

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

*Omnis observator legis mosaycae
iustus est apud Deum:*
Robert Holcot's Theology of the Jews¹

John T. Slotemaker, Fairfield University

The Statler Brothers—a Christian Gospel quartet from Staunton, Virginia—released an album in 1975 entitled *The Bible: The Old Testament*. The third track was written by Robert Watson Schmertz, a Philadelphia-based architect and songwriter who served as professor of architecture for thirty-five years at Carnegie Tech. The song “Noah found Grace in the Eyes of the Lord” was recorded by various artists in the 1970s. In the second stanza Schmertz writes:

So the Lord came down to look around a spell,
And there He found Noah behavin' mighty well.
And that is the reason the Scriptures record,
Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

The final line is a direct quotation of the King James translation of Genesis 6:8.² The following verse continues the quotation, providing the biblical reasoning that “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gn 6:9).

¹ I am grateful to Jack Bell, Ruth Langer, and two anonymous reviewers for making useful corrections and comments.

² The King James translation is close, here, to the Latin vulgate (Gn 6:8): *Noe vero invenit gratiam coram Domino* (Noah found grace before the Lord). The New Revised Standard Version provides a translation that is closer to the Hebrew text “But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord” (וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ וַיְהִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה). The Hebrew word *chen* (חֵן) means favor, grace, or elegance.

While the song is faithful to the text of Genesis, embedded within it is a theological tension that has been debated within Christian theology since the time of the Apostle Paul (cf. Gal) and throughout the patristic, medieval, and early modern periods. Stated in the starkest of terms, this asks on what grounds did God give grace to Noah? Noah lived prior to the Abrahamic covenant (Gn 17) and the giving of the Mosaic Law (Ex 20); he lived prior to the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the grace offered through His death and resurrection. Thus, if Noah was not a child of the Old Law or of the grace offered through Jesus Christ, how, precisely, is he a recipient of God's grace? On what grounds, one could ask, did God give grace to His servant Noah?

Christian theologians in the medieval Latin West had a standard answer to this question that was grounded in the writings of the fourth-century African Bishop, Augustine of Hippo († 430). Augustine had argued that certain prophets and holy men and women of the Old Testament were saved on account of their anticipation of the future coming of Jesus Christ.³ Individuals such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Job, and Ruth were saved because of their belief in the salvation that would be offered through the future coming of the Messiah. However, this answer posed further theological problems: e.g., why, then, did God give the law to Moses? What was the purpose of the law and the sacrificial system described in the books of Exodus and Leviticus? Was the law purely instrumental in teaching the Jews the will of God (if grace was given through Christ)? Was the purpose of the law to instruct them in just how far they had fallen?

³ Throughout this paper I use the term “Old Testament” to refer to Hebrew Bible/Tanakh. Augustine and Robert Holcot understood the Hebrew Bible to be the Old Law/Testament that was followed (replaced) by a New Law/Grace that is revealed in the New Testament. Retaining this historical language despite modern objections to the continued use of such language in modern Jewish-Christian dialogue reflects their theologies more accurately.

The present paper focuses on how two specific Christian theologians addressed these questions and interpreted the Mosaic Law.⁴ The paper begins with Augustine because he established what would become the normative theological response to these questions for Western Christians in the medieval and early modern periods. Following this discussion of Augustine, it turns to the theological writings of the English Dominican Robert Holcot († 1349). Holcot articulated a critical stance towards the mainstream Augustinian position and, in response, developed a novel theology of the Jewish Law and the sacrificial system.

Augustine argued that those who followed the Mosaic Law were saved not on account of their adherence to the law, but by means of the future coming of Jesus Christ. Subsequent scholastic theologians would consequently argue that the law was not efficacious of grace as a cause *per se* (in and of itself) but as a cause *per accidens* (by accident, not in and of itself): a *per se* cause being a cause that causes an effect by its very nature (e.g., a builder builds a house), while a *per accidens* cause is a cause that is accidentally joined to a *per se* cause, and is thus not a true cause (e.g., a *musical* builder builds a house – here *musical* is accidental to the builder). The Mosaic Law, for these theologians, is not a true cause of grace in and of itself, but a cause *per accidens* in that it was accidentally conjoined to the true cause (i.e., Jesus Christ).

Robert Holcot was introduced to this mediated version of Augustine through the scholastic tradition. However, he broke with it, arguing that God gave grace to the Jews through

⁴ For a general introduction to the relationship between Jews and Christians in the medieval Latin West, see: Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989); idem, *The Jews in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); idem, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

the Mosaic Law and the sacrificial system *per se*.⁵ Grace was not given to Moses, Elijah, or Deborah because these men and women foresaw in the law and the prescribed sacrificial system the coming of Christ. Rather, these men and women were given grace by God through their faithfulness to the covenant established by God as found in the law and the sacrificial system. As such, Holcot's theology is radically subversive of the Augustinian position. In the final section of the paper I develop a more constructive (as opposed to historical) argument that engages with the theology of Holcot and offers an alternative to the standard Augustinian theology of supersessionism.⁶

I. The Augustinian Inheritance

Augustine's theology of the Jews has been the subject of extensive research and debate in recent scholarship. Jeremy Cohen's *Living Letters of the Law* catalogs the origins of Au-

⁵ Here I follow the language of the scholastics, see fn. 34. Throughout I use this phrasing to distinguish Holcot's understanding of the grace given through the Mosaic Law from Augustine's (and the subsequent scholastic tradition) understanding of the law as anticipating Christ.

⁶ Supersessionism in its strictest and hardest form is the theological claim that the Christian Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people (i.e., the new covenant is a replacement of the old covenant). For a modern discussion of supersessionism within the context of Christian-Jewish dialogue, see David Novak, *Jewish Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and the collection of essays by David Novak, *Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005). See also Matthew Levering, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom: Engagement with the Theology of David Novak* (London: Continuum, 2010). David Novak helpfully distinguishes between three types of supersessionism, such that "(1) the new covenant is an extension of the old covenant; (2) the new covenant is an addition to the old covenant; (3) the new covenant is a replacement for the old covenant." See his essay "The Covenant in Rabbinic Thought," in *Two Faiths, One Covenant?: Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, Eugene B. Korn and John T. Pawlikowski, eds. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 65-80. Following Novak's definitions, one should note that the third form—what he calls hard supersessionism—is the variant that dominated the medieval Latin West.

gustine's theology of the Jews and traces the reception of his theology in the subsequent medieval tradition. Cohen's focus is on the theology of *Jewish witness*: the claim that, "the Jews survive [after the coming of Christ] as living testimony to the antiquity of the Christian promise, while their enslavement and dispersion confirm that the church has displaced them."⁷ While it is important to recognize the historical significance of the theology of Jewish witness, Augustine's contribution to the development of the medieval theology of the Jews cannot be reduced to it.⁸ It is important also to examine a cluster of related theological questions: are the legal and ceremonial practices of the Jews living prior to the coming of Christ a vehicle of God's grace?; and, if so, how is it that they conveyed such a grace?

The Jewish Law and the Three Ages

Jeremy Cohen begins his discussion of Augustine by analyzing the latter's periodization of world history into seven ages.⁹ However, Augustine also develops an alternative account in *De civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate* that divides world history into three ages.¹⁰ This alternative threefold division—that maps,

⁷ Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 24–65, here 33. For an instructive critique of Cohen's thesis, see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2010), 432–433, fn. 25. Fredriksen's thesis is that Augustine's doctrine of "Jewish Witness" is actually a radical break with the previous Christian tradition. This break from the previous patristic tradition actually provided intellectual support for the preservation of Jewish communities as *living witnesses* and as such deserves to be acknowledged as a *defense* of Jews and Judaism.

⁸ Cohen has not disregarded all other aspects of the Augustinian heritage, but rather his influential work has pushed the argument in a particular direction that emphasizes or prioritizes the doctrine of Jewish witness.

⁹ Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 24–26. See Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* in *Patrologia Latina* 34, J.-P. Migne, ed. (Paris, 1865), I, 23 (190–193). See also, Paul Archambault, "Ages of Man and Ages of the World," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 12 (1966), 193–228.

¹⁰ Paul Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 163 and 243. See, e.g., Augustine, *The Trinity*, Stephen McKenna, ed. (The Fathers of the Church 45)

broadly speaking, onto the seven ages—was employed more broadly by medieval theologians and is thus our focus here.

Augustine discusses the six periods of history (omitting the 7th/ the Sabbath) in *De Trinitate*, book IV, and reduces these *historical* periods to three *theological* categories: a time before the law (*ante legem*), a time under the law (*sub lege*), and a time under grace (*sub gratia*).¹¹ This theological rendering of the various ages of world history was employed by the seventh-century Archbishop Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*. Following Augustine, Isidore understands there to be three ages of world history.¹² The first age (*ante legem*) begins with the creation of the world (i.e., Adam) and persists up through the time of Moses. The second age extends from the giving of the law on Mount Sinai (Isidore lists Moses' birth as the 3,728th year since the creation of the world) up until the coming of Jesus Christ. Finally, the third period extends from the time of Jesus up through the present age (the age of the Christian Church).¹³ Isidore summarizes this threefold division, stating that “the first age is before the Mosaic Law, the

(Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 4.4.7 (139-140).

¹¹ See Augustine, *The Trinity*, 4.4.7 (140). For the Latin of this text, see Augustine, *De Trinitate*, W.J. Mountain and Fr. Glorie, eds. (Corpus Christianorum 50, 50A) (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), 4.4.7 (I, 170²⁶⁻²⁷).

¹² The basic medieval view of the biblical chronology of Moses, Job, et al., can be found in Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, S.A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and O. Berghof, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), here 5.39.9 (Barney 131a) and 5.1.1 (Barney 117a).

¹³ The present discussion of Isidore is limited to his analysis of the three ages in the *Etymologies*. Isidore, however, developed an extensive defense of Augustine's theology of the Jews in his work *De fide Catholica ex veteri et novo Testamento contra Judaeos ad Florentinam Sororem suam*, in *Patrologia Latina* 83, J.-P. Migne, ed. (Paris, 1850), 449-538. In the second book, Isidore argues that because Christ's saving grace was revealed in the Old Testament, Jews themselves know that the Old Testament condemns its own rituals and practices as insufficient. For a further discussion see Bat-Sheva Albert, “Isidore of Seville: His Attitude towards Judaism and His Impact on Early Medieval Canon Law,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 80.3/4 (1990), 207-220.

second under the law, and the third under grace; where the sacrament is now manifest, earlier it was hidden in prophetic enigma.”¹⁴

Medieval Christians, therefore, inherited this Augustinian threefold schema of world history. However, this periodization also raises various theological problems. For example, the Bible records the history of numerous people—e.g., Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Melchizedek, Noah, Job, and Ruth—who lived neither *sub lege* nor *sub gratia*. Some, such as Adam and Noah, lived historically prior to the Mosaic Law, while others, such as Job, seemed to live during the historical period of the law, but in ignorance of it (according to medieval Christians, Job was not Jewish and did not have a knowledge of the law). These individuals were the cause of serious theological discussion because a Christian theologian had to give an account of how God gave grace to such individuals given that they lived outside of the Old Law and the New Law.

Augustine developed a theological strategy to account for God’s offer of grace to those who lived prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law. Augustine, and later medieval Christians following him, would argue that Adam (and those living before the law or in ignorance of it) lived in the promise of a future savior. Thus they understood Genesis 3:15¹⁵ as a promise to humanity according to which God would bring about a son of Adam (i.e., Christ) who would crush the head of the serpent (i.e., the Devil). Adam and his offspring, therefore, would be granted salvation through their belief in the future coming of the Messiah and the grace offered through his death and resurrection.

God similarly offered/s grace and salvation, according to Augustine, to those who lived under the law (*sub lege*)

¹⁴ Isidore, *Etymologies* 6.17.16 (Barney 144b).

¹⁵ Gn 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed: she will crush your head, and you will lie in wait for her heel (*inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem et semen tuum et semen illius ipsa conteret caput tuum et tu insidiaberis calcaneo eius*).”

through their belief in the future coming of Jesus Christ. However, this required a proper reading of the Old Testament. Augustine distinguished between a carnal and a spiritual understanding of Scripture. The carnal or literal reading of Scripture, he taught, was the predominate interpretation of Scripture in the time before the coming of Christ and fails to understand it as foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ; the spiritual reading of Scripture becomes the appropriate reading after the coming of Christ and in light of further revelation; it interprets the Old Testament as speaking about Jesus Christ and the salvation that he offers to humanity. That Jews continue to read the Scriptures carnally or literally indicates that they do not understand the necessity of this spiritual reading. In his comments on Romans 5:20 Augustine writes:

Paul sufficiently indicated the Jews did not understand why the law had been given. It was not to bring life, for grace does this through faith. But the law was given to show what great and tight bonds of sin bound those who presumed to attain righteousness by their own strength.¹⁶

Jews understood/understand the law's purpose to be to instruct them in the will of God. In the Christian spiritual reading, it functions as a teacher pointing to Christ, and Christ, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, is the fulfillment of the law. Augustine writes in *Contra Faustum* that "the same law that was given to Moses *became* grace and truth in Jesus Christ."¹⁷ However, Augustine does argue that while the literal or carnal reading of the Scriptures was common to the period before Christ, there was "[a] special group within Israel—patriarchs, prophets, holy women and men—enlightened by

¹⁶ Augustine, *Propositionum ex epistolae ad Romanos*, in *Augustine on Romans: Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans, Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Paula Fredriksen, trans. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 30.

¹⁷ As cited in Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 243.

divine revelation, [who] understood the ultimate Christological significance of the law.”¹⁸

Augustine’s distinction between the carnal and spiritual readings of Scripture implies—as he writes in *On the Spirit and the Letter*—that “the law written on tablets could not bring about for the Jews this writing of the law upon their hearts, which is justification, but could only bring about transgression.”¹⁹ Thus, the law *per se* is not a source of grace; in fact, the law can only function as a vehicle of God’s grace if it is understood that the law points to Jesus Christ. Jews at the time of King David, therefore, could only achieve salvation through the law if they understood the spiritual, or christological, interpretation of it. While Augustine is not precise about the numbers, it is safe to say that he thought that the majority of the Jews interpreted the law literally and as such failed to understand the spiritual meaning imbedded within it (i.e., that the law pointed to Christ).²⁰

Augustine’s theology of the Jews and the two modes of interpretation had implications for how he understood the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. In *De civitate Dei* and *Contra Faustum* Augustine argued that the Old Testament is a hidden form of the New Testament.²¹ Logically, this means that the Scriptures do not contradict themselves. The apparent contradictions between the Old and New Testaments and their respective theologies of salvation disappear when the Old Testament is read spiritually and not

¹⁸ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 245.

¹⁹ Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, Roland J. Teske, trans. (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, 1.23) (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 48.28 (174).

²⁰ Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, in *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, Roland J. Teske, trans. (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, 1.20) (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007), 12.2–3 (126–127).

²¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, 2 vols., William Babcock, trans., Boniface Ramsey, ed. (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, 1.6 and 1.7) (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012, 2013), 4.33 (I, 141) and 16.26 (II, 217). See also Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 6.9 (Teske, 103).

carnally.²² In fact, Augustine goes so far as to claim that, when one finds an alleged contradiction in Scripture, one must conclude that “either the manuscript is defective, or the translator made a mistake, or you do not understand [the text].”²³

According to Augustine, did or could the Old Law give grace in and of itself, independent of the future coming of Christ? Augustine writes explicitly that the Old Law *per se* could never give grace. Preaching on John 1:17 (*For the Law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*) Augustine writes:

Grace was not given in the Old Testament, because the law threatened but brought no relief. It gave orders; it did not heal; it manifested frailty; it did not get rid of it. But it was preparing the ground for that doctor who was to come with grace and truth; as a doctor who wants to cure someone first sends along his slave, that the doctor might find the patient bandaged up. The patient was not in good health, did not want to be healed, and, to avoid treatment, was boasting about his health. The law was sent, it bound him; he found himself guilty, and he then cried out from the bandages. The Lord comes, he treats him with bitter and stinging medicines. ... That is grace for you, amazing grace indeed.²⁴

While the Old Law could be said to prepare the way for grace (as the slave in this analogy is sent ahead of the doctor to bandage a patient), it cannot give grace in and of itself. The implications of this theological position are important. According to Augustine and the majority of medieval Christians following him, there is no possible salvation for the Jew who

²² See Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 11.5–6 (Teske, 118–120).

²³ Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 11.5 (Teske, 119).

²⁴ Augustine, *Homilies on The Gospel of John (1–40)*, Edmund Hill, trans., Allan Fitzgerald, ed. (The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, 3.12) (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), homily 3 (78).

remains faithful to the God's Covenant. That is, there is no salvation for those who follow the Mosaic Law and believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be faithful to the promises made in the covenant—promises that, from the Jewish perspective, have nothing to do with the future coming of Jesus Christ, but instead with the faithfulness of the Jewish people to God's law and covenant.

The Medieval Reception: Birds without Flight

A full catalog and discussion of the scholastic reception of Augustine's theology of the Jews does not yet exist.²⁵ However, Holcot's theology can only be understood within the context of the thinking of his more immediate forebears. We will therefore first look at the reception of the relevant elements of Augustine's theology in a few of his significant interlocutors, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure.

The development of medieval scholastic theology between the early thirteenth century and the sixteenth century can be traced in the commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Peter Lombard († 1160) was the bishop of Paris and a *magister* (professor) at the cathedral school of Notre Dame. He wrote a textbook called the *Sentences divided into Four Books* (*Sententiae in quatuor IV libris distinctae*) that became, by the early thirteenth century, the standard textbook for theology in the medieval universities.²⁶ Almost every medi-

²⁵ Elisheva Baumgarten and Judah D. Galinsky, eds., *Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century France* (The New Middle Ages) (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) contains several essays relevant to the present discussion. For a focused study on late medieval sacramental theology and the distinction between the Old Law and the New Law, see Ueli Zahnd, *Wirksame Zeichen? Sakramentenlehre und Semiotik in der Scholastik des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Spätmittelalter - Humanismus - Reformation 80) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 132-149.

²⁶ On Peter Lombard see Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994). The Latin text of the *Sentences* can be found in Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libros distinctae*, I. Brady, ed., 2 vols.

eval theologian between the thirteenth and the sixteenth century wrote a commentary on this work in order to become a *magister* and, as such, permitted to teach theology. Perhaps 1,500 such commentaries are known to exist, including Holcot's.²⁷ Particularly because Augustine was the main source for Peter Lombard's theology, his *Sentences* and the subsequent commentary tradition are useful for tracing the influence of Augustine's theology of the Jews.

In his *Sentences* Peter Lombard examines briefly the difference between the "sacraments" (signs, in the Lombard's language) of the Old Law and the sacraments of the New Law. Here he treats the nature of certain Old Testament practices including sacrifices and ceremonial observances. The Lombard argues that "those things which were instituted only for the sake of signifying are merely signs, and not sacraments; such were the carnal sacrifices and the ceremonial observances of the Old Law, which could never justify those who offered them."²⁸ As Marcia Colish has commented, the Lombard "views these Old Testament ceremonies as significant, but not as a means for the transmission of divine grace."²⁹ Following, therefore, the predominant Augustinian tradition, the Lom-

(Spicilegium Bonaventurianum IV, V) (Grottaferrata: Colledii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971, 1981). An English translation is available as, Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Books I-IV*, 4 vols., Giulio Silano, trans. (Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007-2010).

²⁷ On the commentary tradition see: Philipp W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences* (Rethinking the Middle Ages 2) (Ontario, 2007); Gillian Evans, ed., *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Volume I, Current Research* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002); Philipp W. Rosemann, ed., *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Volumes 2-3* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010, 2015).

²⁸ Lombard, *Sent.* IV, d.1, c.4 (Brady II, 233¹⁷⁻²⁰; Silano IV, 4) (Latin text in Appendix B).

²⁹ Colish, *Peter Lombard*, II, 510-514 (and 528), here 511. Cf. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard*, 145-147. See also, Jack Watt, "Parisian Theologians and the Jews: Peter Lombard and Peter Cantor," in Peter Biller and Barrie Dobson, eds., *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life: Essays in Honor of Gordon Leff* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 55-76.

bard holds that the Old Law merely signifies (as signs) the grace of God, but does not sanctify the individual.

In his commentary on distinction 1, of book IV of the *Sentences*, the thirteenth-century Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas recognizes that it *seems* like the sacraments of the Old Law confer grace, for to be a sacrament is, by definition, to confer grace.³⁰ However, after discussing various opinions regarding the nature and the use of the sacraments, Thomas concluded that in no way do the sacraments of the Old Law confer grace by means of the work worked in them (*opus operatum in eis*).³¹ That is, the Old Law *per se* cannot give grace by means of the *opus operatum* (work worked), but could only be a conduit of God's grace if the individual in question believed in the future grace that would come through Jesus Christ.³² Thomas Aquinas makes this final point clear in the *Summa theologiae*:

Though our faith in Christ is the same as that of the fathers of old [i.e., Old Testament patriarchs]; yet, since

³⁰ Aquinas, *Scriptum* IV, d.1, q.1, a.1. qc.1, arg.1 (Latin text in Appendix B from www.corpusthomicum.org, accessed December 15, 2015). For a discussion of Thomas's theology of the Jews, see Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*; Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 364–398. Steven C. Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews: Insights into his Commentary on Romans 9–11* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2008), for example, offers an unconvincing critique of Cohen's argument. For recent presentations of Aquinas, see also: John Y.B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Matthew A. Tapie, *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: The Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

³¹ Aquinas, *Scriptum* IV, d.1, q.1, a.5. qc.1, co. (Latin text in Appendix B). Circumcision is treated by Thomas and others (following the Lombard) as a separate case, however, I am not discussing this somewhat complicated exception here. For a useful introduction to the problem, see Rosemann, *Peter Lombard*, 146.

³² Thomas argues in the *sed contra* to *Scriptum* IV, d.1, q.2, a.5. qc.3, s.c.1 and 2 that following the practices of the Old Law actually stands in the way of the grace offered through Jesus Christ and ought to be discontinued. For a discussion of related issues see Franklin T. Harkins, "Docuit Excellentissimae Divinitatis Myseria: St. Paul in Thomas Aquinas," in *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages*, ed. Steven R. Cartwright (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2013), 235–362, here 261.

they came before Christ, whereas we come after Him, the same faith is expressed in different words...in like manner the ceremonies of the Old Law betokened Christ as having yet to be born and to suffer: whereas our sacraments signify Him as already born and having suffered.³³

Thomas argues in his commentary on the *Sentences* and *Summa theologiae*—following the Augustinian and Lombardian tradition—that the patriarchs of the Old Testament were saved because of their belief in the future coming of Christ and through the ceremonies of the Old Law that foreshadowed Christ’s death and resurrection. Grace was given to those who followed the Old Law, not because of the law *per se*, but because they believed in the coming of Christ who is the source of all grace. This theology was not particular to Thomas Aquinas, and, following the Lombard, is found in the majority of theologians working between the thirteenth and sixteenth century.³⁴

* * *

While the commentaries on the *Sentences* were the scholastic theologian’s workshop for developing theology, this theology was transmitted via preaching. In a sermon on the nature of grace given at the end of his life, the Franciscan contemporary of Thomas, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, begins

³³ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia-IIae, q.103, a.4, in *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vols. 4-12 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888-1906), 7, 256 (Latin text in Appendix B). Here I cite the translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948), II, 1086.

³⁴ Including, for example, Bonaventure, who in his commentary on the *Sentences* states that the sacraments of the New Law give grace and justification (*iustificatio*) *non tantum per accidents, sed etiam per se*. That is, Bonaventure argues that the grace offered through the Old Law is *per accidens* and not *per se*, whereas the grace offered through the New Law gives grace *per se*. See Bonaventure, *Liber IV Sententiarum*, d.1, p.1, art.1, q.5 (*Opera Theologica Selecta*, vol. 4) (Quaracchi: Ad Claras Aquas, 1949), 20.

with an examination of the same verse on which Augustine had preached, John 1:17: “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth have come through Christ.”³⁵ The law, Bonaventure argues, gives the Jews a knowledge of the truth. However, the power to act on this truth—to live the virtuous life through grace—comes about through the grace given by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Jew who lives according to the Old Law, but does not receive the grace that comes through Christ, is, he says, like a bird who has the power to see the heavens (i.e., knowledge of the truth) but not the strength in her wings to fly (i.e., the power of grace that comes from Christ).³⁶ He writes: “O faithless Jew (*Judaeae perfide*). You have the law at hand, but unless you have the power to act, it is pointless for you to think about possessing the law unless grace is present as well.”³⁷

But what is the source of this grace that gives flight? Can it come through the law? Job too inquires into the origins of this grace, Bonaventure observes, when he asks (Jb 38:24), “in what way is light spread, and how is heat divided over the earth?” The answer, according to Bonaventure, is that all grace descends upon rational minds through: 1) the incarnate Word, 2) the crucified Word, and 3) the inspired Word.³⁸ The incarnate Word refers to the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity in the person of Jesus Christ; the crucified Word refers to the triumph of Jesus Christ over death through his crucifixion and resurrection; and the inspired Word refers to the process of regeneration that occurs by means of the Holy Spirit through an individual’s belief in the

³⁵ See Bonaventure, *De septem donis Spiritus Sancti* in *Opera Omnia V* (Quaracchi: Ad Claras Aquas, 1891), 455–503; it is translated by Zachary Hayes as *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Saint Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2008). Here, Quaracchi 457; Hayes 27–28.

³⁶ Bonaventure, *De septem donis*, coll.1 (Quaracchi 457; Hayes 27) (Latin text in Appendix B).

³⁷ Bonaventure, *De septem donis*, coll.1 (Quaracchi 457; Hayes 28) (Latin text in Appendix B).

³⁸ Bonaventure, *De septem donis*, coll.1 (Quaracchi 458; Hayes 30) (Latin text in Appendix B).

salvation offered through Jesus Christ.³⁹ In short, therefore, grace can only come through the person of Jesus Christ, such that there is no grace present in the law unless one understands the law christologically. In this sermon Bonaventure is not explicit about the latter point, as his focus is elsewhere. However, it goes without saying that for the Jew of the law, there is no flying without explicit belief in the future coming of Jesus Christ. The Jew without Christ remains a bird without flight; a person without God's grace. In the language of the scholastic doctors, grace is given through the law *per accidens* and not *per se*.

II. Robert Holcot and the Jews

Robert Holcot was an English Dominican Friar who lived during the first half of the fourteenth century.⁴⁰ He died of the great plague and would spend the majority of his life in the roughly rectangular area between his native village, Holcot, and Oxford, Cambridge, and London. Given that the Jews were expelled from Great Britain by King Edward I in 1290 through the Edict of Expulsion, it is quite certain that Holcot never met a single Jew. Further, if we ask the question “who did Holcot have in mind when he discusses the Jews”—there is not a definitive answer to the question. The situation is complicated by the fact that throughout this paper I will speak of Holcot's *theology of the Jews* as if discussing his theological position about Jews who were contemporaries of his, living during the fourteenth century. However, this is not the case. In fact, Holcot's concern is not with any group of particular Jews, but with God's revelation as found in the Old and New Tes-

³⁹ Bonaventure, *De septem donis*, coll.1 (Quaracchi 458; Hayes 30) (Latin text in Appendix B).

⁴⁰ For an introduction to Holcot's thought see: Hester Goodenough Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise: Contingency and Necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford, 1300-1350* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004); Fritz Hoffmann, *Die theologische Methode des Oxforder Dominikanerlehrers Robert Holcot* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972); and John T. Slotemaker and Jeffrey C. Witt, *Robert Holcot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

taments. Therefore, when discussing Holcot's *theology of the Jews* here, we have to keep in mind from the outset that his concern is to present a Christian theology of the Jews that can account for Judaism as witnessed to in the Old Testament Scriptures (and not rabbinic Judaism as it existed in the fourteenth century).⁴¹

The Three Ages and God's Grace

Holcot's theology of the Jews is grounded in a discussion of the three ages. However, while Holcot's understanding of the three ages corresponds to the Augustinian definition, Holcot has a different interpretation of the nature of God's relationship with the distinct groups of individuals living during these periods.⁴²

Holcot agrees with Augustine that there are three historical periods: a time before the law, a time under the law, and a time after the law/the time under grace. While his basic outline corresponds with Augustine's analysis of the three ages, Holcot radically diverges from Augustine and the subsequent medieval theological tradition that followed him who argued that individuals in all three periods are saved by means of the grace offered through Jesus Christ (even if they lived prior to Christ and only received that grace by believing in the future coming of Christ). Holcot instead insists that individuals living under a given period or covenant are held responsible to God's self-revelation as defined within the respective periods. According to Holcot, individuals who live in the first period are held responsible to God's revelation as known through natural law. Those who live in the second period are held responsible to the Mosaic Law. And, finally,

⁴¹ For a rather different approach that examines Holcot's anti-Jewish statements as if related to actual Jews of the fourteenth century, see Nancy L. Turner, "Robert Holcot on the Jews," in *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Contexts, Writings*, Sheila Delany, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 133-144.

⁴² See Appendix A for a list of Holcot's texts and manuscripts cited throughout.

those who live in the third period are held responsible for God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ and the salvation offered through his death and resurrection. The Jews, therefore, who lived during the second period are responsible for keeping the law and are given grace for following the law. In short, God offers the people of each age grace by means of the instruments provided within the given covenant. Thus, Moses, David, and Elijah received grace through their practice of sacrifice and on account of following the law, because the law gave grace *per se* (not *per accidens* because an individual believed in the future coming of Jesus Christ).

Holcot addresses these theological questions in several places. One is a quodlibetal question (i.e., a public debate "concerning anything"—*de quolibet*—held twice a year at Advent and Lent) on "whether the observation of the Mosaic Law by the Jews merited them eternal life?"⁴³ What strikes the reader familiar with the writings of Augustine almost immediately is that Robert Holcot here confronts, head on, the seeming contradictions found in Scripture. Instead of arguing, as Augustine did, that there are no actual contradictions between the Old and New Testaments, Holcot is willing to address the tension created when Scripture first prescribes animal sacrifice or circumcision (cf. Lev 4 and 6), only to subsequently denounce such practices (Heb 10). This willingness to confront the tensions within the Scriptures is the first indication that Holcot is presenting an entirely new reading of covenantal theology.

In his discussion, Holcot critiques the standard theology found in Peter Lombard (and Augustine). He examines the passage in Acts 15:10 where the Apostle Peter argues that the Old Law placed a yoke (*iugum*) upon humanity that "neither

⁴³ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae*. Nancy Turner correctly rejects Gilbert Dahan's reading of this text. See her "Robert Holcot on the Jews," 144, fn. 20, discussing Gilbert Dahan, *Les intellectuels Chrétiens et les Juifs au Moyen Age* (Paris: Editions de Cerf, 1990), 560.

our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”⁴⁴ Holcot argues that the Lombard uses this passage to argue that while the New Law confers grace (*conferunt gratiam*), the Old Law merely signifies (*significant*) grace. This theology, discussed above, was developed by Augustine and supported by Peter Lombard and the majority of medieval theologians. Holcot argues instead that the Old Law did confer grace, stating explicitly that “every just person before God is worthy of eternal life, and every observer of the Mosaic Law is justified before God.”⁴⁵ As evidence of this claim, Holcot mentions Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Ezekiel, Josiah, Judas Maccabee and many others (*multis aliis*) as examples of those who merited eternal life.⁴⁶ However, Holcot is aware that this general argument is not sufficient to make his broader claim, for, as we know, one could argue that these individuals merited eternal life because (as Augustine would say) they understood the law as pointing to Christ and were given grace though their belief in the future coming of the Messiah. Holcot excludes this interpretation by stating that in Leviticus 4 and 6 sacrifices were offered for the sin of the people (*pro peccato populi*) and that “those sacrifices bestowed the remission of sins” and, as such, bestowed grace (for to give grace and to remit sins is identical).⁴⁷

Holcot indirectly expands this discussion to include circumcision in his discussion of baptism. He recalls that Jesus (Jn 3:5) stated explicitly, “except a person be born again of water and the Holy Spirit (*ex aqua et Spiritu*), he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” Thus, it seems as if baptism is necessary for salvation. However, Holcot broadens his understanding of baptism to include the repentance of the faithful, martyrdom, as well as baptism by water. This allows

⁴⁴ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 174⁷⁻¹² | B, fol. 242^h) (Latin text in Appendix B).

⁴⁵ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 179³⁰⁻³³ | B, fol. 243^h) (Latin text in Appendix B).

⁴⁶ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 180⁷⁻¹¹ | B, fol. 243^h) (Latin text in Appendix B).

⁴⁷ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 176²³⁻³⁵ | B, fol. 243^h) (Latin text in Appendix B).

him to classify the Jewish practice of circumcision under the Old Law as an act of repentance and regeneration; as such, it conferred grace.⁴⁸

Holcot is, like others we have seen, also concerned with whether or not God's grace is given prior to the law, in the first age. Following his medieval predecessors, Holcot focuses on Job and argues that Job is not saved under the Old Law (as he was a Gentile).⁴⁹ However, Holcot explicitly rejects the implication that Job was not given grace. After discussing Job, Holcot immediately inquires into the status of someone who lives simply according to natural law and is ignorant of both the law of Moses and the message of the Gospels, writing: "is it possible for someone who is brought up from infancy (*ab infantia*) outside the context of God's law to be saved?"⁵⁰ He argues that it is possible such a person is saved (and receives God's grace) if she chooses the better sect (*sectam meliorem*) among the available options and follows it earnestly.⁵¹ Such an individual can be saved and can be given grace if she does not provide an obstacle (*obicem*) to God's grace, for barring an obstacle, a baptism of the Spirit (*bap-*

⁴⁸ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 203⁷⁻¹⁰ | B, fol. 245^a) (Latin text in Appendix B).

⁴⁹ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 202²⁶⁻³¹ | B, fol. 245^a) (Latin text in Appendix B).

⁵⁰ Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 183²²⁻³¹ | B, fol. 243^a). Holcot argues that in living "according to the principles of natural law" that God revealed to them, they are not living according to demonstrable reason (*demonstrationes naturales*). See Holcot, *Sent. I*, q.4 (L, fol. e.3^{ra-th} | O, fol. 136^a) (Latin texts in Appendix B). On this, see Heiko A. Oberman, "Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam: Robert Holcot, O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 55.4 (1962), 317-342. Oberman claims, "We are, however, forewarned that Holcot's position cannot simply be identified with that of Augustine by the fact that this gift of knowledge of God is not bestowed on the elect but on those who live according to the principles of natural law" (321).

⁵¹ Cf. Holcot, *Sent. I*, q.1 (L, fol. a.7^b | O, fol. 123^a) (Latin text in Appendix B).

tismum flaminis) would be conferred by God.⁵² Indeed, Holcot maintains that God can grant salvation to those ignorant of the articles of faith if their ignorance arises from no fault of their own.⁵³ According to Holcot, many of the philosophers and wise men—Job, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and most of the Stoics—lived in a divine cult according to some rite (*ritus*) and profession (*protestationes*) and were saved (*salvati sunt*).⁵⁴

Thus, Holcot argues that those living in the first two covenantal eras (before the law and under the law) were offered grace by God if they strove to do their best within their given covenant. Further, the giving of salvific grace was not on account of their belief in the future coming of the Messiah. Such individuals, whether under natural law or the Mosaic Law, are given grace for striving to live according to the will of God as communicated to them within a given covenant.

Holcot's Obligational Analogy

The Arts Faculty of the University of Paris developed a form of academic disputation in the thirteenth century that was referred to as *obligationes* (literally obligations). According to Holcot, this complex form of debate is an instructive analogy of how God interacts with humanity throughout the three ages.

The *obligationes* are a form of logical training or disputation staged between two scholars.⁵⁵ The opponent

⁵² Holcot, *Utrum observantia legis mosaycae* (Molteni, 202³¹–203⁷ | B, fol. 243^{va}) (Latin text in Appendix B). Cf. Oberman, *The Harvest*, 243–248.

⁵³ Cf. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, 294.

⁵⁴ Cf. Holcot, *Sent.* III, q.1 (L, fol. n.i^{va} | O, fol. 176^{ab}) (Latin text in Appendix B). This passage should also be read alongside one referenced by Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), 327–328. Cf. Holcot, *Sap.* 157 (B1, 521–523 | B2, fol. 233^{va-ab}).

⁵⁵ On the obligatory arts, see: Catarina Dutilh Novaes, *Formalizing Medieval Logical Theories: Suppositio, Consequentiae and Obligationes* (Logic, Epistemology, and the Unity of Science 7) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010); Paul Vincent Spade, “If Obligationes Were Counterfactuals,” *Philosophical Topics* 20, 171–188; Paul Vincent Spade, “Medieval Theories of

(*opponens*) begins the disputation by stating a proposition of the form “I posit that *a*” (with *a* being called the *positum*). The respondent (*respondens*) responds to the original *positum* by conceding (*concedo*), denying (*nego*), or remaining doubtful (*dubito*) about the proposition. The debate begins when the respondent accepts the proposition and obliges himself to it (*se obligat*). Throughout the course of the debate the original *positum* functions as the basis for exchange as the opponent introduces new propositions into the debate and the respondent continues by either accepting, rejecting, or denying the relevance of the subsequent propositions. The rules of the debate state that the respondent is to accept nothing contradictory to the first proposition and to deny nothing that is consistent with it. Thus, the obligational debate is about identifying an original proposition and analyzing whether or not subsequent propositions are logically consistent with the original proposition. The debate is concluded when the opponent stops the debate by saying “time is up” (*cedat tempus*).

While there are numerous passages in which Holcot examines the obligational arts as a model for constructive theology, we will focus here on a single passage.⁵⁶ Holcot writes in his *Sentences* commentary:

Obligationes,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014), available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/obligationes/>; and Mikko Yrjönsuuri, ed., *Medieval Formal Logic: Obligations, Insolubles and Consequences* (The New Synthese Historical Library 49) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013). See also the two essays by Eleonore Stump, “Obligations: A. From the Beginning of the Early Fourteenth Century,” and Paul Vincent Spade, “Obligations: B. Developments in the Fourteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 315–334, and 335–341.

⁵⁶ Hoffmann, *Die theologische Methode*, 18–19, 276–277, 280–281, and 346–355; Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, 151–190; and Hester Goodenough Gelber, “Robert Holcot, Obligational Theology, and the Incarnation,” (forthcoming), have discussed the importance of the obligational arts for understanding Holcot.

It seems to me for now that one should speak to this according to the obligatory art. For that God reveals proposition *a* [i.e., “Only those who are numbered among tomorrow’s mortal sinners will be saved”] to Socrates and that Socrates believes this proposition, God’s teaching it to him, and that so it will be as [that revelation] denotes, is the same as if [God] were to say to him: “I pose *a* to you (*pono tibi a*), such that afterwards you should concede and deny [as in an *obligatio*].” And having made such a revelation, the revealed proposition ought to be conceded as often as it is proposed, and every formal consequence following simply [from that] ought to be conceded. To everything, however, that does not follow from that, one should respond as to an irrelevant proposition...⁵⁷

In this short passage Holcot argues that the relation between the opponent and respondent can be understood as analogous to the relationship between God and humanity. According to the analogy, God is the opponent who posits an original proposition or *positum*: “I pose *a* to you.” God reveals this *positum* to an individual (i.e., the respondent) and the respondent either concedes or denies the proposition. If the respondent obliges himself to it, the debate has begun and the respondent is now obligated to everything that logically follows from the *positum*. This, Holcot argues, is perhaps how God interacts with humanity in the three ages described above. God reveals to humanity a given covenant: for example, in the first age before the Mosaic Law God revealed Himself and His ordering of creation to all humanity through the natural law (*iuris naturalis*, i.e. the *positum* of the age). In the second age, the age of the law, God reveals Himself and his law to humanity through the law given to Israel on Mount Sinai. In the third age, God reveals Himself to humanity through the coming of Jesus Christ and the salvation offered to all through his death and

⁵⁷ Holcot, *Sent.* I, q.3 (L, fol. d.2^{th-va} | O, fol. 132th) (Latin text in Appendix B). This passage is transcribed and translated in Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, 182.

resurrection. In each case individuals are obligated to God's revelation and are held accountable for what has been revealed to them (and everything that logically follows from the original *positum*).

The true power of the analogy, for Holcot, is that it allows him to give a theological account of how Scripture speaks in different ways about the parameters of human salvation. Holcot was almost unflinching in accepting the fact that the Christian Scriptures contain divergent plans of human salvation. For example, in some places Scripture implies that animal sacrifice is necessary for salvation, whereas in other places it implies that it is not. Holcot accepts the fact that for a Jew living during the first temple period, the sacrificial system described in the book of Leviticus contained God's revealed law. As such, this person lived faithfully according to the will of God as revealed in the law by sacrificing animals. However, the New Testament, reflecting the third age, after the law, outright rejects that animal sacrifice forgives sins.

Following the obligational analogy, Holcot argues that God has revealed to humanity three distinct covenants that are binding for those to whom they have been revealed. In other words, Holcot argues that God, like the opponent in the debate, can change or stop the debate at any time and offer a new *positum* that contradicts the first. That is, God can change the rules of the game (i.e., the original *positum*). Further, Holcot argues that Scripture witnesses to the fact that God has indeed done so in the past through the three distinct ages of salvation history. This allows him to reject Augustine's understanding of the three ages as bound to a single salvific system governed by Christ and His work of salvation. Therefore, according to Holcot, Job, who lived neither under the Mosaic Law nor under the grace of Christ, is given the grace of God by *obliging* himself to the natural law revealed by God. Moses, who lived under the Mosaic Law revealed to him, is given grace by *obliging* himself to the law given on Mount Sinai. These individuals, Holcot insists, are not saved because they understood the natural law or Mosaic Law as pointing to the

future salvation offered through Jesus Christ. No, they are saved because God has revealed His will to them in radically distinct ages of salvation history that are spoken of in Scripture.

Holcot argues that according to the obligational model *God reveals proposition a to Socrates* and that *Socrates believes this proposition, God teaching it to him*. Consequently, Holcot is arguing that the change from one age to the next is not a defined moment in history according to which God immediately and without warning shifts all of humanity from one covenant to the next. A new covenant did not immediately begin for all of humanity the moment Moses was given the tablets on Sinai (Ex 24:14–18) or Jesus Christ rose from the dead (Mt 28:1–10). Indeed, as Holcot understood things, Job lived during the age of the Mosaic Law and, as a non-Jew, did not have access to this revelation. Holcot's understanding of the shift from one covenant to the next is more nuanced and individualized than a blanket shift at a given point in history. He writes that God reveals the proposition or *positum* to the individual, as is implied in Holcot's comment about Socrates. Job too was held to the standard of the natural law because God had not revealed the Mosaic Law to him. Similarly, if there were Jews living in Persia or India around the year 1,000 C.E. who had not been exposed to the Gospel of Christ (i.e., God did not reveal to them the third age) they would be held accountable to God's revelation as they knew it through the law of Moses.

To return to the question that was posed at the beginning of this paper, we can note that for Holcot Noah received grace because he lived according to the natural law that God had revealed to him. Noah was neither a proto-Jew who anticipated the Mosaic Law nor a proto-Christian who anticipated the grace of Jesus Christ—Noah was an individual who did the best he could within the covenantal relationship that God established and revealed to him through the natural law.

Implications of Holcot's Theology

Robert Holcot's theology of the Jews has interesting and complex implications for Christian theology and it is necessary to address a few of the questions that may arise.

First, Robert Holcot was certainly not arguing that any of his contemporary European Jews were offered salvation on account of following the Mosaic Law. Holcot knew that the majority of the Jews during his time period were aware that: (a) Jesus Christ had lived and died, and (b) Christians believe that this person Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. Consequently, Holcot would have argued that individual Jews during the medieval period were probably *not* receiving the grace of God because they consciously rejected God's most recent covenantal revelation. This accounts for the fact that Holcot in general continues to employ anti-Jewish language.⁵⁸

Second, this means that the theology discussed above is not a theology of the Jews in and of itself. Historically, therefore, we must not anachronistically overextend his argument and claim that Holcot developed an alternative theology of the Jews that moved beyond a kind of supersessionism. For Holcot, the question was not how to articulate how the Jews fit within God's plan of salvation in relationship to the message of Christian theology. Holcot's concern was about how to read Scripture. His original approach to the material arose from questions about the consistency of the message revealed by God in the Old and New Testaments. In confronting the tensions and perceived theological inconsistencies between the Old and New Testaments, he resoundingly rejected the Augustinian sentiment that the Old Testament is just an imperfect form of the New Testament and that there are not contradictions between the two Testaments. His theology of

⁵⁸ Nancy Turner, "Robert Holcot on the Jews," 134, notes that Holcot's most extensive treatment of the Jews is found in his analysis of Wisdom 2:12-24. His commentary on these verses is found in lectures 24-30 (B1, 84-108 | B2, fols. 39^{ab}-50^{ra}).

the three ages and his obligational model are a complex alternative way of approaching the various theological and textual tensions that exist between the two Testaments.

Finally, those familiar with the Christian theological tradition will recognize that various unsavory consequences seem to follow from Holcot's theology. The first (1) natural objection or concern is how one can know that there are only three ages. For example, one could argue that in fact there are not just three ages, but instead four ages with the fourth beginning with God's revelation to the Prophet Mohammed.⁵⁹ (2) Second, Holcot's Dominican Order (the Order of Preachers) is devoted to spreading the Gospel. However, Holcot's theology seems to undermine the need for proselytizing given that if one is unaware of a new covenant they can still achieve God's grace and salvation. In the most literal sense of the phrase, *ignorance is bliss* (or could be). (3) Further, some would object that this model presents God as a God of absolute power who acts capriciously in His dealings with human beings. Holcot did not deal with these basic objections directly in his extensive corpus of writings. If he was aware of them, he was apparently not troubled by them.

However, these objections raise real issues today, so we can propose certain responses. In response to the first claim (*ad 1*), Holcot was clear that God's revelation is never complete and that one could anticipate that a subsequent covenant is pending. For Christians, the final age is one of union with God where the wolf lays down with the lamb and all is made whole (Is 11:6). Holcot's theology could easily accommodate a discussion of the eschaton, therefore, that views the present age as not the final age. However, the specific objection about other religions being revealed as a new covenant simply did not occur to him and it is difficult to anticipate how he would respond.

⁵⁹ This objection was raised by a perceptive undergraduate student at the University of Basel in response to a public lecture on Holcot's theology.

To the second claim (*ad 2*), Holcot could consistently argue that within the third covenant (i.e., *sub gratia*) God has revealed to humanity that they ought to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:16–20). God’s revelation in Scripture is binding and, therefore, the believer ought to follow the teachings of this revelation. Thus, despite the fact that by analyzing carefully the obligational model one could theologially anticipate objections to proselytizing, based on the same analogy, the fact that God commands the making of disciples in the New Testament would trump, for the Christian, any other theological objections.

Finally, in response to the third objection (*ad 3*), Holcot developed a strong covenantal theology according to which God acts in a way that is faithful to His covenant(s). In short, Holcot argues that God never acts “inordinately (*inordinate*)” within a given covenant (that is, God does not break His own rules and is faithful to the covenant in question).⁶⁰

III. Thinking with Holcot: A Theological Response

The purpose of the present paper has been to think through Robert Holcot’s theology of the Jews, given its important divergences from the broader Augustinian heritage. Its final section presents preliminary thoughts about the implications of Holcot’s theology that may be of interest to those thinking about the relationship between Jews and Christians today. What follows is not the theology of Robert Holcot (and to take it as such would be to distort his thought). Further, my goal here is not to work through my own theology of the Jews, but to present some thoughts that build on Holcot’s theology.

⁶⁰ An adequate response to these three objections requires a separate essay. This third argument, in particular, has been the focus of considerable attention in the literature. The reader who is interested in a fuller sympathetic response should consult: Gelber, *It Could have been Otherwise*; Hoffmann, *Die theologische Methode*; and Slotemaker-Witt, *Robert Holcot*. A non-sympathetic account (that should be used with caution) can be found in Leonard A. Kennedy, *The Philosophy of Robert Holcot, Fourteenth-Century Sceptic* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 1993).

According to Holcot God could grant grace to a Jewish person living during the time of Moses and practicing her religion to the best of her ability. The sacrifice of animals, for example, could be efficacious of grace in and of itself because it was ordained by God according to the Mosaic Law. What is less clear, however, is whether Jews living after the coming of Jesus Christ could receive grace by living according to God's covenant with Abraham and Moses. If so, how could they receive such grace? We turn to this question because, in the end, it is perhaps the most pressing theological question facing Holcot (or a defender of his position).

It was argued above that according to Holcot the Jews living after the coming of Jesus Christ who remained ignorant of his life, death, and resurrection—and the fact that those events initiated a new covenant—could be granted grace through the practice of the Mosaic Law. Holcot is clear that one is responsible for a new or subsequent covenant only when God has revealed that covenant to the person directly. In this sense, ignorance really could result in bliss (i.e., grace). However, this response does nothing to answer the question of whether or not a Jew living in the fifth century after the coming of Christ and who had knowledge about Jesus Christ (but rejected the claim that he is the Jewish Messiah) could be granted grace for following the law. This remains a pressing issue for contemporary Christian theologies of Judaism.⁶¹

It seems, *prima facie*, that Robert Holcot claimed that Jews living after the coming of Jesus Christ who had knowledge of his life, death, and resurrection, but continued to follow the Mosaic Law, were denied grace if they failed to recognize or accept God's new covenant. Indeed, evidence that Holcot would support this claim, with resounding enthu-

⁶¹ See the recent statement by the Vatican, "The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29)," available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html; and Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

siasm, appears throughout his writings. In his commentaries on the *Sentences* and the book of Wisdom he repeats the traditional anti-Jewish accusation that Jews are blind because they fail to recognize the coming of Christ.

What I want to examine here, though, is a possible and novel theological position that is consistent with Holcot's broader theology and might perhaps present an intriguing option for modern Christians and Jews who seek to move beyond a theology of supersessionism. Robert Holcot writes that individuals are bound to a given covenant only when God has revealed that covenant to them. Some human beings, therefore, are bound to the rules of the law of nature because God has communicated those rules to them (and not others). Similarly, God chose to communicate the Law of Moses to the people of Israel as His truth—that is, the rules were not just known to the people, they were revealed to the people of Israel as the truth of God, of YHWH. Here it is useful to recall the obligational model, according to which the original *positum* was put to the respondent by the opponent. In the model, it is necessary that the *positum* is communicated to the respondent and in a way in which the respondent understood the *positum* to be a binding proposition within the rules of the obligational arts. Following the analogy, what one could hold, given Holcot's position, is that God takes responsibility for the act of revelation. Jews and Christians then accept the proposition that God has revealed Himself through Holy Scripture. As such, God has chosen to reveal to certain groups of humanity that the Scriptures are true. Holcot's model allows one to argue, I think, that Jews living after the coming of Christ are perhaps not responsible for following the "New Covenant" (i.e., to hold that Jesus is the Messiah) if God has not revealed to them that there is, indeed, a new covenant that is grounded in the person of Jesus Christ, and even so, if they have not accepted this revelation as true. Would Holcot endorse such a claim?

This scenario is perhaps consistent with Holcot's obligatory analogy (though not with his supersessionism).⁶² First, recall that in his analogy Holcot imagines God revealing to Socrates the parameters of a given covenant. In this discussion Holcot states that God reveals the *positum* to Socrates and that *Socrates believes this proposition, God teaching it to him*. What is important here is that Socrates must believe the proposition for the proposition to be binding (in the same way a respondent must accept the *positum* in an obligatory debate). That is, Holcot seems to imagine a possible scenario in which information is known to an individual but the individual does not believe it. This, of course, would be the case for medieval Christians who lived in a world in which Muslims claimed that God had revealed His truth through the Prophet Mohammed. What a Christian would argue in response to Islam, according to this model, is that while a Christian may know about the claims of the Prophet, he or she does not believe those claims to be true. In the same way a defender of "Holcot's model" could argue that Jews have knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth but that they did not recognize him to be the Christ because God had not revealed it to them as the truth.

Second, Holcot says that the *positum* is not only believed, but it is believed in a particular way: i.e., *God teaching it to him*. The point, again, is that God's revelation to an individual must be taught to the individual by God as *the truth* in such a way that it is believed as *the truth*. Returning to the question of the Jews who lived during the medieval period, one defending this revision of Holcot's theology could claim that the Jews in the Middle Ages were aware of the teachings about Jesus but that they did not believe this claim as *the truth* because it had not been taught to them by God. That is, God did not teach it to the Jews as *the truth* of His revelation.⁶³

⁶² See, e.g., Holcot's discussion of the three laws (the law of nature, the Mosaic Law, and the law of the Gospel) in the *Moralitates* 11 (B1, 720-721); cf., Slotemaker-Witt, *Robert Holcot*, ch. 11.

⁶³ This argument is in no way defended by Robert Holcot. Further, while it is perhaps theologically consistent with certain aspects of his thought, other aspects of his thought (the idea, e.g., that the Jews are blind because they

On this theological model God has revealed Himself to humanity in three distinct ages: a time before the law, a time under the law, and a time after the law. In each age God communicates His truth to humanity and humanity believes this truth because it was taught to them by God. In each covenant, individuals must seek to follow the truth of God as revealed to them—in response, God rewards those who follow a given revelation and He gives grace. Further, one could argue that these are not three historically exclusive covenants such that one sequentially replaces the next (with Moses on Sinai or with Jesus’ resurrection).⁶⁴ One could push Holcot’s model, a bit, and argue that God in some cases does not reveal a given covenant to a particular individual (or group) as the truth. In particular, one could claim that God did not choose to reveal to the Jews, *as the truth*, the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah. While Jews at the time of Holcot (or presently) clearly knew about Jesus of Nazareth and what Christians claimed about him, one could argue that this knowledge was not revealed to the Jews by God as *the truth* and as such they live under a distinct covenant that began with Moses and extends into the medieval and modern world (a truth revealed in Written and Oral Torah and taught to them by God as *the truth*). On this model one could argue that God gives grace to the Jews for living into the truth of Judaism as revealed to them by God.

do not accept Jesus as the Messiah) clearly go against the argument suggested here. The present argument, therefore, is perhaps closer to modern theories that have attempted to move beyond supersessionism. For example, see David Novak, “From Supersessionism to Parallelism in Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Talking with Christians*, 8-25.

I have, for the sake of simplicity, bracketed the question of how Rabbinic Judaism relates to the Mosaic Law and the Jewish practices of the first and second temple periods. The Christian interested in modifying and extending Holcot’s thought could make a similar argument regarding two distinct propositions (the original *positum*) that God revealed as true to two distinct groups (Rabbinic Judaism and Christians) through a binding covenant.

⁶⁴ Holcot seems to grant this possibility (see, e.g., the discussion of Job).

Appendix A: Robert Holcot: Manuscripts and Editions Cited

Text	Manuscripts/Editions	<i>Sigla</i>
<i>In quatuor libros Sententiarum quaestiones</i>	Lyon, 1518; reprinted Frankfurt, 1967	L
<i>In quatuor libros Sententiarum quaestiones</i>	Oxford, Oriel College, ms. 15	O
<i>Moralitates</i>	Basel, 1586	B1
<i>Super Sapientiam Salomonis</i>	Basel, 1586	B1
<i>Super Sapientiam Salomonis</i>	Oxford, Balliol College, ms. 27	B2
<i>Utrum observatia legis mosaycae fuit Iudaeis meritoria vitae aeternae</i>	Paulo Molteni (ed.), <i>Roberto Holcot O.P.: Dottrina della grazia e della giustificazione con due questioni quodlibetali inedite</i> (Pinerolo, 1967), 174-204	
<i>Utrum observatia legis mosaycae fuit Iudaeis meritoria vitae aeternae</i>	Oxford, Balliol College, ms. 246	B

Appendix B: Latin Citations

Fn.	Reference	Latin Quotation
28	Lombard, <i>Sent.</i> IV, d.1, c.4	<i>Quae enim significandi gratia tantum instituta sunt, solum signa sunt, et non sacramenta: sicut fuerunt sacrificia carnalia et observantiae caerimoniales veteris Legis, quae nunquam poterant iustos facere offerentes.</i>
30	Aquinas, <i>Scriptum</i> IV, d.1, q.1, a.1. qc.1, arg.1	<i>Videtur quod sacramenta veteris legis gratiam conferebant. Ut enim supra dictum est, sacramenta a sacrando dicuntur, sicut ornatus ab ornando, et munimenta a muniendo. Sed sine gratia non potest aliquid sacrari. Ergo sacramenta veteris legis gratiam conferebant.</i>
31	Aquinas, <i>Scriptum</i> IV, d.1, q.1, a.5. qc.1, co.	<i>Sed haec opinio non videtur convenire dictis sanctorum: dicunt enim, quod lex erat occasio mortis, inquantum ostendebat peccatum, et gratiam adiutricem non conferebat. Nec differt quantum ad hoc qualitercumque vel directe vel indirecte gratiam conferrent. Et praeterea secundum hoc nulla esset vel valde modica praeminentia sacramentorum novae legis ad sacramenta veteris legis: quia etiam sacramenta novae legis a fide et significatione causandi efficaciam habent, ut dictum est. Et ideo alii dicunt, et melius, quod nullo modo sacramenta ipsa veteris legis, idest opus operatum in eis, gratiam conferebant, excepta circumcissione, de qua post dicitur.</i>
33	Aquinas, <i>Summa theologiae</i> Ia-IIae, q.103, a.4	<i>Quamvis autem sit eadem fides quam habemus de Christo, et quam antiqui patres habuerunt; tamen quia ipsi praecesserunt Christum, nos autem sequimur, eadem fides diversis verbis significatur a nobis et ab eis. Nam ab eis dicebatur, ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium, quae sunt verba futuri temporis, nos autem idem repraesentamus per verba praeteriti temporis, dicentes quod concepit et peperit. Et similiter caeremoniae veteris legis significabant Christum ut nasciturum et passurum, nostra autem sacramenta significant ipsum ut natum et passum</i>
36	Bonaventure, <i>De septem donis</i> , coll.1	<i>Lex se habet ad gratiam, sicut virtus apprehensiva ad motivam, et sicut instrumentum ad virtutem operativam. Esto, quod avis haberet aspectum ad videndum caelum et non haberet virtutem in alis, non posset volare nec ibi pertingere. Sic, quantumcumque gloriatur Iudaeus in Lege, ex quo est</i>

		<i>sine gratia, nihil est. Artifex, quando habet instrumentum, per quod operatur, nisi habeat virtutem operativam in manibus, nihil boni potest facere.</i>
37	Ibid.	<i>Iudaeae perfide, Legem habes in manu, sed nisi habeas virtutem operativam, frustra putas, te Legem habere. Ideo per Legem nemo salvatur, nisi adsit gratia.</i>
38	Ibid.	<i>Sed qua via descendit gratia in homines? Quaerit Iob dicens: Per quam viam spargitur lux, et dividitur aestus super terram? Respondeo et dico, quod gratia descendit super mentes rationales per Verbum incarnatum, per Verbum crucifixum et per Verbum inspiratum.</i>
39	Ibid.	<i>Per Verbum incarnatum descendit ad nos copia gratiarum; unde in Ioanne: De plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus et gratiam pro gratia. Certum est, quod originale principium, quod est Deus, quando creavit hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem suam in statu innocentiae, ita propinquum creavit illum sibi, ut per Verbum increatum informabilis esset homo ad gratiam. Postquam vero homo lapsus est per peccatum, providit divina sapientia modum condescensionis per Verbum incarnatum, per quod homo adaptaretur ad gratiam.</i>
44	Holcot, <i>Utrum observantia legis mosaycae</i>	<i>Antecedens proba per auctoritatem Petri Act. 15: "Quid temptatis imponere iugum super cervicem discipulorum quod neque nos neque patres nostri portare potuimus."</i>
45	Ibid.	<i>Omnis homo iustus apud Deum dignus est vita aeterna, omnis observator legis mosaycae iustus est apud Deum; igitur etc.</i>
46	Ibid.	<i>Hoc idem per exempla satis patet, sicut de Moyse, Josue, Samuele, David, Ezechia, Josia et Machabaeis et multis aliis.</i>
47	Ibid.	<i>Similiter sacrificia multa instituta fuerunt ad emendandum homines a peccatis sicut patet Lev. 4 et 6, ubi ponitur quadruplex hostia pro peccato scilicet pro peccato populi, sacerdotis, principis et animae, id est singularis personae. Tunc arguo sic: Idem est tribuere gratiam, et remissionem peccatorum, sed ista sacrificia tribuebant remissionem peccatorum.</i>
48	Ibid.	<i>Tertio dico quod extorte exponit verbum Christi Joh. 3:[5]: "Nisi quis renatus fuerit, etc."</i>

49	Ibid.	<i>Similiter ex ista ratione non concluditur quod sine gratia potest quis salvari in lege nova, sicut nec in veteri, unde Job, de quo exemplificat, nec fuit sub lege, nec fuit salvatus sine gratia.</i>
50 ^a	Ibid.	<i>Secunda ratio talis: ponatur quod aliquis ab infantia instruitur sub terra, nec infortetur de lege Dei, similiter illa, quae sunt servanda ad meritum vitae aeternae et statuat ipse penes se quod vellet sectam meliorem tenere, si constaret sibi, quae esset illa, et sic decedat.</i>
50 ^b	Holcot, Sent. I, q.4	<i>Dico quod gentes que legem Moysi si non habent, viventes secundum principia iuris naturalis, perceperunt fidem et gratiam a Deo sine lege Moysi, et faciebant legem, et dilexerunt Deum super omnia, instructe a Deo non per demonstrationes naturales.</i>
51	Holcot, Sent. I, q.1	<i>Unde quidam ducti sunt ad fidem per orationes sanctorum. Similiter aliqui solliciti de salute consequenda volunt et desiderant scire que sunt media et ad salutem necessaria; et cum intellexerint, quod credere sit necessarium ad salutem, tunc desiderant credere et volunt credere et habent animum promptum ad faciendum quicquid est necessarium ad salutem, et quicumque fuerint tales in quacumque secta, credo eos per divinam gratiam aliquo modo salvandos.</i>
52	Holcot, <i>Utrum observantia legis moysae</i>	<i>Secunda ratio, quam facit de homine nutrito sub terra, qui audiens de diversis sectis diceret penes se quod vellet servare meliorem, si sciret quae esset talis, dicit quod ipse salvaretur sine gratia et sine baptismo. Falsum est: sed Deus tali conferret gratiam, si non praeberet obicem gratiae et sic baptismum flammis consequeretur.</i>
54	Holcot, Sent. III, q.1	<i>Quarto dico quod de istis philosophis aut mundi sapientibus quidam in divino cultu secundum aliquos ritus et protestationes perstiterunt et salvati sunt, sicut constat de Iob, de Socrate, de Platone, Aristotele et plurima turba stoicorum presumi potest.</i>
57	Holcot, Sent. I, q.3	<i>Videtur mihi pro nunc ad istam formam respondendo est secundum artem obligatoriam. Nam idem est dicere revelet Deus Sorti a propositionem et credat Sortes a propositionem, Deo docente, et sic erit sicut per eam denotatur, et simile est si dicat sibi: 'Pono tibi a, quantum ad</i>

	<p><i>concedendum et negandum postea, et ideo facta tali revelatione, ipsa propositio revelata quotiescumque proponatur est concedenda, et omne sequens ex ea simpliciter per formalem consequentiam est concedendum. Ad omne autem quod non sequitur ex ea nisi consequentia ut nunc, respondendum est sicut ad impertinens, quia consequentia et nunc debet negari in illa arte.</i></p>
--	--