

THOMAS AQUINAS – CONSULTATION

Topic: Thinking Catholic Interreligiously with Aquinas
 Convener: Dominic Langevin, O.P., Dominican House of Studies
 Moderator: Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, Loyola University of Maryland
 Presenters: Melanie Barrett, Mundelein Seminary/University of St. Mary of the Lake
 Bruce Marshall, Southern Methodist University
 David M. Lantigua, University of Notre Dame

Melanie Barrett, of Mundelein Seminary/University of St. Mary of the Lake, started the session with her paper, “A Thomist Reconsideration of the Torah for the Moral Life of Catholic Christians.” She began by noting the difficulties inherent in a Christian consideration of the saving role of the Torah, and St. Paul’s teaching on two phases of salvation, before and after Christ. Drawing on Aquinas to show the “abiding relevance of the Torah for Christians,” Barrett argued that looking at the Torah can answer moral questions not addressed by the New Testament. In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas contends that the moral precepts oblige all human beings, including the Jewish people and Christians. Some are knowable by reason whereas others necessitate divine instruction. Within the Old Testament, Aquinas identifies the Decalogue as the privileged place where the moral precepts are found, because they were given by God. Aquinas acknowledges that additional divine precepts were given through Moses, but without identifying them. Barrett argued that an examination of Jewish traditions of interpretation of the Torah (e.g., the Midrash) can assist Christians in formulating principles that can be applied to moral questions such as the return of lost objects or the obligation to remove hazards from one’s property. Barrett concluded that Jewish traditions of interpretation, as “bearers of wisdom,” can “help us become better Christians.” Discussion focused on Jewish “case-based” and Christian “principle-based” approaches to moral reasoning.

Bruce Marshall, of Southern Methodist University, then presented his paper entitled “Judaism among the Religions, according to Aquinas.” Marshall noted that the title would more accurately be, “Aquinas on Religions *Other* than Judaism,” since he focused on Aquinas’s approach to the “worship of the gentiles” (*ritus infidelium*). Aquinas classifies non-Christian religions as “unbelief,” and supports corresponding strictures on the availability of their practices in a Christian society, which must promote the common good by directing all to eternal beatitude, and therefore privilege Christian practice. The Judaism of his own time, while also classified as unbelief, is for him exempt from these strictures, because Jews do worship according to divine law. Marshall examined Aquinas’s treatment of different forms of unbelief, noting that for him, it is rarely non-culpable. He then raised the question of how this squares with Aquinas’s teaching on the natural virtue of religion, addressing the apparent paradox that natural law seems to require what God forbids. In fallen nature, the natural inclination to worship a superior by sacrifice will be sinfully directed to other gods unless the true God provides the help of grace. A lively discussion ensued about whether the “God of Aquinas’s five ways” adequately identifies for non-Christians the true God.

David M. Lantigua, from the University of Notre Dame, presented the last paper in the session, entitled “Aristotle, Ancient Romans, and the Amerindians: Spanish Thomists on the Imperial Seduction of Pagan Virtue.” Lantigua noted that his paper dovetailed well with Marshall’s, since he would consider how the principle “*gratia non tollit naturae*” gets applied as a political axiom to non-believers.” Lantigua discussed Aquinas’s treatment of pagan virtue in *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus* 2. He noted that in sixteenth century Spain, pagan virtue discourse included Augustine, Aquinas, Aristotle, and humanist sources, in the context of European contact with New World indigenous peoples. Early-modern Spanish humanists and Thomists both retrieved classical ideas about pagan virtue, but with opposite intent. Humanists argued that Indians were “barbarians” with no “political virtue” and so could be subjugated, seeking to justify European expansion in the Americas under the model of the Roman Empire. Thomists at Salamanca defended the native peoples as examples of true virtue, identifying the Spaniards, who exercised coercion and violence against the innocent, as the “pagans” and “barbarians”; in a nutshell, these Thomists argued that “the apostles were sent as sheep among wolves, not vice versa.” Lantigua focused on the debate at Valladolid between the humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas to show how Spanish Thomists refuted claims of European imperialism, applying classical ideas about pagan virtue in the context of law and political thought. The evangelical challenge to pagan virtue (or counterfeit virtue) by Spanish Thomists would yield a robust self-critique of the imperial vices of European conquest and open new vistas for recognizing the goodness, rationality, and basic rights of non-Christians in the New World.

DARIA SPEZZANO
Providence College
Providence, Rhode Island