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“Salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22): Aquinas, God, and the People of God

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In a recent column in the *National Catholic Reporter*, John L. Allen, commenting on Pope Benedict XVI's January 17th visit to the Great Synagogue in Rome, suggested that the speech made by Benedict on that occasion "reflected a broad thrust in his approach to interfaith relations, away from specifically theological dialogue in favor of social, cultural and political cooperation."¹ This suggestion was refuted by Daniel Madigan, an eminent speaker on inter-faith matters, and an expert on Islam. Madigan suggests that interreligious dialogue must be theological if it is to lead peoples of different faiths into deeper relationship with one another. He reminds us that Vatican II means Catholics in particular have no option but to seriously engage in theological dialogue with those of other faiths. "One cannot," he writes, "say that we adore together the one God and then say that we cannot or may not talk together about that God, or about that sense of adoration that God evokes in us. This is after all precisely what theological dialogue means."² Talk about God is foundational to interreligious theological dialogue, a dialogue that cannot be regarded as solely a Vatican II initiative. Although the explicit praxis of interreligious dialogue for Roman Catholics may indeed be a fruit of Vatican II, serious engagement with other religions has long been part of theological work. To illustrate this fact, this essay will explore the thought of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1275), regarded by many as the greatest of the medieval theologians. Particular focus will be on his *Commentary on Romans* chapters 9-11 and his consideration of the issues of predestination and election as they pertain to the Jewish people.

The fact that engagement with another religion is essentially a question of the type of god, or deity, believed in will be

¹ John L. Allen Jr., "Two experts insist: Interreligious dialogue lives!"

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/future-church/two-experts-insist-interreligious-dialogue-lives> Accessed 6/6/2010.

² Ibid.

identified as central in Aquinas' attempt to understand the place of Jews in the story of salvation. Tension, together with a search for internal coherence, not always accomplished, might be seen as the trademarks of these writings. The God that Aquinas knows through his theological study and prayer is a just and merciful one. The question thus is: How does this just and merciful God relate to the Jewish people who crucified Jesus, as the tradition taught? Aquinas is clear: Jesus is a Jew. In his first major theological work he refers to Jesus as *Frater Iudaeorum*.³ He welcomed assistance from Jewish thinkers in his own work. This paper does not seek to portray Aquinas as a participant in interreligious dialogue, to do so would be anachronistic. Rather it is his willingness to engage with thinkers outside of his tradition, in particular Jewish thinkers, in his attempts to articulate with deepening clarity the Truth, what he terms God, that is of concern. The writings of Moses Maimonides, "Rabbi Moses" (1135-1204) played a particularly influential role in his intellectual development.⁴ Yet the time in which Aquinas lived, the thirteenth century, was a period of evolving anti-Judaism. In the thirteenth century "the very legitimacy of the European Jewish community" was being called into

³ His commentary on the *Sentences* was composed largely during his first tenure in Paris (1252-1254), still unfinished in 1256. The question of circumcision is the context of this address (*In IV Libri Sententiarum* IV, d.1, q.2, a.2). The mature Aquinas deals with the question of circumcision in detail in *Summa Theologiae* III q.70. In this question he writes that "circumcision was a sacrament, and a preparation for baptism" (ST III q.70 a.1 ad.2); it was a preparation for baptism "inasmuch as it was a profession of faith in Christ, which we also profess in baptism" (ST III q.70 a.2 c).

⁴ As well as Maimonides the writings of Avicbron (Ibn Gabirol), also influenced his thought. Conversely, Aquinas' doctrines also found favor among Jewish writers after his time. See David Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish Thinkers" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, eds. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60-84.

question.⁵ Up to this point the official ecclesiastical attitude had been tolerance, as while judged guilty of deicide the Jews were also recognized, following the teachings of Augustine, as “chest-keepers.”⁶ The anti-Talmud controversy began in Paris in 1239 (in which Albert the Great, Aquinas’ teacher, himself a renowned scholar, seems to have been involved). As some of Aquinas’ questions indicate, this was a time of forced conversions and of forced baptism of children (See ST II-II q.10 a.12; ST III q.68 a.10).⁷ He was not immune to the change in official ecclesiastical attitudes and yet it seems that his provenance from Aquino in the region of Naples, then a part of the kingdom of Sicily, together with his own studies in the secular university of Naples, both introduced and positively predisposed him to Jewish culture.⁸

⁵ Jeremy Cohen, “Towards a Functional Classification of Jewish anti-Christian Polemic in the High Middle Ages,” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, eds. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 104.

⁶ “Codicem portat Judeus, unde credit Christianus. Librarii nostri facti sunt....” Augustine, *Ennarr. In Ps.*, LXVI, 9. Since the time of Augustine the Jews were recognized as *capsarii* for the Christians; they carried the scrolls, the sacred scriptures which guard the truth of Christian faith. In this way the elder brother (Esau) has served the younger (Isaac). This remark is probably of greater weight given the context of Talmud burning.

⁷ See Steven C. Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews. Insights into his commentary on Romans 9-11* (New York and Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 19-35 for a succinct account of medieval Church policy on the Jews. See also Robert Chazan, ed. *Church, State, and Jew in the Middle Ages*. Library of Jewish Studies. (New York: Behrman House, 1980); Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁸ “Latin, Muslim, and Jewish culture mingled freely in Sicily in a unique way that was peculiarly Sicilian.” James Weisheipl, OP, *Friar Thomas D’Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 15.

In the *Commentary on Romans*, specifically in chapters 9-11, Aquinas struggles with the concepts of election and predestination in his attempts to account for the salvation of humanity, and in particular the salvation of those who crucified Christ. He finds himself immersed in a struggle to balance God’s justice and God’s mercy, while maintaining Divine Providence as the overarching explanatory framework. In themselves these are complex issues, a complexity much increased by their application to the so-called Jewish question.

Predestination and Election in the *Summa Theologiae*

Before exploring the issues of predestination, election and the Jews in the thought of Aquinas, a brief exposition of his teachings in question 23 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, a question which focuses on predestination, is helpful.⁹ It is in the context of predestination that the question of election is dealt with. The *Summa* is not constrained by a *lectio continua* of scripture, as Aquinas’ gospel commentaries inevitably are, and so we see the selective employment of sacred scripture, the teachings of the Fathers and of ecclesiastical authorities in the formulation of the views most properly his own. At the same time, as shall be seen, Aquinas does not allow the text to

⁹ Giles Emery, while acknowledging the difficulty in dating Thomas’ commentaries on the works of Paul, suggests that Paul was probably taught in two stages, first in Italy (probably Rome) between 1265 and 1268, and secondly in Paris and Naples. The course on Romans he posits as having been composed in Naples 1272-73, the last years of his life. See Giles Emery “Brief Catalogue of the Works of St Thomas Aquinas” in Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Vol. 1 The Person and His Work, trans. R. Royal (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 330-361: 340. Another view is that of Boguslawski who suggests that the *Prima Pars* (1268-69) and Aquinas’ first lecture series on Romans were contemporaneous labors. Whatever the exact dating it is evident that ST I q.23 “informs these three chapters (9-11) of Aquinas’ commentary and serves as the essential point of access for this interpretation of Romans 9-11.” Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews*, 45.

dictate theology but feels free to go beyond Paul's writings to validate what he thinks is correct theologically.

While the question addresses the issue of predestination, it is fundamentally a consideration of God, and God's actions. Predestination is predestination to eternal life, to glory. It is a part of providence, of God's plan for rational creatures, and is concerned with the "whereto" of human life (ST I q.23), not with the "wherefrom."¹⁰ Predestination involves the conferring of a good that is beyond that which is due to the human and thus it pertains to mercy (ST I q.23 a.1).¹¹ The gift nature of predestination is illustrated by Thomas' statement that "predestination is not anything in the predestined; but only in the person who predestines" (ST I q.23 a.2 c).¹² It is an immanent activity in God, its execution involves calling and magnification. Predestination "does not put anything in the predestined. But its execution...has an effect on them" (ST I q.23 a. 2 ad 1).¹³ Neither good works, nor grace, merit that a person be predestined—predestination is from eternity; it is not temporal. However one can posit a certain relation between predestination and grace, "as of cause to effect, and of act to its object"

(ST I q.23 a. 2 ad 4).¹⁴ The gifted, unearned nature of predestination is central. While all are ordained to eternal life by the providence of God (ST I q.22) providence permits certain defects in things, for the greater good. Hence God may be said to reprobate some (ST I q.23 a.3 c). The language used is important—while the providence of God ordains all to eternal life, some are permitted to fall away. Reprobation cannot be deemed a positive exclusion; it is rather a non-election.

Reprobation differs in its causality from predestination. This latter is the cause both of what is expected in the future life by the predestined—namely, glory—and of what is received in this life—namely, grace. Reprobation, however is not the cause of what is in the present—namely, defect; but it is the cause of abandonment by God. It is the cause, however, of what is assigned in the future—namely, eternal punishment. But defect proceeds from the free-will of the person who is reprobated and deserted by grace (ST I q.23 a.3 ad 2).¹⁵

This is complex. God loves all and wishes good to all, and "the divine will is efficacious" (ST I q.19 a.8). Yet, while God wills that all might be saved, and makes salvation possible for all (see ST I q.21 a.1 ad 3) the efficaciousness of what God wills has to be contingent on human free will. We play an active part in the divine drama of God's involvement in creation, in the story of the human journey into God's love. So while God wills that all should be saved, simultaneously God permits, in view of a greater good known only to God, that some may sin and thus

¹⁰ See also ST I qq. 44-49 where Aquinas treats specifically of creation. God is identified as "the efficient, the exemplar and the final cause of all things" (ST I q.44 a.4 ad 3). Aquinas writes that "all things desire God as their end" (ST I q.44 a.4 ad 2). Creation and salvation are linked concepts; indeed one might say that creation is for the sake of salvation. Salvation takes place in history. It is achieved through the incarnation of the Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit (ST III q.32). For Aquinas this is true of Jew and Christian alike.

¹¹ That Aquinas begins his response to this article with a citation from Romans reminds the reader of the close connection between both pieces of work. Thomas Aquinas is primarily a *magister in sacra scriptura*, a biblical theologian.

¹² Praedestinatio non est aliquid in praedestinitis, sed in praedestinate tantum.

¹³ Unde praedestinatio non ponit aliquid in praedestinato. Sed executio eius, quae transit in exteriores res, ponit in eis aliquem effectum.

¹⁴ Ut causae ad effectum, et actus ad obiectum.

¹⁵ Ad secundum dicendum quod aliter se habet reprobatio in causando, quam praedestinatio. Nam praedestinatio est causa et eius quod expectatur in futura vita a praedestinitis, scilicet gloriae; et eius quod percipitur in praesenti, scilicet gratiae. Reprobatio vero non est causa eius quod est in praesenti, scilicet culpae; sed est causa derelictionis a deo. Est tamen causa eius quod redditur in futuro, scilicet poenae aeternae. Sed culpa provenit ex libero arbitrio eius qui reprobatur et a gratia deseritur.

may not attain glory. This has to be possible if human freedom to choose is to be safeguarded. In this way God is said to reprobate in so far as God permits us to choose other goods to love at the expense of loving God.¹⁶ Aquinas notes that “as people are ordained to eternal life through the providence of God, it likewise is part of that providence to permit some to fall away from that end; this is called reprobation” (ST I q.23 a.3 c).¹⁷ The asymmetry is important. The concept of double predestination is never at issue.¹⁸ Reprobation is permitted, predestination is conferred. The distinction though subtle is key. That God should reprobate is not a negative statement about God. Rather that God should destine any for glory is a

¹⁶ Aquinas seeks at all times to safeguard the free will of the person being reprobated, or indeed the one predestined. While the predestined must “necessarily be saved” it is a “conditional necessity” which “does not do away with the liberty of choice.” (ST I q.23 a.3 ad 3)

¹⁷ Unde, cum per divinam providentiam homines in vitam aeternam ordinentur, pertinet etiam ad divinam providentiam, ut permittat aliquos ab isto fine deficere. Et hoc dicitur reprobare.

¹⁸ While the beginnings of a doctrine on double predestination can be found in Augustine, it is with the writings of the French reformer John Calvin (1509-1564), that the concept of a double predestination receives substantial development. His great theological work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, devotes a chapter to this doctrine: “In conformity, therefore, to the clear doctrine of the Scripture, we assert, that by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined, both whom He would admit to salvation, and whom He would condemn to destruction. We affirm that this counsel, as far as concerns the elect, is founded on His gratuitous mercy, totally irrespective of human merit; but that to those whom He devotes to condemnation, the gate of life is closed by a just and irreprehensible, but incomprehensible, judgment. In the elect, we consider calling as an evidence of election, and justification as another token of its manifestation, till they arrive in glory, which constitutes its completion. As God seals His elect by vocation and justification, so by excluding the reprobate from the knowledge of His name and the sanctification of His Spirit, He affords an indication of the judgment that awaits them.” See <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/calvin-predest.html> Accessed 12/20/2010.

superabundance of kindness, an excess of justice. It is a kindness beyond all deserved justice for the human thus destined.¹⁹

The question of election, God’s choice of the predestined, is addressed solely in article 4 of question 23.²⁰ As scripture teaches, God wills all to be saved (ST I a.4 ob 3). However in his attempt to protect human free will Aquinas distinguishes between God’s will that all be saved (God’s antecedent will) and the fact that humans must be permitted to exercise free choice in resisting their predestination to eternal life (God’s subsequent will). This is where the issue of election comes to the forefront. Aquinas is trying to explain what he observes, people sinning, damaging one another, with the God that he knows as a God of love. It seems that God elects some, and thus appears to love these more than others, making them “good,” worthy of predestination.²¹ The only reason Aquinas can give to account for this is God’s will. It cannot be deemed unjust of God that equals be treated unequally as the effects of predestination are free gifts of God’s grace. Predestination simply has “the goodness of God for its reason” (ST I q.23 a.5 c).²² Indeed the whole thing is very mysterious for “God allows some evils, lest many good things should never happen” (ST I q.23 a.5 ad 3).²³ This principle will be of importance when it

¹⁹ God gives to each person more than strict justice demands (ST I q.21 a.4).

²⁰ While the question of election is addressed in article 4 of ST I q.23 there is no article specifically devoted to this issue in the *Summa Theologiae*.

²¹ Garrigou-Lagrange speaks here of predilection, which he identifies as central to Aquinas’ writings on election and predestination. See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, translated by Dom Bede Rose. (St. Louis, MO.: Herder, 1939).

²² The placing of the question on predestination, after questions dealing with God’s love, justice, mercy and providence, is itself instructive. God’s goodness, the reason for predestination is likewise the explanation for God’s creation of the world (ST I q.32 a.1 ad 3).

²³ Deus permittit aliqua mala fieri, ne multa bona impediatur.

comes to discussion of the elect, the Jewish people, and Thomas' consideration of them in Romans (interestingly he cites Romans 9:22-23 in this article).²⁴

Aquinas seems to struggle with the complex ideas he is trying at once to understand and explain, and he utilizes the subtleties of language in his attempts to reach some form of clarity: "Predestination most certainly and infallibly takes effect; yet it does not impose any necessity" (ST I q.23 a.6 c).²⁵ It has nothing whatsoever to do with merit (ST I q.23 a.5).²⁶ Predestination is a part of providence, and the order of providence is infallible (ST I q.22 a. 4), and yet free will is safeguarded as "the effect of predestination has its contingency" (ST I q.23 a.6).²⁷ This again is God's doing. God employs intermediary causes "in order that the beauty of order may be preserved in the universe; and also that He may communicate to creatures the dignity of causality" (ST I q.23 a.8 ad.2).²⁸ "We" help God,

like a servant helps their master we can assist in the furthering of predestination but we cannot impede it (ST I q.23 a.8 ad.3). At the same time we may lose our "crown by mortal sin" (ST I q.23 a.6 ad.1).²⁹

In trying to understand what Aquinas is saying, a consideration of the concept of time, as that in which all creation exists, together with the realization that God exists in eternity, is essential.³⁰ There is no before or after "in God's thought, but He understands all things simultaneously." (SCG I 55)³¹ Nothing in God comes before anything else. God "is" in eternity. Predestination is a human concept, one pertaining to creatures living in time yet destined to share eternal life with God. The theory of predestination seeks to explain how that possibility can be realized. For Aquinas, God is eternal, a teaching he concludes from God's immutability, (see ST I q.10 a.2), and eternity belongs properly to God alone (ST I q.10 a.3). This is foundational. Discourse about predestination is human speech about God, and as always our words strain as they seek to speak of God. The term predestination reflects our human perspective. There is no before or after in the God who is eternal. The "pre" in "predestination" reflects human experience of the

²⁴ In an earlier work, the *Sentences*, election is defined as "the divine ordination itself, by which certain ones are preferred to others for the attaining of beatitude" (I *Sent.* d.41.1.2 resp). It is a "certain segregation," temporal in so far as it is executed in this world, and eternal in so far as God has from eternity willed to separate the good from the evil, the good being elected, predestined for eternal life. The elect are predestined to grace for this life and glory in the next (I *Sent.* d.41.1.2). In III *Sent.* d.32.2 resp. *dilectio amicitiae* is specified as the cause of election. "Predestination, additionally, signifies the preparation of the goods of grace and the goods of glory for the elect by means of which they are conformed to that end." Boguslawski, *Aquinas on the Jews*, 62.

²⁵ Praedestinatio certissime et infallibiliter consequitur suum effectum, nec tamen imponit necessitatem.

²⁶ "[N]obody has been so insane as to say that merit is the cause of divine predestination as regards the act of the predestinator (God)." [Nullus ergo fuit ita insanae mentis, qui diceret merita esse causam divinae praedestinationis, ex parte actus praedestinantis.] (ST I q.23 a.5 c).

²⁷ Libertas arbitrii non tollitur, ex qua contingenter provenit praedestinationis effectus.

²⁸ Ut ordinis pulchritudo servetur in rebus, et ut etiam creaturis dignitatem causalitatis communicet.

²⁹ Et sic suam coronam aliquis amittere potest per peccatum mortale sequens.

³⁰ For an informative discussion on the issue of eternity see E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, "Eternity" in *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429-458. In this article eternity is defined as "the condition of having eternity as one's mode of existence" (430). This pertains solely to God. For discussion on the eternity of the world see *Summa Contra Gentiles* Bk II, 32-38.

³¹ "Igitur nec consideratio Dei habet prius et posterius, sed omnia simul intelligit." The writings of Boethius, who defined eternity as "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life" (*The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, Prose 6 422.9-11), were very influential in Aquinas' consideration of eternity, in particular as it applies to God. See also *Summa Theologiae* I q.10.

divine plan. What is predestined happens but it does not happen “later” from the perspective of God—in God’s thought there is no succession, therefore whatever He knows He considers simultaneously. From the human perspective, that of temporality, things are necessarily perceived differently. Yet it is imperative for human beings to be aware that they are not like trams, moving in predestinate grooves, predestined to arrive at the next station.³² God’s love has graced humans with the ability to choose freely to love God, or to choose some lesser good at the expense of loving God. This latter is difficult. It is hard to resist love, almost impossible to resist divine love. Indeed Herbert McCabe, an English Dominican and scholar of Aquinas, speculates that “it is very hard to hold out for a lifetime against such love; and perhaps nobody ever does.”³³

Romans 9-11³⁴

This is the framework of thought from which Aquinas engaged in dialogue with Romans 9-11, and the question of the Jews, election and predestination.³⁵ In a world purview where Jewish people were being increasingly criticized, and their way of life coming under pressure as to its legitimacy, Aquinas engaged with Sacred Scripture seeking to find the truth of the

³² Herbert McCabe, “Predestination” in *God Still Matters*, ed. Brian Davies, OP (London/New York: Continuum), 182-186: 185.

³³ Herbert McCabe, “Predestination,” 186.

³⁴ Larcher, Fabian R., trans., and Jeremy Holmes, ed. *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans*. E-text, www.aquinas.avemaria.edu/Aquinas_on_Romans.pdf. All references (paragraph numbers) to this work shall be included in the body of the article. Latin text available at <http://www.thomasinstituut.org/thomasinstituut/scripts/index.htm>

³⁵ “Aquinas’ use of elect/election occurs in eighteen paragraphs in chapters 9-11 and in five additional paragraphs in the remainder of the letter. By contrast, Paul uses election four times in Romans 9-11, specifically, 9.11; 11.5, 7, and 28. He speaks of the “elect” in 8.33 and 16.13.” Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews*, 76, n.20.

story of Israel’s irrevocable predestination—indeed was it irrevocable? And if it was not, what did this say about God and God’s fidelity to covenant? And if the Jews remain the elect, the first chosen, where does that leave all the followers of Christ? It seems that for Aquinas, Augustinian supersessionism (the replacement of the new Israel, the Church, for the old) was not sufficient.³⁶ In his commentary on Romans, he addresses the story of the Jews using the theological concepts of predestination and election previously addressed in the *Summa*. Aquinas uses Paul to remind the reader of the “greatness of the Jews” and of “how the Gentiles have been drawn into that greatness” (*Super Epistolam S. Pauli Lectura, Ad Romanos*, 735).³⁷ This acknowledged greatness of the Jews is the foundation for all his discussion, and he explains in some detail the reasons for this greatness, not limiting his use of scripture to Paul. The Jews enjoy “an ancient (*pristinam*) dignity” (742), a dignity, a greatness which stems from their descent from “Jacob who was called Israel (Gen 32:28)” (743).³⁸ They have been blessed by God temporally with the gift of sonship (Ex 4:22) by means of the covenant sealed by circumcision, the law and divine worship; and blessed eternally with the gift of glory promised to the children of God (Ex 40:32). Aquinas writes that the “promises made in the Old Testament and fulfilled by Christ seem made especially to the Jews” (744).³⁹ The centrality of Christ is

³⁶ Mathew Levering highlights the centrality of the Old Testament in Aquinas’ understanding of salvation. As the title to his work indicates, Levering presents Aquinas as portraying Christ as the fulfillment of the Torah and the Temple. The Mosaic law thus remains of significance to Christians, and is brought to conclusion in Christ. See Mathew Levering, *Christ’s Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

³⁷ Primo commemorat dignitatem Iudaeorum; secundo ostendit quomodo gentiles ad illam dignitatem sunt assumpti (Cap.9 lect.1).

³⁸ A genere Iacob descendentes, qui est dictus Israel (Cap.9 lect.1).

³⁹ Promissiones enim factae in veteri testamento impletae per Christum, Iudaeis praecipue factae videntur (Cap.9 lect.1).

acknowledged as part of the Jewish story. They are great by origin, from the Patriarchs (745) and great because of their descendant Christ. Indeed it was Christ himself who taught that “Salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22) (746),⁴⁰ and Christ is truly great, as Aquinas teaches, for he is God (747).

Aquinas is struck by Paul’s assertion that one can be adopted into the sonship of God, i.e., become a son of Abraham by imitating the faith and works of Abraham (“God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Mt 3:9)) (344). Mere physical descent does not gift one with greatness—the dignity of the Jews refers to God’s selection, a selection which “applies generally to Jews and Gentiles.” Paul’s astuteness in his use of the story of Rebecca’s children is remarked upon and Aquinas utilizes this to discuss the mystery of God’s election. Jacob and Esau are the sons of Rebecca and Isaac, and yet one was set over the other “in virtue of the promise” (758) before their birth.⁴¹ Election is not by merit; it is never deserved. Jacob was elected so that God’s purpose might be fulfilled: he was chosen “not by reason of merits but of election, i.e., inasmuch as God himself spontaneously fore chose one over the other, not because he was holy but in order that he be holy” (759).⁴² Predestination is because of God’s will. It has nothing to do with merit.⁴³

⁴⁰ Salus ex Iudaeis est (Cap.9 lect.1).

⁴¹ Quod per repromissionem (lit: counter promise) est unus filiorum Rebeccae alii praelatus (Cap.9 lect. 2).

⁴² Non secundum merita sed *secundum electionem*, id est in quantum ipse Deus spontanea voluntate unum alteri praelegit, non quia sanctus erat, sed ut sanctus esset (Cap.9 lect. 2).

⁴³ In Catholic theology the term merit (*meritum*) is generally understood as a reward due to a person as the result of a good work done. It needs to be very carefully articulated to avoid the idea of “earning” one’s own salvation.

Paul’s citation from scripture, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom 9:13) is utilized to develop Aquinas’ thought. God’s love is first. Jacob did not merit this choice of God, “[c]onsequently, one must say that God loved Jacob from all eternity” (762).⁴⁴ God’s love is the cause of all good that is to be found in a creature (ST I q.6 a.4). God elects someone not because of a good perceived, “but it is because God loved him that God prefers him to someone by election” (763).⁴⁵

Aquinas next addresses the question of rejection, an issue which also pertains to eternal life. Complexly, he asserts that while predestination is not a reward for merits foreknown, the foreknowledge of sins can be the reason for rejection, for punishment. The sins of the rejected they “have from themselves, not from God” (764).⁴⁶ They have chosen a lesser good at the expense of choosing God’s friendship.

Inevitably the question of God’s justice arises. If merit does not lead to the reward of eternal life, God must be unjust. With this issue Aquinas brings the reader to the heart of the God question. Merit cannot be a cause of predestination for “nothing which is an effect of predestination can be taken as a reason for a predestination” (772).⁴⁷ Predestination does not pertain to distributive justice, but is to be seen in the light of things given spontaneously and out of mercy. For Aquinas to give alms to one beggar and not to another is a demonstration of mercy, and is unjust to neither beggar. Similarly, that God predestines anyone shows that God is merciful. On the other hand, those God does not predestine cannot be deemed to

⁴⁴ Et ideo oportet dicere quod Deus ab aeterno Iacob dilexit (Cap.9 lect. 2).

⁴⁵ Sed potius eo quod ipsum diligit, praefert eum aliis eligendo (Cap.9 lect. 2).

⁴⁶ Peccata quae a seipsis habent, non a Deo (Cap.9 lect. 2).

⁴⁷ Manifestum est enim quod nihil potest poni ut ratio praedestinationis (Cap.9 lect.3).

have been treated unjustly, for all have been “born subject to damnation on account of the sin of the first parent” (773).⁴⁸

Predestination is gratuitous; it is grace, gift (see also ST I q.23 a.5 ad 3 for very similar reasoning). God remains the epitome of mercy. Temporal graces are granted to those who are predestined, and so they are moved to good. God is judged the author of these good deeds; with regard to the hardening of people’s hearts, and acts of malice, God is deemed to permit their actions “by not affording grace” (784).⁴⁹ It is important to note that there is no such thing as an “anti-grace,” an inspiration of God by which we choose evil. Sin is freely chosen, we harden our own hearts.⁵⁰ The reader of both Paul and Aquinas is still left asking “why?” And it seems we will continue to ask why for Aquinas writes “in this we are given to understand that one should not examine the reason for God’s judgments with the intention of comprehending them, for they exceed human reason” (789).⁵¹ What remains of central importance is that all God’s works seek to manifest God’s goodness. With humans, made from dust, any good they possess must be clearly seen as due to God’s goodness, while any lack of same cannot be seen as an injustice of God.

When applied to the Gentiles, Aquinas finds the fact of God’s election even more astounding. The Gentiles did not share divine sonship and so were not called the People of God. They did not enjoy the privilege of divine love, nor did they enjoy a share in the divine compassion which delivered the Jews

⁴⁸ Omnes homines propter peccatum primi parentis damnationi nascantur obnoxii (Cap.9 lect.3).

⁴⁹ Sed non apponendo gratiam (Cap.9 lect.3).

⁵⁰ McCabe, “Predestination,” 185.

⁵¹ In quo datur intelligi quod homo non debet scrutari rationem divinorum iudiciorum cum intentione comprehendendi, eo quod excedant rationem humanam (Cap.9 lect.5).

from original sin by the exterior sign of faith, circumcision (ST I-II q.102 a.5). All of this has been achieved through Christ, through whom “they have become God’s people” (799)⁵² and even more powerfully “*sons of God* by divine adoption” (800).⁵³ Those who had clearly been defined as ‘not-my-people’ can now be called children of God (800). Righteousness is not based on works, or on fidelity to the law, but on faith in Christ.

Yet the complex question of the Jews and salvation remains central to Paul, and hence to Aquinas. While their sin is great (some of them crucified Christ) divine mercy ensured that they were not completely exterminated. God is merciful and just, God does not revoke his covenant. Israel is not abandoned. Israel cannot be, for God is faithful. Some Jews, a remnant (802), will be saved. Paul cites Is 10:22 and Aquinas struggles to interpret this verse:⁵⁴ “Few will be converted from Israel...not all, not the majority, but a certain few” (802),⁵⁵ and they will be saved because of “the efficacy of the word of the gospel” (803).⁵⁶ The evangelical word is efficacious as it explains the moral precepts of the Law. The word of the Gospel “shortens the words of the Law.” It is, Aquinas suggests, “more perfect,” “more profound,” “simpler and briefer” as it focuses

⁵² Sed per Christum facti sunt populus Dei (Cap.9 lect.5).

⁵³ *Ibi vocabuntur filii Dei* per divinam adoptionem (Cap.9 lect.5).

⁵⁴ “And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved’” (Romans 9:27).

⁵⁵ *Reliquiae salvae fient*, id est non omnes, nec maior pars, sed aliqui pauci qui relinquentur ex excidio aliorum (Cap.9 lect.5).

⁵⁶ Ponit efficaciam evangelici verbi (Cap.9 lect.5). In a sense this is what the controversial document *Dominus Iesus* sought to reaffirm. It remains a point of debate as to the wisdom of issuing the document at this point in history, and as to reason for so doing. *Dominus Iesus*, On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 6 August, 2000.

everything on Christ, and Christ's sacrifice, and on the "law" of charity (803). The focus has shifted from the Law of Israel and the People of God to justification through faith in Jesus Christ. The problem is not with the Law per se, for the Law of Moses "if it is well understood" teaches righteousness (809).⁵⁷ However now, henceforth, justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ (808), the foundation of the Church, a foundation which has become a stumbling block for the Jews (811), due to their ignorance and their unbelief. This is what leads them to persecute Christ and his followers.⁵⁸

But, as Aquinas teaches, Paul felt compassion for the Jews, his brethren, and prayed to God for their salvation (Rom 10:1 ff).⁵⁹ He did not see their fall as universal, nor unprofitable or irreparable. In Paul's desire for the salvation of the Jews Aquinas sees him as conformed to God "Who desires all people to be saved" (1 Tm 2:4) (814).⁶⁰ Paul, he tells us, had compassion for them as they sinned not from malice but from ignorance. They have a zeal for God, but zeal alone is

⁵⁷ Vel sectando legem iustitiae, id est legem Moysi, quae est lex iustitiae si sit bene intellecta: quia docet iustitiam (Cap.9 lect.5).

⁵⁸ For people of any faith, whether or not they profess faith in Jesus the Christ, it is the constant teaching of the Catholic Church that salvation is achieved through the incarnation of the Son, an event in history, and by the gift of the Spirit. This too was Aquinas' belief. Once more the issue of temporality and eternity are of importance.

⁵⁹ From this we can learn that "we should pray for unbelievers that they may be saved because faith is a gift from God" (814).

⁶⁰ Et in hoc Deo conformabatur, qui, ut dicitur I Tm II, 4, *vult omnes homines salvos fieri* (Cap.10 lect.1). A consideration of natural law would be of interest here. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in detailed discussion it is pertinent to note that Aquinas' "notion of natural law, as it turns out, cannot be separated from his account of grace." Fergus Kerr, review of "Mathew Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple. Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas*," in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 55(2004) 733-737:733.

insufficient for their "zeal was not guided by correct knowledge as long as they were ignorant of the truth" (816).⁶¹ Aquinas next reinforces an important theological position. Despite their zeal for God, the Jews, he wrote, sought to establish their own righteousness based on the Law (819), and in doing this "*they did not submit to God's righteousness*, i.e., they refused to be subject to Christ through faith in whom people are made just by God" (818).⁶² The Jewish people thought they could merit salvation if they obeyed the law, but it is this very belief which is now leading them astray for God's righteousness is more perfect than that of the Law (820). There is a distinction between human righteousness and God's righteousness, a righteousness based on the Law and one based on faith, faith in Jesus Christ, the faith that leads to eternal life. Aquinas sees Paul, the Apostle, attributing to Christ what Moses "said of the commandments of the Law; because Christ is the Word of God in which are all God's commandments" (825).⁶³ God's salvific will has not changed, but human understanding has been greatly enriched.

Having stated that the Jews have fallen because of their ignorance, Aquinas next addresses the perennial question of how people come to know God, to faith. By hearing, Paul tells us. This hearing can happen in two ways: first immediately from God revealing, which Aquinas terms an internal hearing, and secondly the hearing which comes from preaching. Preaching is a gift of God, and the preacher seeks to help people to live well in this world, and to reach the next. However, here we

⁶¹ Quia scilicet eorum zelus per rectam scientiam non ordinatur dum ignorant veritatem (Cap.10 lect.1).

⁶² Quia neminem *ad perfectum adduxit lex*, ut dicitur Hebr. VII, 19, sed ordinat homines in Christum quem promittebat, et praefigurabat (Cap.10 lect.1).

⁶³ Nec est inconueniens si quod Moyses dixit de mandato legis, hoc apostolus attribuit Christo: quia Christus est verbum Dei, in quo sunt omnia Dei mandata (Cap.10 lect.1).

move into the realm of mystery. In Aquinas' day just as much as in our own, not everyone who hears believes—the Jews heard and only some came to believe in Jesus. For “the outwardly spoken word of the preacher is not sufficient to cause faith, unless a person's heart is attracted inwardly by the power of God speaking...Consequently, if people believe, it should not be attributed to the industry of the preacher” (842).⁶⁴ It is God's work, and we are back again to the idea of election and predestination. Two things are required for faith, first the gift of grace which inclines the heart to believe, and the other is the decision about what to believe. So we can say about the Jews that while they sinned from ignorance [813] their sin is not entirely excusable “because their ignorance was not invincible or rooted in necessity, but somehow voluntary” (845).⁶⁵ They have heard, have they not, he wonders. They heard the teachings of the Apostles in Jesus' time, and before that they had the Law and the prophets.⁶⁶ Hence their lack of understanding seems to be inexcusable, for unlike the Gentiles of yore or the unbelievers of today, the Jews have always had their Law and the prophets. So, the question remains, has God rejected them? Aquinas does not mince words—the fall of the Jews is deplorable, not entirely excusable (813), and yet it is not universal (859) for

⁶⁴ Hoc autem dicit ideo ut ostendatur quod verbum exterius loquentis non est causa sufficiens fidei, nisi cor hominis attrahatur interius virtute Dei loquentis ... Et sic quod homines credunt, non est attribuendum praedicatoris industriae (Cap.10 lect. 2).

⁶⁵ Eorum talis casus non est excusabilis ex toto, quia eorum ignorantia non fuit invincibilis vel ex necessitate existens, sed quodammodo voluntaria (Cap.10 lect. 3).

⁶⁶ With regard to those who have not heard, and so are excused from the sin of unbelief, Aquinas follows Church teaching and says they will not obtain God's blessing, the removal of original sin, or the removal of any sin they added by leading an evil life “for these they are deservedly condemned.” However, adding his own caveat, he notes that if any of them “did what was in his power, the Lord would provide for him according to his mercy” (849). The goodness and the greatness of God are paramount.

“God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (863).⁶⁷ This is not the first time, Aquinas notes, that the Jewish people have turned from the worship of the one God. In the time of Elijah, and indeed in many other situations in the past, the prophets have had to intervene in the relationship between God and God's people “in order that people's sins but not people be destroyed” (866).⁶⁸

In his commentary on Romans 11:11-16, Aquinas moves to a central point of his discourse, and makes explicit the implicit principles of predestination. First, he reminds us that the fall of the Jews is not universal (859), and then journeys with Paul to show why the fall of some “was neither useless nor irreparable” (878).⁶⁹ Much of what is said in this section is a replication of what Aquinas already said in ST I q.23 a.6 ad 3. Everything rests on God's goodness. For Aquinas the subject of theology is always God (ST I q.1 a.7), a God that is good, merciful, and just. This God permits evil to happen, in this case the Jews to stumble and fall for the sake of salvation of others: “The providence of God is operative in the fall of the Jews, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the ultimate restoration of Israel – all essential components of τό μυστήριον τούτο (Romans 11.25).”⁷⁰ The fall of the Jews enabled the Gentiles to be saved—the crucifixion of Christ redeemed them through his blood, the apostles, rejected by the Jews, preached to the Gentiles, and even their scattering, the *diaspora* of the Jewish people, was useful as in this way the books of the Jews, giving testimony to Christian faith, were widely spread.

⁶⁷ Dicit ergo primo: non solum ego (Paul) non sum repulsus sed *Deus non repulit plebem suam*, totam, *quam praescivit*, id est praedestinavit (Cap.11 lect 1).

⁶⁸ Ut scilicet non homines, sed peccata hominum destruantur (Cap.11 lect. 1).

⁶⁹ Hic incipit ostendere quod casus eorum non est inutilis neque irreparabilis (Cap.11 lect. 1).

⁷⁰ Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews*, 98.

The fall of the Jews is reparable and will bring great goodness to the world, this is the underlying refrain. God permitted the Jews to do wrong and to be diminished for the benefit of the whole world. Thus, argues Aquinas, how “much more will God repair their disaster for the benefit of the whole world” (884).⁷¹ It is this belief that spurns Paul on in his ministry. Paul himself is an Israelite by race and enjoys a place of eminence amongst the Jews, being a member of the tribe of Benjamin (861). His “very zeal for the conversion of the Jews was the sign he adduced for stating that the fall of the Jews was reparable” (889).⁷² The reparation of this fall will also help to restore to “their primitive fervor” Gentiles who have grown lukewarm (890). From Romans 11:16 on, Paul uses images, metaphors to remind the Gentiles of the pre-eminence of the Jews, and of how the Gentiles have been included within their story. Using Paul’s writings as foundational, Aquinas goes beyond them to make his teaching. As the apostles who are holy were chosen by God from the Jewish people, so too the people must be holy; similarly as the Patriarchs, the root, are holy, so too must the branches, the Jewish people, be. The sanctity of believing Jews perdures, at least in potential:

The Apostle is not speaking here of actual holiness, for he does not mean to say that unbelieving Jews are holy; but of potential holiness. For if their ancestors and descendants are holy, nothing prevents them from being called back to holiness themselves. (893)⁷³

⁷¹ Si Deus propter utilitatem totius mundi permisit Iudaeos delinquere et diminui, multo magis implebit ruinas eorum propter totius mundi utilitatem (Cap. 11 lect. 2).

⁷² Unde ipsum apostoli studium quod adhibebat ad conversionem Iudaeorum, inducit pro signo quod casus Iudaeorum sit reparabilis (Cap. 11 lect. 2).

⁷³ Sed dicendum quod apostolus hic non loquitur de actuali sanctitate; non enim intendit ostendere Iudaeos incredulos esse sanctos sed de sanctitate

In this way Jewish sanctity is defended. It is well rooted. And while the Gentiles, a wild olive shoot, have been grafted on to the olive tree, they must not boast against the Jews as they are the supporting root. Aquinas is quite harsh in his words to the Gentiles, reminding them of their humble origins (895), and their promotion to the dignity of the Jews. The Jewish race is the olive tree and has borne rich spiritual fruit. The Gentiles, promoted to a partnership with the patriarchs, apostles, and prophets, are warned not to boast against the Jews, and to remember that “Judea did not receive salvation from the Gentiles, but just the reverse: ‘Salvation is from the Jews’” (Jn 4:22) (897).⁷⁴ Gentiles are warned to be careful in their faith. It was God who permitted some branches to be broken off so that Gentiles might be grafted in (900); similarly God might permit the Gentiles to be broken off because of unbelief (902). Despair and presumption are equally to be avoided. Even though we have been speaking of predestination and election, the mysterious nature of these two activities of God is underlined by Thomas’ advice to persevere in goodness for “the situation is not immutable but could change in the future” (906).⁷⁵ The Gentiles could be cut off once again and the Jews restored to their former status. God’s power can do this (909). Thus while Aquinas grounds his argument historically, he is simultaneously looking forward to the restoration of the Jewish people to the greatness “which by natural origin pertains to the Jewish nation” (911).⁷⁶

potentiali. Nihil enim prohibet eos reparari in sanctitate, quorum patres et quorum filii sunt sancti (Cap. 11 lect. 2).

⁷⁴ Id est Iudaea non accepit a gentilitate salutem sed potius e converso. Io. IV, 22: *salus ex Iudaeis est* (Cap. 11 lect. 3).

⁷⁵ Quia non immobiliter sicut quod potest mutari in futurum (Cap. 11 lect. 3).

⁷⁶ Id est qui naturali origine pertinent ad gentem Iudaeorum (Cap. 11 lect. 3).

The salvation of Israel is declared in Romans 11:26. Israel's blindness will end. Thomas reads Paul's eschatology thus: the fall of a part has permitted some Gentiles to be saved, more will be saved, and then "when the full number of the Gentiles has come in, all Israel will be saved" (916).⁷⁷ God is always active, hardening and selecting, always with mercy. "Salvation is (indeed) from the Jews" (918)⁷⁸ as the savior, God in human flesh, came from the Jewish people. The salvation which Christ brings is also for the Jews. While a few "are converted with great difficulty" and "a certain violence" (919) Aquinas interprets Paul's scriptural citation—that the Deliverer *will banish ungodliness from Jacob* (Is 59:20-21)—to refer to 'the ease with which the Jews will be converted at the end of the world' (919).⁷⁹ They will be saved by the new covenant, the new testament, brought about by the blood of Christ which has the power to remit sin (920). There will be no need for repentance "for the gifts and the call of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29). The Jewish people are beloved by God not on account of anything they or their ancestors (or descendants) have done, but on account of election: "God from all eternity chose the fathers and the sons in such a way that the children would obtain salvation on account of the fathers"...and this happens..."through an outpouring of divine grace and mercy" (923).⁸⁰ God does not

⁷⁷ Et tunc, scilicet cum plenitudo gentium intraverit, omnis Israel salvus fiet (Cap.11 lect. 4).

⁷⁸ *Salus ex Iudaeis est*. Io. IV, 22 (Cap.11 lect. 4).

⁷⁹ Vel utrumque refertur ad liberationem a culpa sed dicit *qui eripiat*, propter paucos, qui nunc difficulter quasi cum quadam violentia convertuntur. ...Dicit autem *avertet impietatem a Iacob*, ad ostendendum facilitatem conversionis Iudaeorum in fine mundi (Cap.11 lect.4).

⁸⁰ Quod non est sic intelligendum quasi merita praestita patribus fuerint causa aeternae electionis filiorum sed quia Deus ab aeterno elegit gratis et patres et filios, hoc tamen ordine ut filii propter patres consequerentur salutem, non quasi merita patrum sufficerent ad filiorum salutem, sed per quamdam abundantiam divinae gratiae et misericordiae hoc dicit, quae intantum patribus est

revoke his call. Israel will be saved "because God wills that His mercy find room in all" (932).⁸¹ The action of God in predestination and election is an act of the manifestation of God's goodness and God's mercy. God allowed all to fall, all to err, Jew and Gentile alike, so that his mercy could be applied not to people individually but to all races of people. The statement⁸² applies to the genera of individuals, not to all the individuals of the genera. God wishes all to be saved by His mercy, in order that they be humbled by this fact and ascribe their salvation not to themselves but to God (932).⁸³

Conclusion

So what does this have to say to interreligious dialogue in the twenty-first century? While Thomas Aquinas cannot be deemed as having engaged in interreligious dialogue, his willingness to attend with great seriousness to another tradition is instructive. The theological question at the heart of his work remains consistent: What is the nature of this God we believe in? Are our teachings truthful, or as truthful as they can be given our limited intellect, to this God who is at once the God of the Covenant and the Trinitarian God revealed through the advent of Christ into the world? The specific question Aquinas seeks to address is complex, and while he cannot be said to have "answered" the theological conundrum of predestination, he teaches us of the need to take other faiths very seriously, for

exhibita, ut propter promissiones eis factas, etiam filii salvarentur (Cap.11 lect.4).

⁸¹ Deus voluit, ut sua misericordia in omnibus locum haberet (Cap.11 lect. 4).

⁸² "For God has consigned all people to unbelief that God might have mercy on all" (Rom 11: 32).

⁸³ Ad omnia genera hominum. Fit enim hic distributio pro generibus singulorum et non pro singulis generum. Ideo autem Deus vult omnes per suam misericordiam salvari, ut ex hoc humilientur et suam salutem non sibi, sed Deo adscribant (Cap.11 lect.4).

the God of Jesus Christ wishes to save all peoples by his mercy, and moreover God wants people to have knowledge of his universal salvific will. (932) This desire to save all peoples is a desire concomitant with God's "decision" to create—the Creator God is the God of the Covenant is the God revealed by Jesus Christ. The issue of predestination is essentially an attempt to understand the promise of eternal life with God, and the necessity to safeguard the human freedom to choose. We are not, as McCabe said "trams, moving in predestinate grooves,"⁸⁴ but have been created by the communication of God's goodness to the world, with the possibility of accepting or rejecting this goodness.

This paper explores specifically Aquinas' struggle to address the issue of the Jews, the Chosen People, and their relationship with God, following their "failure" to recognize Christ as God. God's mercy and God's justice are at issue. The God revealed by Jesus Christ is a merciful and just God, merciful and just in what we might term a 'Godly' manner. While Christians may seek to restrict salvation, Aquinas' study of God teaches him that "God's salvific will has no other cause than his entirely free and disinterested love. We do not impose on it the intelligible structures of our mind."⁸⁵ Aquinas' engagement with the issue of the salvation of the Jewish people leads him further into the mystery of God, and leaves him to wonder at this God of free and disinterested love. Today, interreligious dialogue must seek to do no less, as Daniel Madigan suggested in the opening paragraph of this paper.

⁸⁴ Herbert McCabe, "Predestination" in *God Still Matters*, ed. Brian Davies, OP (London/New York: Continuum), 182-186: 185. Cited earlier [p. 7].

⁸⁵ J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 2 *Spiritual Master*. Trans. R. Royal. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 15.