

Article

A Sacrificial View of Life

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Abstract: Sacrifice as a practice aimed at honoring deities by offering them something as a sign of propitiation or worship is usually studied from the viewpoint of numerous disciplines and religious cultures, from which equally numerous interpretations follow. However, the view of sacrifice as able to shape life *in its entirety*, which means that every act taken by believers may be seen in sacrificial terms, does not seem to be sufficiently considered. This is a view that I believe emerges from various reflections on sacrifice, especially the ones offered by thinkers of the past such as Augustine and Aquinas. In this essay, I first focus on these reflections and more specifically on Augustine's and Aquinas's view that religious believers should order everything to God. I then argue—in the footsteps of Aquinas—that this view applies to important acts taken by believers. These acts are prayer, faith, and intellectual activity.

Keywords: religion; prayer; faith; intellectual activity; Augustine; Aquinas

1. Introduction

Sacrifice as a practice aimed at honoring deities by offering them something as a sign of propitiation or worship is studied from the viewpoint of numerous religious cultures and scientific disciplines. Theology and philosophy as well as evolutionary biology, sociology, economics, literary studies, political and military theories, gender studies, and such, are involved in research on sacrifice.

It is true that, despite the numerous disciplines in question, two fundamental approaches to sacrifice have basically been adopted in the course of the last decades. A negative approach, on the basis of which sacrifice is seen as essentially violent and irrational (Coakley 2012, p. 5), and a positive one, based on which sacrifice is taken in a moral sense, as a necessary cathartic symbol of the human need for humility and service.¹

Nevertheless, the views of sacrifice that have emerged from the abovementioned studies are numerous and exceedingly varied. Regarding Pagan and Christian antiquity, for example, R. Daly says that 'modern scholarship has been pointing out (1) that little or nothing in the ancient world corresponds precisely to what is now called "sacrifice", and (2) that the practices in the ancient world that can be described as "sacrificial" are staggering in their number, variety, and pluriformity' (Daly 2019, p. 17). Lack of uniformity and clarity in research on sacrifice does not only regard biblical and religious studies. It also regards other fields such as philosophy, especially the 'continental' one. As P. Bubbio points out, decades of debates in which thinkers such as Bataille, Derrida, Nancy, Girard, and Žižek have offered substantial reflections on religious sacrifice have provided very little assistance in clarifying sacrifice *in itself*. This is why—so Bubbio claims—we still need to make it clear what we mean by 'sacrifice' (Bubbio 2014, p. 1).

It is my conviction that we also still need to ask ourselves whether religious sacrifice can be seen as able to shape life *in its entirety*, which means that every act taken by believers may be deeply characterized by sacrifice. In this essay, I intend to show that this view of life and sacrifice is stressed by representative figures from the Christian tradition such as Augustine and Aquinas. They have offered an influential doctrine of sacrifice as an act of directing everything to God, a doctrine which I will consider in Section 2. I will then argue—in the footsteps of Aquinas—that this doctrine applies to important acts taken by



Citation: Di Ceglie, Roberto. 2023. A Sacrificial View of Life. *Religions* 14: 876. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070876>

Academic Editors: Hans Zollner and Philip Goodchild

Received: 3 April 2023

Revised: 24 May 2023

Accepted: 2 July 2023

Published: 5 July 2023



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believers. These acts are prayer, faith, and intellectual activity,² to which I will devote Sections 3–5, respectively.

2. Sacrifice as an Act of Directing Everything to God

Can it be said that sacrifice shapes the life of believers, in the sense that *everything* they do should be ultimately seen in sacrificial terms? Can it be said that sacrifice is not just one category of ritual? As J. Zachhuber points out, Christians affirmed sacrifice ‘at a psychological, volitional, and motivational level, as an attitude of devotion to God, which could but did not have to find expression in ritual form’ (Zachhuber 2013, p. 17). In his *City of God*, Augustine offers the most extensive treatment of sacrifice in the Patristic era and says that sacrifice applies to the whole experience of believers. He proposes a spiritual interpretation of sacrifice, which implies the adoption of ‘a wide variety of religious acts performed by laity and clergy alike and expressing individual and communal devotion to God’ (Ibid., p. 3). According to Augustine,

man himself, consecrated in the name of God, and vowed to God, is a sacrifice in so far as he dies to the world that he may live to God . . . Our body, too, is a sacrifice when we chasten it by temperance, if we do so as we ought, for God’s sake, that we may not yield our members instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but instruments of righteousness unto God. (Augustine 1950, X, 6)

In this view, if we love God and see him as our supreme good, then everything we are ready to give up with the aim of attaining communion with him can be considered a sacrifice. Everything we *do* to attain communion here under consideration honors God. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that *we* are those who really benefit from it. As Augustine says, ‘whatever right worship is paid to God profits not Him, but man’ (Ibid., X, 5). According to the author of the *City of God*, ‘our good . . . is nothing else than to be united to God. It is, if I may say so, by spiritually embracing Him that the intellectual soul is filled and impregnated with true virtues. We are enjoined to love this good with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength’. This is of great importance to understand Augustine’s view of sacrifice, because ‘a true sacrifice is every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship, and which has a reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed’ (Ibid., X, 3).

Aquinas substantiates the relationship between, on the one hand, the fact that we can be truly blessed when we make religious sacrifices and, on the other hand, the honor paid to God. He says that being subjected to someone who is superior to us causes our perfection, from which follows that being subjected to God by paying him honor and reverence is beneficial to us.³ In Aquinas’s view, religion consists precisely in paying God honor and reverence. He takes into account three meanings of religion, which emerge from as many etymologies of the word ‘religio’. He says that this word is derived (1) ‘from frequent reading’, (2) ‘from a repeated choice of what has been lost through negligence’, or (3) ‘from being a bond’. The words ‘relegere’, ‘religere’, and ‘religare’ correspond to (1)–(3), respectively. Aquinas argues that common to all of them is the view that religion ‘denotes properly a relation to God. For it is He to Whom we ought to be bound as to our unfailing principle; to Whom also our choice should be resolutely directed as to our last end; and Whom we lose when we neglect Him by sin, and should recover by believing in Him and confessing our faith’ (Aquinas 1920, q. 81, a. 1). Religious acts, therefore, are directed to God taken as their last end. Furthermore, this should apply to *all* human activities since God should be seen as our ‘unfailing principle’ and ‘last end’. Given the Augustinian influential view, which I have mentioned above, that what we do to be united to God is a sacrifice to him, it can be said that, if *all* human activities are done to generate communion with God, they should be seen as shaped by sacrifice.

To support this view, which is crucial to this essay’s argument, let me propose a number of considerations Aquinas puts forward while treating religion and its acts.

First, he distinguishes two types of acts of religion. Some of them—sacrifice, adoration, and the like—are ‘proper and immediate’, ‘by which man is directed to God alone’; others,

such as acts of temperance and mercy—can be produced ‘through the medium of the virtues which it [religion] commands, directing them to the honor of God’ (See *ibid.*, q. 81, a. 1, ad 1).⁴ The former group regards religion ‘in its proper sense’, whereas the latter contains acts that are religious ‘in a broad sense’ (*Ibid.*, q. 81, a. 1, ad 2).

Second, Aquinas reflects on the abovementioned distinction also when he deals with objections raised by those who believe that religion does not seem ‘a special virtue distinct from the others’. They base their view precisely on Augustine’s authoritative argument—which I have already mentioned above—that *every* action we take to be united to God ‘is a true sacrifice’. Thus, they argue, since sacrifice is an act of religion, ‘every virtuous deed belongs to religion; and consequently religion is not a special virtue’ (*Ibid.*, q. 81, a. 4, arg 1). In reply, Aquinas reiterates his view that religion commands other virtues. He says that ‘every virtuous deed (*omne opus virtutis*) is said to be a sacrifice, in so far as it is done out of reverence of God. Hence this does not prove that religion is a general virtue, but that it commands all other virtues, as stated above’ (*Ibid.*, q. 81, a. 4, ad 1). This position, which includes not only the conviction that every virtuous act can be seen as religious in a broad sense but also the more specific conviction that every virtuous act can be seen in sacrificial terms, must be of great interest to Aquinas as shown by the fact that he mentions it again elsewhere, more precisely in the question he devotes to sacrifice. According to him, ‘the very fact that we wish to cling to God in a spiritual fellowship (*quadam spirituali societate*) pertains to reverence for God: and consequently the act of any virtue assumes the character of a sacrifice (*rationem sacrificii accipit*) through being done in order that we may cling to God in holy fellowship’ (*Ibid.*, q. 85, a. 3, ad 1).

Third, a contradiction may appear to emerge between Aquinas’s view that sacrifice is a ‘proper and immediate’ religious act, which means that it is directed to God alone, and his conviction that all virtuous deeds, not only the ones directed to God alone, are said to be religious and, more specifically, sacrifices. In reply, it should be said that Aquinas’s view that every virtuous act can be taken as religious and more specifically as a sacrifice is acceptable since it is grounded in his distinction between immediate acts of religion and religious acts in a broad sense. Acts of virtues other than religion can be directed to the reverence of God, ‘as when a man gives alms of his own things for God’s sake’. It is in this way that ‘the acts also of other virtues may be called sacrifices (*etiam actus aliarum virtutum sacrificia dici possunt*)’ (*Ibid.*, q. 85, a. 3).

Fourth, Aquinas distinguishes three types of goods that humans tend to achieve. They are, in order of decreasing value, the soul’s good, the body’s good, and the good that consists of external things. The good of the soul is offered to God by way of devotion, prayer, and the like, ‘and this is the principal sacrifice (*hoc est principale sacrificium*)’. The good of the body is offered while accepting martyrdom, abstinence, and so on. The good that consists of external things is offered to God directly, that is, ‘when we offer our possession to God immediately’, and indirectly, i.e., ‘when we share them [external things] with our neighbor for God’s sake’ (*Ibid.*, q. 85, a. 3, ad 2).

Based on these considerations, it is possible to confirm the view that every virtuous act, since it implies the act of offering some good, is a sacrifice. Furthermore, since there is a hierarchical order of the goods that can be offered, the principal sacrifice is the *inward* one, i.e., the sacrifice whose object is the most important good, that is, the good of the soul. Acts such as devotion and prayer, as Aquinas says, are therefore the hierarchically most important types of sacrifice.⁵ They allow the believer to offer to God *herself*, and not goods connected to her body or external goods.

3. Prayer as Shaped by Sacrifice

Prayer can be seen as a religious act through which the believer subordinates and offers her own will to God. This emerges from Aquinas’s reflection when he concentrates on errors that can be made while determining the nature of prayer. Aquinas mentions a threefold error made by the ancients. First, ‘some held that human affairs are not ruled by Divine providence’. Second, some believed that ‘all things, even in human affairs, happen

of necessity'. Third, there was the opinion 'of those who held that human affairs are indeed ruled by Divine providence, and that they do not happen of necessity; yet they deemed the disposition of Divine providence to be changeable, and that it is changed by prayers and other things pertaining to the worship of God' (Ibid., q. 83, a. 2). Aquinas claims that none of these opinions is acceptable. From the first two follows that there is no point in praying. In fact, the first error consists in saying that God is not provident, and the second one is that we are not provided with free will. The third error consists in thinking that God's mind is changeable and, even more unacceptably, that we have the power to make God change his mind. Against these views, Aquinas argues that there is a point in praying and that prayer is useful to the extent that we neither impose 'necessity on human affairs' nor imply 'changeableness on the part of the Divine disposition'.

The utility of prayer consists in the possibility that 'by our prayers, we may obtain what God has appointed' (Ibid., q. 83, a. 2, ad 2). In contrast, common to all of the errors mentioned above is the idea that the believer prays to God to obtain what *she* wants. In fact, only if the believer prays to God to obtain what she wants it can be explained why prayer becomes useless if divine providence does not rule human events, which is the first error, and if all things occur necessarily, which is the second error. The same can be said of the third error, that is, the view that God may change his will and the course of events because of the believer's prayer, a prayer that would obviously be aimed at obtaining what the believer wants.⁶ Aquinas says that, like any other religious act, prayer should be due to the will to be united to God, which implies the subordination of oneself, one's will included, to him. Furthermore, the subordination of the creature to her creator should perfect the creature. This can be explained in merely rational terms, without reference to faith, as shown by Aquinas.⁷ In this connection, it may be useful to remind the reader of Plato's view of prayer, which he presented in *Alcibiades II*. In it, Socrates recommends that one should pray to Zeus as follows: 'King Zeus, grant us good whether prayed for or unsought by us; But that which we ask amiss, do thou avert' (Plato 2017, 142e–143a). In other words, Plato shows awareness that, once before the gods, and then *a fortiori* before the creator of all things, we should not pray to obtain what *we* want, which may be evil. We should pray to obtain what *God* wants, which can only be our best. That is why, after rejecting errors regarding prayer, Aquinas claims that 'we pray not that we may change the Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers' (Aquinas 1920, II-II, q. 83, a. 2).

A quite predictable objection may be raised. Where does the utility of prayer lie if we pray to impetrate that which God has already decided will happen? Replying to this objection is of special importance here. In this way, I can show that when Aquinas says that prayer is useful, he is referring to the fact that by praying one subordinates and offers one's will, one's wishes, and then oneself to God, which confirms the view that prayer is deeply shaped by sacrifice. However, let me make this point by first referring to Augustine, and more precisely to how he showed that God's foreknowledge is compatible with human free will. Augustine proposed his solution as follows: 'It is not the case . . . that because God foreknew what would be in the power of our wills, there is for that reason nothing in the power of our wills' (Augustine 1950, v, 10). If God can foresee everything, why deny that he can also foresee that we will freely engage in certain actions? Based on the premise that his interlocutors share with him—God can foresee everything—Augustine shows that it does not follow that our free will is compromised. This explains why 'prayers, also, are of avail to procure those things which He foreknew that He would grant to those who offered them' (Ibid.). If our free will is not compromised by God's foreknowledge, then we can freely pray to God to be granted those goods that he has already decided to grant us. Let me now note that, once explained that praying to God does not contradict God's foreknowledge of every event, I still need to explain *why* one should pray given that God has already decided the course of events. A convincing explanation may be that believers are expected to conform themselves to the will of God. If they love God and trust him, they should take everything he has prepared as the best that can happen to them. In other words,

because of their charity, they should devote themselves to God. As Aquinas says, ‘charity both causes devotion (inasmuch as love makes one ready to serve one’s friend) and feeds on devotion’ (Aquinas 1920, II-II, q. 82, a. 2, ad 2). This is why believers should be ready to accept everything is included in God’s will. This reminds us of Aquinas’s definition of implicit faith. By implicit faith, believers are ready to accept everything God may reveal. There are truths of faith that they may not be aware of. However, they should be ready to believe them. According to Aquinas, ‘as regards the primary points or articles of faith, man is bound to believe them, just as he is bound to have faith; but as to other points of faith, man is not bound to believe them explicitly, but only implicitly, or to be ready to believe them, in so far as he is prepared to believe whatever is contained in the Divine Scriptures’ (Ibid., q. 2, a. 5). Note that it is charity that makes the believer prepared to believe.⁸ It is because believers love God and trust him that they are ready to believe everything he may reveal to them. In other words, charity and devotion lead the believer to commit herself to God.

I will focus on faith and commitment to God in the next section. For now, I can conclude the present section by saying in the footsteps of Aquinas that believers should pray to conform themselves to the will of God. Conforming themselves to the will of God is what I have called above *inward* and *principal* sacrifice.

4. Faith as Shaped by Sacrifice

Can faith also be seen as an inward sacrifice? What do believers offer to God when they believe? To answer these questions, it is necessary to briefly focus on Aquinas’s doctrine of faith.

According to him, faith is ‘an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God’ (Ibid., q. 2, a. 9). Faith is an act of the intellect, and nonetheless the intellect needs to be caused to assent to divine revelation, seen as the good itself, by human will. Human will is in turn moved by divine grace that makes the believer love God and trust him. As I have shown at the end of the previous section, according to Aquinas, charity makes the will ready to believe. Therefore, it can be said that God makes believers love him, trust him, and believe whatever he has revealed. (Furthermore, this occurs at different levels of intensity, which are proportional to the levels of intensity at which Aquinas says that believers experience faith (Ibid., q. 5, a. 4).)

On the basis of these few considerations, it is already possible to see that, like prayer, faith presupposes devotion to God. One believes firmly—faith, at least in its paradigmatic form, is characterized by certainty (Ibid., q. 1, a. 4)—because one’s intellect gives assent under the command of the will, which is in turn moved by God’s grace. It is because one loves God and trusts him that one firmly believes. (This applies when faith does not have a fully evident object; that is, its object—Incarnation, the Trinity, and such like—is not supported by conclusive evidence. This is why Aquinas says that this object is unable to cause our intellect to firmly assent. This, however, does not apply always, because there are truths of faith, e.g., God’s existence, which Aquinas claims enjoy full evidence (Ibid., I, q. 2, a. 2).)

Therefore, although faith is an intellectual act, the believer needs to give up the rights of the intellect. I mean that, although there is *no full evidence* in support of the most fundamental truths of faith, she should assent to them *with certainty*. Note that the certainty in question is ‘certainty of faith’ and not ‘certainty of reason’, the latter being possible only if supported by full evidence. The difference between the two kinds of certainty is explained by Aquinas while comparing faith to intellectual virtues such as intellect, science, and wisdom. Let me cite the entire passage in which Aquinas offers this comparison:

Certitude can be looked at in two ways. First, on the part of its cause, and thus a thing which has a more certain cause, is itself more certain. On this way faith is more certain than those three virtues, because it is founded on the Divine Truth, whereas the aforesaid three virtues are based on human reason. Secondly, certitude may be considered on the part of the subject, and thus the more a man’s

intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is. On this way, faith is less certain, because matters of faith are above the human intellect, whereas the objects of the aforesaid three virtues are not. Since, however, a thing is judged simply with regard to its cause, but relatively, with respect to a disposition on the part of the subject, it follows that faith is more certain simply, while the others are more certain relatively, i.e., for us. (Ibid., II-II, q. 4, a. 8)

From the viewpoint of the *cause* of certitude, faith is more certain than reason, whereas from the viewpoint of the *person* who believes or reasons intellectual virtues are more certain than faith. Unlike the latter, in fact, intellectual virtues meet our need for full evidence. This means that, at least from the viewpoint of the *person* who has faith, *doubt* can emerge—the person in question, in fact, needs full evidence in support of a firm assent. In this sense, Aquinas says that ‘doubt is not on the side of the cause of faith, but on our side, in so far as we do not fully grasp matters of faith with our intellect’ (Ibid., q. 4, a. 8, ad 1). Aquinas also says that the viewpoint of the cause is more important than the viewpoint of the subject or person because the adoption of the former enables us to know the object of knowledge more completely than the adoption of the viewpoint of the subject or person does. In this way, Aquinas can conclude that ‘faith is more certain simply’. At any rate, it remains true that doubt can emerge and affect faith. The believer needs to be aware of this. When it comes to fundamental matters of faith such as the articles contained in the Creed, she is required to give up the certainty of reason, which can be based only on conclusive arguments. More precisely, her commitment to God leads her to give up *the choice* to assent *only* to things characterized by such certainty, i.e., to rely on rational evidence alone as a guide to the intellect.

Note that this does not cause any fideism. On the contrary, the sacrifice in question is expected to make cognitive abilities stronger and to rationally support faith more effectively. I will show how this is possible in the next section. I will argue that substantial rewards from the merely rational viewpoint can emerge because of the abovementioned sacrifice. Before proceeding, however, let me point out that an objection may be raised. It may be said that sacrifice implies the possibility that no reward is offered by the receiver of the sacrificed gift. This objection, however, only means that one should not sacrifice based on calculations of the merit that one may acquire and of the reward that one may gain. However, those who make sacrifices by way of sincere faith do not calculate anything. I mean that, like implicit faith,⁹ their faith is based on the readiness to believe, readiness which is caused by charity, and charity does not include any of the calculations mentioned above.

5. Intellectual Activity as Shaped by Sacrifice

Can intellectual activity conducted by believers be seen as a type of inward sacrifice? To answer this question, I need to refer to the relationship between the activity in question and the faith of the believer. Due to charity, the believer is ready to firmly adhere to God and divine revelation no matter if intellectual requirements have not been met. This means that she is ready to sacrifice such requirements. Nonetheless, as I am about to show, rational rewards can follow, that is, intellectual activity can be substantially improved. (As I have said above, the believer who sincerely adheres to God and divine revelation does not sacrifice only *to obtain rewards*, which is why she does not need to be warned about the possibility that rewards might not be gained.)

To show how the rewards in question may be gained, let us focus on Aquinas’s view of the relationship between faith and rational arguments.¹⁰ In a well-known passage, he says that if natural reason attains conclusions that contradict the truths of faith, this means that the arguments adopted were wrong:

If . . . anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore also it is possible from

the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary. (Aquinas 1946, q. 2, a. 3)

The thesis Aquinas advocates is that once arguments against faith have been rejected—simply because they led to contradiction with faith—reason must start anew from the beginning, ‘from its own principles’. This means that Aquinas fully trusts in reason, and this seems to be due to his religious conviction that, since God is the author of both faith and reason, reason cannot contradict the former,¹¹ and since no falsity can affect faith, reason is reliable. Thus, it can be said that Aquinas places firm trust in reason because of his faith.¹² As I have already said so far, faith is characterized by firmness, and firmness is due to charity and devotion to God. Due to charity and devotion, the believer wants to unite herself with God and is ready to accept as true whatever is contained in divine revelation. By the same token, the believer should reject all of the arguments that deny the truths of faith, no matter how convincing they may at least at first sight appear to be. Faith is, therefore, surer than any rational certainty. (Note that when Aquinas mentions religious beliefs to which the believer is invited to tenaciously stick no matter how persuasive contrary evidence may be, he only refers to those beliefs that believers should consider undeniable, such as that God exists, that Jesus is the Lord, and the like.¹³) Furthermore, the certainty of the paradigmatic believers does not prevent them from arguing for faith. On the contrary, it makes them certain that their firm trust in reason is properly placed, from which follows their confidence, which I have shown Aquinas’s thought paradigmatically reveals, that any objection to their faith will be answered.

Let me now argue that it is precisely the believer’s sacrifice of the choice to rely only on rational certainty that may allow her the opportunity to gain at least two substantial intellectual rewards.

First, if believers love God and accordingly entrust themselves to him, they attain certainty (of faith) that what he has revealed as well as everything that can plausibly be related to his revelation is *true*. Given the various levels of intensity at which believers experience faith and charity (Ibid., q. 5, a. 4), it can be said that the more they love and trust God, the more they will be ready to believe whatever he has revealed, including the belief that God, being the creator of everything, created both faith and reason. Consequently, the faithful will firmly believe that no contradiction can arise between faith and reason; otherwise, God would contradict himself, which is impossible (see note 11). This seems to put paradigmatic believers in an ideal condition to conduct intellectual investigations. Once convinced that human reason cannot contradict that which they are expected to mostly care about, i.e., their faith and other related beliefs, they will be ready to follow reason wherever it leads, which is the mark of philosophy and science. By contrast, it does not seem possible to say the same of those who neither love nor trust the creator of both faith and reason. They can only rely on the correct functioning of their cognitive faculties. Like everybody else, however, they are well aware that reason is affected by fallibility, fallibility which implies that further research may disprove what they maximally care about. This may prevent them from following reason wherever it leads.

One may object that following reason wherever it leads seems to be ‘vain curiosity’ (*vana curiositas*), which Augustine, Aquinas, and many others would reject.¹⁴ In reply, let me say that there is not only vain and rejectable curiosity, which takes away from God. H. Oberman appropriately argued that there is also *iusta curiositas* (just curiosity), which supports faith and the connected view that everything should be directed to God (see Oberman 1974). This characterizes the abovementioned passage of Aquinas’s *Super Boetium De Trinitate*. In it, the author encourages believers to employ their cognitive abilities in any possible direction to confirm the beliefs that they already hold by faith, including the belief that everything should be *directed to* God. This obviously does not have anything to do with vain curiosity, which takes *away from* God.

Second, in proportion to their faith believers are expected to adopt good habits in every activity they take, the intellectual one included. The more they firmly believe, the more should they love their neighbor and promote intellectual virtues such as patience,

open-mindedness, humility, and docility, which are virtues that can be taken as a subset of the corresponding moral virtues.¹⁵ Quite predictably, if one adopts good habits this should offer one the opportunity to better understand one's interlocutors and should consequently facilitate the attainment of truth. Can the same be said of those who do not share charity and devotion to God? After all, everyone should seek the virtues mentioned above. Propositions such as 'be virtuous, keep an open mind, consider evidence carefully, do justice and oppose injustice' have at least a *prima facie* evidence that all may often recognize, including those who only rely on evidence. This, however, cannot be said of love of the neighbor, which it is plausible to say only believers are required to cultivate. (Equally plausibly, such a love best supports the cultivation of the intellectual virtues mentioned above.) Moreover, the virtues in question should apply to every belief, including the one that while doing research and conducting debates, we should adopt those virtues. This, however, is not possible for those who only rely on evidence. To decide to adopt those virtues, they first need to find appropriate arguments without adopting the virtues in question. Finally, since for them the conviction that we need to adopt good habits in our intellectual activities can only be due to rational arguments, this conviction will consequently appear revisable to them.

In conclusion, it can be said that in both cases substantial rewards seem available to those who sacrifice intellectual requirements such as full evidence and are ready to adhere to God and his revelation because of devotion to him. If my argument is correct, then it is possible to conclude that intellectual activity taken by believers can be deeply shaped by sacrifice. When it comes to religious beliefs that they should consider undeniable, believers should give up the choice to rely only on intellectual requirements because of charity and devotion.

In this article, I have shown that, on the basis of Augustine's and especially Aquinas's reflection, the whole experience of the believer should be seen as deeply shaped by sacrifice. Not only religious acts, prayer *in primis*, but also faith and intellectual activity can be appropriately understood in sacrificial terms. The promotion of all of these activities should be due to the will to give up something for God's sake. Prayer should be based on the readiness to give up one's wishes and to conform oneself to God's will, whereas faith and intellectual activity should be cultivated based on the fact that, at least in some cases, the believer should be ready to give up the choice to rely only on rational certainty.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ See Houtman et al. (2014, p. 1). As J. Dunnill points out, however, self-sacrifice and self-denial may also be seen in negative terms, given that 'any kind of "self-denial" is in conflict with our culture's emphasis on "self-expression" and "self-fulfilment"' (Dunnill 2013, p. 4).
- ² Moral experience is not mentioned because, as I have shown above (see note 1), it is already customary to connect that experience to the notion of self-sacrifice.
- ³ 'We pay God honor and reverence, not for His sake (because He is of Himself full of glory to which no creature can add anything), but for our own sake, because by the very fact that we revere and honor God, our mind is subjected to Him; wherein its perfection consists, since a thing is perfected by being subjected to its superior' (Aquinas 1920, II-II, q. 81, a. 7).
- ⁴ Aquinas explains the relationship between virtues that 'command' and virtues that 'are commanded' by saying that 'the virtue which is concerned with the end, commands the virtues which are concerned with the means' (Ibid.).
- ⁵ This is confirmed and not contradicted, as it may appear to be at first sight, by Aquinas's conviction that sensible things are necessary to make sacrifices. As he says, 'the human mind, in order to be united to God, needs to be guided by the sensible world... Wherefore in the Divine worship it is necessary to make use of corporeal things, that man's mind may be aroused thereby, as by signs, to the spiritual acts by means of which he is united to God. Therefore the internal acts of religion take precedence of the others and belong to religion essentially, while its external acts are secondary, and subordinate to the internal acts' (Ibid., q. 81, a. 7).
- ⁶ Note that the view that one prays to obtain what one wants led a number of modern thinkers and philosophers to reject prayer. Let me just mention Baruch Spinoza. According to him, prayer reveals believers' ignorance of the fact that the course of events

cannot be changed. Furthermore, it reveals their arrogance that prayer can modify reality, as it is shown by the fact that believers pray to God to obtain something, ‘especially when they are in danger and cannot help themselves’ (Spinoza 2004, Preface, p. 3f).

7 As he argues, ‘a thing is perfected by being subjected to its superior’ (Aquinas 1920, II-II, q. 81, a. 7). See above, note 3.

8 As Aquinas says, ‘charity . . . makes the will ready to believe’ (Ibid., q. 2, a. 10, ad 2).

9 See Aquinas’s view of implicit faith, which I have referred to above. (Ibid., q. 2, a. 5.)

10 A recent treatment of the relationship between faith, reason, and charity in Aquinas’s works is offered by Di Ceglie (2022).

11 ‘It is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge. In this case one would necessarily be false: and since both kinds of truth are from God, God would be the author of error, a thing which is impossible’ (Aquinas 1946, q. 2, a. 3).

12 After all, those who trust reason by way of reason and say that it is reason that leads them to obtain the belief that reason is reliable obviously fall into a circular argument.

13 There are aspects of religious experience that believers are expected to rethink or, in some cases, reject. As Aquinas says, ‘it is possible for a believer to have a false opinion through a human conjecture (*ex coniectura humana*), but it is quite impossible for a false opinion to be the outcome of faith’ (Aquinas 1920, II-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3).

14 Among the numerous considerations devoted to this subject, let me only refer to Augustine, *Confessions*, x, 35, 54.

15 Intellectual virtues can be seen as a subset of moral virtues. As Linda Zagzebski points out, the beliefs held by those who are intellectually virtuous are expected to be due to *habituation* and *deliberate choice*. For more on this, see Zagzebski (1996). For a recent consideration of the adoption of good habits as related to a ‘spiritual turn in epistemology’, see Di Ceglie (2023).

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