spirit, certain external works should ensue.

. . .

[Reply 1 omitted]

Reply to Objection 2. According to the Philosopher [Aristotle] (*Metaphysics*, 1.2), what is "free is cause of itself." Therefore he acts freely, who acts of his own accord. Now man does of his own accord that which he does from a habit that is suitable to his nature: since a habit inclines one as a second nature. If, however, a habit be in opposition to nature, man would not act according to his nature, but according to some corruption affecting that nature. Since then the grace of the Holy Ghost is like an interior habit bestowed on us and inclining us to act aright, it makes us do freely those things that are becoming to grace, and shun what is opposed to it.

Accordingly the New Law is called the law of liberty in two respects. First, because it does not bind us to do or avoid certain things, except such as are of themselves necessary or opposed to salvation, and come under the prescription or prohibition of the law. Secondly, because it also makes us comply freely with these precepts and prohibitions, inasmuch as we do so through the promptings of grace. It is for these two reasons that the New Law is called "the law of perfect liberty" (James 1:25).

[Reply 3 omitted]

Article 2. Whether the New Law made sufficient ordinations about external acts?

Objection 1. It would seem that the New Law made insufficient ordinations about external acts. Because faith that worketh through charity seems chiefly to belong to the New Law, according to Galatians 5:6: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision: but faith that worketh through charity." But the New Law declared explicitly certain points of faith which were not set forth explicitly in the Old Law; for instance, belief in the Trinity. Therefore it should also have added certain outward moral deeds, which were not fixed in the Old Law.

[Objections 2 through 4 and On the contrary *omitted]*

I answer that, as stated above (Article 1), the New Law had to make such prescriptions or prohibitions alone as are essential for the reception or right use of grace. . . .

The right use of grace is by means of works of charity. These, in so far as they are essential to virtue, pertain to the moral precepts, which also formed part of the Old Law. . . .

Accordingly the New Law had no other external works to determine, by prescribing or forbidding, except the sacraments, and those moral precepts which have a necessary connection with virtue, for instance, that one must not kill, or steal, and so forth.

Reply to Objection 1. Matters of faith are above human reason, and so we cannot attain to them except through grace. Consequently, when grace came to be bestowed more abundantly, the result was an increase in the number of explicit points of faith. On the other hand, it is through human reason that we are directed to works of virtue, for it is the rule of human action, as stated above (Part I-II, Question 19, Article 3; Part I-II, Question 63, Article 2). Wherefore in such matters as these there was no need for any precepts to be given besides the moral precepts of the Law, which proceed from the dictate of reason.

[Replies 2 through 4 omitted]

Article 4. Whether certain definite counsels are fittingly proposed in the New Law?

[Objections and On the contrary *omitted]*

I answer that, The difference between a counsel and a commandment is that a commandment implies obligation, whereas a counsel is left to the option of the one to whom it is given. Consequently in the New Law, which is the law of liberty, counsels are added to the commandments, and not in the Old Law, which is the law of bondage. We must therefore understand the commandments of the New Law to have been given about matters that are necessary to gain the end of eternal bliss, to which end the New Law brings us forthwith: but that the counsels are about matters that render the gaining of this end more assured and expeditious.

Now man is placed between the things of this world, and spiritual goods wherein eternal happiness consists: so that the more he cleaves to the one, the more he withdraws from the other, and conversely. Wherefore he that cleaves wholly to the things of this world, so as to make them his end, and to look upon them as the reason and rule of all he does, falls away altogether from spiritual goods. Hence this disorder is removed by the commandments. Nevertheless, for man to gain the end aforesaid, he does not need to renounce the things of the world altogether: since he can, while using the things of this world, attain to eternal happiness, provided he does not place his end in them: but he will attain more speedily thereto by giving up the goods of this world entirely: wherefore the evangelical counsels are given for this purpose.

Now the goods of this world which come into use in human life, consist in three things: viz. in external wealth pertaining to the “concupiscence of the eyes”; carnal pleasures pertaining to the “concupiscence of the flesh”; and honors, which pertain to the “pride of life,” according to 1 John 2:16: and it is in renouncing these altogether, as far as possible, that the evangelical counsels consist. . . .

[Replies omitted]
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