

THE CREATURE BEFORE GOD

Part II

The Due Return

Contents

1	The Question after Vertigo	1
2	Worship before the God Who Needs Nothing	1
3	Justice without Equivalence	2
4	The Living Sacrifice	3
5	Command within Deliverance	4
6	Dependence, Duty, Precept, and Culpability	4
7	The Due Made Common	5
8	The Neighbor at the Altar	6
9	What Action Cannot Close	7
10	Grace and the Answer	8
11	At Gethsemane	8
	Notes	10
A	Scope, Method, and Qualifications	11
B	References	14

1 The Question after Vertigo

Part I ended in the present tense: the creature is being held in existence now. The conclusion makes the asymmetry harder, not easier. God needs nothing; the creature has nothing unreceived. An equal return is impossible. Yet knowingly to receive the good and leave action untouched is already to take a position toward its giver.

Repayment is therefore the wrong model from the start. The relevant return neither enriches God nor pretends that the creature stands outside what it has received. It concerns the truthfulness of creaturely action: whether intellect, will, body, time, and goods are ordered in accord with a relation to God that the creature did not make.

One evasion appears pious: wait to act until love is pure. Christ's parable of the two sons refuses it. One says that he will not work in the vineyard and afterward goes; the other answers with deference and does nothing. "Which of the two did his father's will?" (Matt 21:28–31). The answer is not the son whose language was warmer. A due act does not become hypocritical merely because affection has not yet caught up with judgment. Hypocrisy counterfeits a goodness one does not possess; obedience can begin by doing the known good while asking that the will itself be made good.

In Psalm 116, this problem assumes liturgical form. "How can I repay the Lord?" (v. 12). The psalmist answers not with a possession transferred into divine ownership, but by receiving the cup, calling upon the Lord's name, fulfilling his vows, and giving thanks in the presence of the people (vv. 13–19). Return begins, paradoxically, with reception.

St. Paul excludes any return that would make God a debtor. "Who has given [God] anything that he may be repaid?" His answer is absolute: no one. "From him and through him and for him are all things" (Rom 11:35–36). No creature reaches behind the first gift or supplies a divine lack. Whatever return means, it cannot mean repayment.

The question is therefore practical before it is affective. What must a creature do when the truth of creaturehood is known but not yet loved?

2 Worship before the God Who Needs Nothing

Any account of worship that supplies a need in God reverses the relation it means to confess. If sacrifice or obedience completed something missing in the divine life, the Creator would depend upon the creature. Worship would no longer tell the truth about either one.

Irenaeus denies that divine service answers a need in God. God did not form Adam because he needed a human being upon whom to depend. Before creation, the Word glorified the Father. Nor did God command service because he needed human obedience. Those who follow the light do not illuminate it; they are illuminated. Service profits God nothing, while the servant receives life, incorruption, and communion with God. His account of sacrifice follows the same order. God does not hunger for oblations. He teaches a people to turn from idols, to practice justice, and to offer from a rightly ordered heart.¹

We do not serve to supply a lack in God; we serve because we lack the fullness of communion with God. Worship brings no gain to the One worshipped. It directs the worshipper toward communion with the good that no creature can produce for itself.

In Aquinas's account of religion, we offer not for God's usefulness but for his glory and our good. "Glory" here is not an increase in divine excellence. It is the creature's manifestation and acknowledgment of an excellence already infinite. Right worship creates no new truth about God; it brings the worshipper's act into conformity with truth.²

2.1 Gratitude without indifference

God owes no creature the original gift of existence. Aquinas nevertheless distinguishes the orders carefully. God is not directed to creatures as to an end that perfects him. Within the order willed by divine wisdom, however, God gives each created nature what belongs to its condition; created dues are real but derivative. The creature likewise possesses goods, powers, relations, and ends from which genuine obligations follow.³

Creation begins with no antecedent claim in a nonexistent recipient. Once a rational creature exists, however, it is capable of acting fittingly or unfittingly toward the source from whom it exists. It can acknowledge truth or suppress

it, honor the good or prefer a lesser good as ultimate, render justice or withhold it. The gratuity of the first gift does not leave moral life shapeless.

Gratuity excludes contract without producing moral indifference. God does not create in order to exact an equivalent, but neither does the freedom of the gift leave the relation without moral form. Obligation can arise within a relation that is neither commercial nor initiated by the one obliged. Gratuity and due are not contraries.

The relation to God is more radical and less commensurable. Everything offered is already received: the body that kneels, the reason that judges, the will that consents, the bread and wine placed upon the altar, the hour reserved for worship. Nothing crosses from an independent estate into divine possession. The return cannot make the accounts equal because there are no such accounts.

The giver cannot be enriched, and the return cannot be equal; nevertheless, the creature can render or withhold what is fitting.

3 Justice without Equivalence

A ledger cannot settle this return. The creature has nothing independent to give, God cannot be enriched, and no exchange can close the relation. Yet something is truly due. Religion belongs to justice under a peculiar condition: the due is real, while equality of exchange is impossible.

3.1 The will to render the due

Aquinas receives the classical juristic definition of justice as the constant and enduring will to render to each one his right. The definition joins an objective term—what is due to another—to a subjective firmness—the will that knowingly and steadily renders it (ST II–II, q. 58, a. 1). Justice is not satisfied by a correct idea retained within the intellect. It rectifies action toward another.

God is not “another” alongside creatures within one common genus. Yet a rational creature is really distinct from God and really ordered to him. The special virtue governing acts of honor toward God is religion. It offers sacrifice, adoration, prayer, vows, and related acts because God alone is the first principle of creation and government and the last end of rational life.

Religion belongs to justice, but not as a part capable of exact equality. Aquinas places it among justice’s potential parts: something is genuinely due, but the full equality of strict justice cannot be achieved because the recipient infinitely exceeds the giver and the return can never equal the gift. The shortfall is not a defect in a willing creature’s virtue. Equality is measured according to the creature’s capacity and God’s acceptance, not as equivalence between independent parties.⁴

An equal return is impossible. A true return is not.

3.2 Obligation without coercion

Obligation is not identical with constraint. Aquinas distinguishes a necessity arising from constraint, which acts against the will, from the necessity of a command or of a means required for an end. The second does not destroy merit when one voluntarily does what is necessary (ST II–II, q. 58, a. 3, ad 2). Likewise, the service owed to God can be virtuous precisely insofar as it is rendered willingly (q. 81, a. 2, ad 2).

Duty is therefore neither self-creation nor alien coercion. The will does not invent the good by choosing it, but neither is a forced bodily movement an act of virtue. A just act is knowingly chosen for a due end and performed with stability. Obligation can bind the will without forcing it.

Consent does not produce the Creator’s authority; nevertheless, the creature’s moral act becomes whole only through consent. A person can attend worship to preserve a reputation, recite words without attention, or avoid external wrongdoing while inwardly preferring injustice. The external act may retain some objective order, but virtue requires the will’s truthful participation.

Aquinas calls the will's readiness for divine service *devotion*. Devotion is not first an intensity of feeling. It is the act by which one gives oneself readily to what pertains to God's service (ST II-II, q. 82, aa. 1-2). The readiness is inward but not disembodied: the will made ready for divine service must act through the body it has received.

3.3 A right act before a ready heart

Three goods that may converge in one deed should not be confused. An act may first possess an objective rightness: the debt is paid, the truth told, the child fed, the worship rendered. It becomes an act of virtue in the fuller moral sense when it proceeds knowingly and freely from a will choosing the due good with the steadiness proper to justice. Its supernatural merit depends upon grace and charity and cannot be read from the deed's exterior surface.⁵

These are not three competing verdicts upon action. The objectively due act is a real good even when the agent's formation is incomplete. If restitution is owed, its payment does not become false because remorse is still shallow. If worship is owed, attendance does not become a lie because sensible desire is weak. One must not pretend to love; one may obey while learning to love.

This is why the first conversion of mind can precede the conversion of desire. The will begins to place action under the truth that the intellect has seen. Repeated action does not manufacture infused charity, but it can cease protecting the habits by which the creature continually says no.

4 The Living Sacrifice

Paul's "therefore" joins the denial that anyone first gives to God, the confession that all things are from him and through him and for him, and the mercy that precedes response: the creature is to offer the body as a living sacrifice (Rom 11:35-12:1). The offering neither repairs a divine lack nor transfers an independently possessed good into God's estate. The body offered is already created; the reason renewed is already sustained; the will that consents already acts through powers it has received.

Sacrifice makes the return visible. Aquinas argues that natural reason recognizes some outward sign of the honor and subjection due to the first principle, while positive law determines its concrete forms. Embodied signs subject the mind to God and can arouse the devotion they express; the outward offering signifies the inward sacrifice in which the soul offers itself to God (ST II-II, q. 81, a. 7; q. 85, aa. 1-2). The sign is false when it is severed from the inward act, but the inward act is not therefore disembodied. An embodied and social creature answers with more than an intention hidden from the world.

For Augustine, every work truly ordered to holy fellowship with God is sacrifice; the person becomes an offering, works of mercy are referred to the supreme good, and the whole redeemed city is offered through the High Priest who first offered himself (*City of God* X.5-6, 20). Christian self-offering is not an autonomous ascent. It occurs within Christ's prior oblation.

The Eucharist is not deduced from First-Mover metaphysics. Christ's sacrifice is a genuinely human oblation offered by the divine Son; it cannot be placed alongside creaturely returns as though commensurable with them. Christ is priest and victim; the Church's self-offering depends wholly upon his perfect prior oblation. United to him, she offers the divine Victim and learns to offer herself with him (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 47-48; *Lumen Gentium* 10-11). Work and prayer, family life and rest, hardship and acts of mercy become spiritual sacrifices when offered through Christ and brought into his Eucharistic offering (*Lumen Gentium* 34).

A living sacrifice takes the received self as its matter: intellect, will, body, time, possessions, and common life. It does not merely acknowledge that creaturely being is from God. It places creaturely action within that truth.

Because Christian sacrifice is ecclesial, its words, signs, times, and offices are received rather than privately devised. Authority belongs inside the account of worship; its presence does not by itself convert command into coercion.

5 Command within Deliverance

The Decalogue does not begin with a naked imperative. God first identifies himself through an act of deliverance: “I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.” Only then follows “You shall” (Exod 20:2–3). The law does not address an anonymous will in an empty universe. It addresses a people already created, rescued, assembled, and claimed.

The order does not reduce command to gratitude. The commandments state genuine goods and prohibit genuine evils. Nor does it make obedience the price by which liberation is purchased after the fact. It shows the identity of the Lawgiver and the relation within which the law is heard. The one who commands is not Pharaoh under another name. He is the one who has broken Pharaoh’s claim.

The *Catechism* preserves this order. The Decalogue is understood within covenant and as a response to God’s initiative; moral existence answers a loving action that comes first (CCC 2060–2062). The first word recalls liberation before it makes the just demand that Israel accept and worship the one God (CCC 2084). At Sinai, covenantal gift precedes commanded response. Command is not severed from gift, and gift is not made morally mute.

5.1 Natural law disclosed and taught

The commandments are revealed, yet their moral substance is not arbitrary. Aquinas argues that the moral precepts of the Old Law belong to the natural law: they concern acts whose order to human good can be known by reason (ST I–II, q. 100, a. 1). Revelation gives them divine promulgation, gathers them into covenant, corrects a reason darkened in practice, and directs them within salvation history.

Theft and murder did not become wrong only when words were inscribed on tablets. Yet revelation is not superfluous merely because reason can in principle know moral truth. Human beings require instruction, correction, authority, and grace. The Decalogue states with divine clarity an order that belongs to the good of rational creatures.

Aquinas treats its precepts as primary specifications of justice. The general commands to love God and neighbor order the whole law; the Decalogue gives immediately knowable conclusions and directs acts toward the due (q. 100, a. 3). The first table orders the person to the common and final good, God. The second establishes justice among persons, forbidding what is undue and commanding that each receive the due (q. 100, a. 8).

5.2 Moral substance and specified observance

The Sabbath command displays another distinction. For Aquinas, its moral core is that a person should reserve some time for divine things. The determination of a particular time and ceremonial manner does not follow from natural reason alone (ST I–II, q. 100, a. 3, ad 2; a. 7, ad 5; II–II, q. 122, a. 4). The Christian Lord’s Day therefore cannot be read off from natural reason or treated as a simple continuation of every Mosaic Sabbath determination. Its Resurrection-centered meaning is received from revelation and apostolic tradition; its determinate common observance comes through ecclesiastical law (CCC 2174–2177).

Natural moral obligation, revealed command, and ecclesiastical determination must therefore be distinguished. The obligation to worship does not by itself identify the day and liturgical act current law requires, the persons it binds, the exceptions it recognizes, or the authorities competent to dispense or commute it. Metaphysics establishes no hidden canon; concrete observance must be identified from competent law.

6 Dependence, Duty, Precept, and Culpability

Dependence, duty, precept, and culpability can converge in one act without becoming the same judgment. Collapse them, and metaphysics begins to issue canons while the bare existence of a canon is made to decide guilt. Four registers keep the claims distinct. Dependence names what is true of the creature whether or not it consents. Duty concerns the act practical reason judges fitting. A precept gives a duty, or one determinate way of fulfilling it, juridical form for identified subjects and circumstances. Culpability concerns the knowledge, freedom, intention, and circumstances of the particular agent.

Their separation establishes important limits. Dependence upon God does not by itself yield the canon specifying how the Sunday precept is fulfilled. A precept identifies an objective obligation without making every external failure equally culpable. That an act is owed does not make it coerced, meritorious without consent, or incapable of love.

6.1 The layers of law

The movement from duty to common form requires authority. Law is an ordinance of reason for the common good, made and promulgated by one who has care of the community (ST I–II, q. 90). Aquinas’s categories of eternal, natural, divine, and human law do not name four independent legislatures occupying one plane. Eternal law is divine wisdom ordering acts and ends. Natural law is the rational creature’s participation in that order through practical reason. Divine positive law is used here for precepts revealed and promulgated by God within salvation history. Human positive law, civil or ecclesiastical, makes common determinations through competent authority.

The labels keep three sources of normativity distinct: what practical reason knows, what God has revealed or commanded, and what human authority has enacted for common observance. A single practice can stand under more than one description without the sources becoming interchangeable. A theological reason does not by itself enact a canon; a canon does not exhaust the moral, ecclesial, or sacramental good it protects.

6.2 From general due to common form

Aquinas holds that natural reason dictates some act of reverence for God. That *this* rather than *that* determinate act be required can be established by divine or human law (ST II–II, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3). Sacrifice likewise belongs generically to natural law, while its concrete signs receive positive determination (q. 85, a. 1, ad 1).

The Lord’s Day follows this pattern without becoming a natural-law theorem. Regular outward worship is morally due; revelation and apostolic tradition give Sunday its Paschal identity, while ecclesiastical law gives that observance determinate juridical form. Governing law and moral teaching distinguish impossibility and excuse from dispensation and commutation by competent authority. These are juridical distinctions, not private preference.

A concrete obligation must therefore be identified through its authority, promulgated text, jurisdiction, subjects, circumstances, and permitted relief. Law states an obligation within a reality it did not originate.

6.3 Scrupulosity is not a higher justice

Scrupulosity does not honor the due by multiplying it. It confuses feared obligation with established obligation, makes private anxiety act as legislator, and can turn obedience into endless self-inspection. The remedy is not a more intricate private code. A person caught in this pattern should ordinarily follow stable counsel from one prudent confessor or spiritual director rather than recruit repeated reassurance. When recurrent doubt includes intrusive fears, compulsive repetition, or serious impairment, evaluation by a clinician competent in obsessive-compulsive disorder may also be appropriate; this general article can neither diagnose the condition nor adjudicate an individual conscience.⁶

7 The Due Made Common

7.1 A received day

St. Justin Martyr’s second-century account of the Sunday assembly holds together readings, common prayer, Eucharistic thanksgiving, Communion, and aid to those in need (*First Apology* 67). Sunday is the Lord’s Day: Christ rose on the first day of the week, and the Christian assembly receives that day as the first feast and sign of the new creation (CCC 2174). The reality later specified by law is already Paschal, sacramental, corporate, and merciful.

The juridical precept is understood from a reality it did not create. Early Christians experienced the Sunday gathering as an inner necessity before later ecclesiastical law gave the duty more explicit universal form (*Dies Domini* 46–48). The Second Vatican Council calls Sunday the original feast day (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 106). Neither historical spontaneity nor later obligation exhausts the practice.

Because Eucharistic worship is the act of a body rather than an aggregate of private intentions, its common temporal form cannot be generated anew by each individual will. Sunday gathers persons who did not choose one another into one thanksgiving, interrupts labor's claim to ultimacy, and makes room for joy, rest, and mercy. A common minimum protects a good that private intentions alone cannot secure.

For members of the Latin Church whom the law binds, that minimum includes participation in Mass on Sunday or the preceding evening and abstention from work and affairs that impede worship, the day's proper joy, or suitable rest. The law itself recognizes impossibility, serious reason, and relief by competent authority; personal culpability further requires the knowledge and consent belonging to any grave sin. Reception of Communion at every Sunday Mass is not part of the Sunday precept.⁷

The precision matters because justice does not authorize invented burdens. It also does not reduce Sunday to attendance. Works of mercy belong positively to the day; necessary care is not a profanation, and Christians should resist imposing avoidable labor upon those whose poverty deprives them of ordinary leisure (CCC 2185–2187). The precept marks a floor. It does not measure the fullness of worship or love.

7.2 The ordinary means received

The same structure appears more broadly in sacramental life. The sacraments are not techniques by which a creature gains leverage over God. They are Christ's instituted, ecclesial means by which grace is signified and given; for believers, they are the ordinary means of salvation in the differentiated manner proper to each sacrament (CCC 1127–1129). A Catholic cannot make private sincerity a substitute for the means Christ has given or treat ecclesial reception as an optional ornament to a self-designed spiritual life.

When justice has failed, the first truthful action is not to disguise the failure as devotion. Reconciliation names sin, receives sacramental absolution, and includes the purpose of amendment and satisfaction; it restores communion by Christ's mercy rather than by a performance that makes the sinner even with God (CCC 1422, 1440–1460). The point here is not to inventory sacramental discipline. It is that the received order includes a received way back.

The due made common is therefore not anonymous bureaucracy. It is a protection against the fantasy that the individual creature may define both the relation and its adequate response. The rite can be approached first because it is owed. Part III will ask how the very same reception can ripen from bare observance into hunger.

8 The Neighbor at the Altar

An altar can be made into a border: worship on one side, the remainder of life kept as an independent estate on the other. The prophets and Fathers refuse that division. Irenaeus insists that God neither hungers for offerings nor accepts sacrifice severed from justice (*Against Heresies* IV.17.1; 18.1–6). An external act of religion can be objectively due and still fail to express a self offered to God.

Gregory Nazianzen inventories existence, breath, understanding, knowledge of God, hope, creation's beauty, food, laws, social life, friendship, and the common goods of the earth. Having named what has been received, he identifies the return God asks: kindness and love, rendered through just stewardship toward the poor (*Oration* 14.23–25). The neighbor is not an interruption of the Godward answer. The gift has already placed the neighbor within it.

For Chrysostom, the one who honors Christ's altar while neglecting Christ in the poor contradicts the honor he claims to render. His argument does not oppose beautiful worship to almsgiving; it denies that splendor can excuse abandonment of the afflicted (*Homilies on Matthew* 50.3–4). Justin's Sunday assembly had already joined Eucharistic thanksgiving to a collection for widows, orphans, the sick, prisoners, and strangers (*First Apology* 67).

Christ's sacrifice is perfect; mercy neither replaces the Eucharist nor adds to that sacrifice as though it were deficient. Mercy is a fruit and test of the communicant's incorporation into Christ. Worship directs mercy toward a good the self does not invent; mercy exposes religion confined to a protected interior life as false. The living sacrifice passes through both because body, possessions, and social life are among the goods received.

Teresa of Jesus makes the point from within the highest reaches of contemplative life. Near the end of the *Interior Castle*, she refuses to let union terminate in the enjoyment of an interior state. Prayer matures in works, she says in substance; Mary and Martha must remain together, and the surest service offered to Christ often takes the form of

love for the neighbor (*Interior Castle* VII.4). The mystical witness does not create the obligation. It makes visible what the colder account can leave abstract: one cannot draw near the God who loves creatures and become indifferent to what he loves.⁸

The upward and outward directions of the due cannot finally be separated. Religion gives God the honor owed to the first principle, but it can command acts elicited by other virtues—showing mercy to the afflicted, acting temperately and truthfully, and rendering justice to the neighbor (ST II–II, q. 81, a. 1, ad 1; a. 4, ad 1). The same God creates worshipper and neighbor; one cannot honor the Creator by treating the creature’s due as dispensable. Scripture gives the test without abstraction: “whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).

Justice therefore does more than add obligations after awe. It gives the apprehension a stable outward grammar: adore, keep faith, tell the truth, render what is due, protect rest, serve the vulnerable. These acts do not make dependence smaller. They make action agree with it.

8.1 Penance without contempt for the body

The received body can participate in the answer through fasting and other penance, but it is matter for offering, not an enemy to be damaged. Moderate abstinence can, by grace and in union with Christ, make satisfaction for sin, train desire, and resist the rule of appetite.⁹ It must remain ordered to charity, health, duties of state, and the good of those for whom one is responsible.

The saints are more sober here than their legends are sometimes made to sound. The Rule of St. Benedict invites a voluntary Lenten offering with joy, yet requires the abbot’s approval so that presumption and vainglory do not govern it. John of the Cross warns against self-chosen austerities pursued without obedience. Extraordinary bodily penance belongs only within forms of life and direction competent to judge it; no voluntary practice may be chosen to damage bodily function. Weighty fasting, corporal penance, or burdens of prayer and reading require a prudent spiritual director.¹⁰

Nor may voluntary penance baptize preventable suffering. Hunger one can relieve, an unjust structure one can reform, an illness one can treat, or abuse one can stop is not made holy by being left untouched. Virtue receives unavoidable suffering differently from an evil it has the power and duty to resist.

When suffering cannot now be removed, it may be accepted without denial or theatrical display, united to Christ’s Passion, and offered in charity for others. This does not make pain good, add to Christ’s complete Redemption, forbid legitimate relief, or silence necessary disclosure. It means that an evil which cannot yet be escaped need not have the final word over the sufferer’s act of love.¹¹

9 What Action Cannot Close

A determinate debt can end. Restitution is made; a sentence is served; the sum ordered by the court is paid. The act matters precisely because justice has an objective term. It would be perverse to refuse payment until affection became pure.

The creature’s relation to God contains determinate obligations, but it is not itself a case that can be closed. The Sunday Mass ends; the duty for that Sunday has been fulfilled. A fast ends; the food afterward is received with thanks. Yet the giver of being has not ceased to give, and the creature has not crossed into an estate independent of him. Religion belongs to justice, but no aggregate of religious acts can make Creator and creature even.

Here correct action can become a form of spiritual laundering. The person performs an obligation, then treats the performance as permission to preserve an untouched center for the self. Worship becomes the price paid to prevent God from making any further claim. The deed may remain objectively good; the presumption lies in using it to close a relation that cannot be closed.

This is not an argument for endless anxiety. A person need not invent duties beyond divine and ecclesial command, nor repeat a fulfilled obligation until it feels fulfilled. The opposite is true: because no checklist can purchase independence, the checklist need not bear that impossible weight. Do what is due; repent when it is not done; receive mercy; refuse both self-excusing presumption and scrupulous self-redemption.

The inadequacy lies not in action but in the end assigned to it. Justice can render a due act. It cannot make God no longer the creature's last end. Even perfect compliance, considered only as compliance, would leave a further question: is the good merely obeyed, or is it loved?

10 Grace and the Answer

Knowing what is owed is not the same as having the power to render it. Justice names the due; it does not create a natural capacity for supernatural communion. No creature can repay creation or become equal to the Creator; that inequality is permanent. Fallen nature also cannot attain the supernatural end by its own powers.

The *Catechism* says that when God reveals himself and calls, a person cannot fully respond to divine love by his own powers. The person must hope that God will give the capacity to love in return and to act according to charity's commandments (CCC 2090). Aquinas describes hope as tending toward future beatitude, arduous but possible through divine assistance (ST II-II, q. 17, aa. 1-2).

Grace does not erase the permanent inequality. In the sinner, it heals fallen nature and elevates the creature toward the supernatural end. Hope relies upon the divine assistance by which a real answer becomes possible without withdrawing the claim of justice.

The *Catechism* treats presumption and despair as contrary distortions of hope. Presumption appeals to mercy while refusing conversion, or trusts one's own powers as sufficient. Despair treats forgiveness, assistance, or beatitude as unavailable (CCC 2091-2092). Presumption makes obedience unnecessary; despair makes it futile. Both distort the priority of gift.

Devotion joins this hope to the will. For Aquinas, consideration of divine goodness principally awakens readiness and joy; recognition of one's defect excludes presumption and introduces sorrow secondarily, while hope moves the person to rely upon divine help (ST II-II, q. 82, aa. 3-4). Creaturely finitude is not itself a moral defect, and spiritual joy is not a promise of sensible ease. Devotion names the will becoming available for divine service even when the act remains costly or dry.

The First Mover is also the first mover of the return, though the supernatural claim is not deduced from the metaphysical proof. Aquinas holds both that God moves the will according to its voluntary mode and that even a free turning toward grace requires God's gratuitous inward motion (ST I-II, q. 10, a. 4; q. 109, a. 6). The response is received without becoming fictitious. Grace does not answer in place of the creature; it gives the creature the power to answer.

In Gregory Nazianzen's sequence, grace comes first; fear takes determinate form in keeping the commandments; obedience purifies; purification opens toward illumination and the fulfillment of desire (*Oratio* 39.8-10). The sequence is neither wages earned for vision nor a technique guaranteed to regulate feeling. It names how received truth can take hold of action and dispose a person for deeper knowledge of God.

The psalmist receives the cup, keeps his vows, and gives thanks among the people. The answer is truly his; even his power to make it has been received.

Justice can remove obstacles to peace, but it does not by itself unify desire in the beloved good (ST II-II, q. 29, a. 3, ad 3). It cannot produce the unity in which a good commanded by the highest Lord is embraced as communion with the beloved.

What is owed can be freely loved. What is freely loved does not cease to be owed. That movement belongs to charity.

11 At Gethsemane

The movement by which our obedience is perfected in love is not an escape from concrete action. Gethsemane does not show Christ progressing from loveless duty into charity; it reveals their perfect unity in the most concrete consent of his human life. In the garden he does not deny anguish or pretend that death is naturally desirable. He prays, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

The sentence is sometimes heard as though freedom were the destruction of a human will. Catholic Christology says

the opposite. The eternal Son possesses a complete human nature and therefore a real human will. That will is not sinful, fictitious, or absorbed into the divine will; it freely adheres to the Father's saving will in the extremity of suffering (CCC 475). The natural human shrinking from death gives the consent its terrible concreteness. It does not make the consent a contest between a disobedient humanity and an overpowering God.¹²

Gethsemane therefore reveals the summit of created human freedom, not because every free act must take the form of physical abnegation, but because freedom reaches perfection when the real created will adheres without reserve to the true good. Createdness is predicated here of the human will assumed by the eternal Son, never of the divine Person. For most Christians the immediate form of such adherence is not dramatic suffering. It is fidelity to a spouse, care for a child or parent, truthful work, necessary rest, resisted temptation, repaired injustice, prayer kept in dryness, and mercy offered when no emotion carries it.

Christ's consent is more than an example. The Son's human obedience belongs to the unique redemptive offering by which the creature's answer is healed and taken into his. No penance, suffering, or act of worship stands beside it as an equal sacrifice. Christian action is possible within his prior "yes."

Justice brought the inquiry to a will that does what is due. In the garden, obedience is revealed from within as filial self-gift. The act remains costly; the command has not disappeared. Yet the final intelligibility of the act is not a court whose claim has at last been satisfied. It is communion with the Father and love for those whom the Son came to save.

The question after vertigo was, *What must I do?* It cannot be skipped. It also cannot be the last question.

What must I learn to want?

Notes

¹St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV.14.1–3; IV.17.1; IV.18.1–6. The article preserves the claims’ anti-heretical and salvation-historical setting: command and sacrifice form a people for life, obedience, justice, and communion; they neither supply a divine need nor reduce worship to subjective therapy.

²Aquinas, ST II–II, q. 81, a. 6, especially ad 2–3. The usefulness of worship belongs to the worshipper; divine glory names the manifestation and acknowledgment of God’s already perfect excellence, not an increase in God.

³Aquinas, ST I, q. 21, a. 1, especially ad 2–3, and a. 4, ad 4. What is “due” to a creature follows the order freely established by divine wisdom; God is never ordered to a creature as debtor to an independent creditor.

⁴Aquinas, ST II–II, q. 80, a. 1; q. 81, aa. 1–6, especially a. 5 and a. 5, ad 3. Religion is a special moral virtue ordered to God and annexed to justice under an impossible equality; faith, hope, and charity remain distinct theological virtues capable of commanding its acts.

⁵The distinction follows Aquinas’s separation of an act’s object and circumstances, the agent’s virtuous mode, and merit within grace: ST I–II, qq. 18 and 65; II–II, q. 58, a. 1; and ST I–II, q. 114, especially aa. 2 and 4. CCC 2006–2011 denies any strict claim before God apart from his gratuitous ordering, places grace before human cooperation, denies that anyone merits initial grace, and identifies Christ’s charity in us as the source of Christian merit. This article infers neither merit nor a person’s state of grace from outward observance or felt devotion.

⁶St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 18, sec. 2, especially “Obedience to the Director Is the Great Remedy Against Scruples,” gives ascetical counsel in a religious context; it is spiritual witness, not current canon law or clinical protocol. The International OCD Foundation’s Faith and OCD Resource Center, “What Is OCD & Scrupulosity?” and “For Faith Leaders” (accessed 23 July 2026), describes scrupulosity as an OCD presentation, warns that repeated reassurance and excessive confession can become compulsive, and distinguishes potentially collaborative clergy and clinical roles. Its clinical education is not Catholic doctrinal authority. Neither source diagnoses the reader, relaxes a known precept, or makes every sensitive conscience disordered.

⁷Current universal Latin discipline as checked through 23 July 2026: CIC cc. 1, 11, 1245, 1246 §1, 1247, and 1248; CCC 1857–1861 and 2180–2188. Canon 1248 §1 permits fulfillment at Mass in any Catholic rite on the feast or preceding evening. Canon 1248 §2 treats impossibility; canon 1245 identifies competent dispensers and commutation. Particular law, proper law, jurisdiction, individual facts, and Eastern Catholic law may change the analysis. The complete audit remains in the article’s current-law matrix.

⁸Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle* VII.4.4–15, especially her insistence that the purpose of prayer is the birth of good works and that love of neighbor is a decisive test. The article paraphrases the argument rather than reproducing a modern translation.

⁹CCC 1459–1460 distinguishes forgiveness from the disorders and injuries still requiring repair: satisfaction restores spiritual health, repairs harm where possible, must suit the penitent’s situation and spiritual good, and has efficacy only through Christ, who alone expiated sin once for all. CCC 618 locates every Christian participation within Christ’s unique Paschal sacrifice. Penance therefore neither earns initial forgiveness nor supplies anything deficient in Christ’s atonement.

¹⁰Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 49; St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night* I.6. The project applies their anti-presumption principle conservatively to lay and active states of life. This is not an exhaustive ascetical rule or individualized medical advice. Ordinary duties, legitimate rest, and care owed to dependents take priority over self-imposed burdens.

¹¹CCC 1505 teaches that Christ’s healings signify the Kingdom without removing every illness and that his Cross gives suffering a new meaning; CCC 1508 allows suffering, when healing is not given, to be united to Christ’s Passion for the good of his Body. CCC 618 places such participation wholly within Christ’s unique sacrifice. None makes pain good, forbids treatment or disclosure, or makes suffering automatically meritorious; merit presupposes grace and charity in the sense specified by CCC 2006–2011. Part III develops that relation.

¹²CCC 475 receives the dyothelite teaching of the Third Council of Constantinople: Christ’s human will follows and is freely subject to, rather than resisting or opposing, his divine will. Benedict XVI’s general audience of 1 February 2012 reads Gethsemane as the human will’s complete “yes” to the divine will and the place where true freedom is realized. The article uses that doctrinal synthesis; it does not speculate about Christ’s interior psychology beyond the Gospel and received teaching.

A Scope, Method, and Qualifications

A.1 Reader, question, and governing profiles

This is Part II of *The Creature Before God*, a discursive series for a serious general reader. Part I, *Ontological Vertigo*, treats the apprehension of asymmetric dependence and ends with present divine conservation. This article asks what action is due before desire has matured, how the response becomes a living sacrifice, how worship takes common and sacramental form, how justice passes through the neighbor, and why no completed action can close the creature's relation to God. The current universal Latin Sunday obligation is a bounded illustration, not the article's principal subject. Gethsemane supplies the Christological culmination: Christ's complete created human will reaches freedom not by disappearing but by adhering to the Father's saving will. Part III treats charity, prayer, Eucharistic desire, and union with God.

The article deliberately combines theology and canon law under the discursive-articles profile. Metaphysics, Scripture, patristic witness, Thomistic moral theology, and authoritative Catholic teaching govern the account of gift, justice, religion, command, grace, hope, and charity. Canon law governs only the identified juridical conclusions. A theological reason does not by itself enact a canon; the existence of a canon does not settle every theological interpretation or personal culpability judgment.

"Due return," "responsive justice," the four-term grammar of dependence, duty, precept, and culpability, and the language of ontological vertigo's ongoing resolution are project synthesis. *Religion* is used principally in Aquinas's technical sense: the moral virtue annexed to justice that renders worship to God. It is not used as a synonym for the theological virtues or for every institutional feature of a religious body.

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Sacred Scripture	Supplies creation and mercy before response, covenant before command, the Decalogue, worship and justice, the unrepayable gift, and the living sacrifice.	Exegetical synthesis remains bounded by the cited passages; no single verse is made a complete theory of law.
Patristic witness	Shows divine non-need, command for creaturely good, common Sunday worship, grace-enabled obedience, and self-offering in Christ.	Representative witnesses are not a mechanical consensus count or current legislation.
Thomistic theology	Provides justice, religion, unequal due, moral necessity without coercion, the levels of an act's goodness, devotion, kinds of law, natural and positive determination, grace, hope, and charity's formal role.	School theology and adopted synthesis remain distinct from dogma and current canon law.
Catechetical and conciliar teaching	Governs moral law, Church precepts, the Decalogue, the Lord's Day, culpability, merit, sacramental mediation, satisfaction, suffering united to Christ, Christ's two wills, hope, worship, and common liturgical life.	The <i>Catechism</i> is authoritative teaching, not the promulgated text of the Latin Code; participation in Christ does not make creaturely acts independent or automatically meritorious.
Monastic and mystical witness	Shows mature prayer issuing in works and asceticism governed by obedience, discretion, and bodily limits.	Saintly witness discloses lived intelligibility; it neither creates the obligation nor turns a monastic practice into universal law.
Ascetical and clinical boundary	St. Alphonsus supplies traditional counsel against repeated reassurance; the International OCD Foundation identifies scrupulosity as an OCD presentation and distinguishes clergy and clinical roles.	Alphonsus is used as spiritual witness, not clinical protocol or current law; the Foundation is used for clinical education, not Catholic doctrine or individual diagnosis.

Source class	Function in the article	Governing boundary
Current Latin canon law	Establishes subjects, feast-day duties, satisfaction, impossibility, dispensation, commutation, and territorial competence.	The official Latin text, amendments, jurisdiction, particular law, and facts control; no individual case is adjudicated.
Project synthesis	Orders gift, due, precept, fault, hope, and self-offering into Part II of the series.	The terminology and literary movement are not attributed wholesale to any source.

A.2 Legal scope and currentness

Element	Controlling scope	Limit
Governing body of law	1983 Code of Canon Law as amended; universal law of the Latin Church.	CIC c. 1 excludes applying the Latin Code as such to Eastern Catholics; CCEO c. 881 and proper Eastern law are not analyzed.
Authoritative text and translation	Promulgated Latin and applicable later Latin legislation control; Holy See English pages are working reference renderings.	English wording does not displace the official text, canonical tradition, or a later promulgated norm.
Persons and territory	CIC cc. 1, 11–13 and 1246–1248; no named territory beyond universal law.	Other holy days, dispensations, and observance can depend upon episcopal-conference, diocesan, proper, or other applicable law.
Material facts	Abstract adult Latin Catholic with sufficient use of reason; no serious reason, impossibility, dispensation, commutation, privilege, or special law unless expressly discussed.	Real cases require complete facts and competent pastoral or canonical judgment.
Currentness	Official Code pages, the Holy See code and amendment archive, and the Holy See’s published compilation of authentic interpretations checked through 23 July 2026.	No located amendment or published authentic interpretation modified CIC cc. 1246–1248 in a way material to this article. This bounded audit is not proof against unpublished or unexamined particular or proper law.
Advice boundary	General theological and canonical study.	Not legal or canonical advice, a decree, a culpability judgment, or a substitute for a pastor, confessor, competent authority, or qualified canonist.

A.3 Included and excluded scope

Included are Matt 21:28–31 and Luke 22:39–46; Rom 11:33–12:5; Exod 19–20; Psalm 116; the Decalogue’s twofold order to God and neighbor; Irenaeus on divine non-need; Augustine on true sacrifice; Gregory Nazianzen and Chrysostom on gift and mercy; Justin on the unified Sunday assembly; Teresa on union bearing works; Benedict and John of the Cross on ascetical discretion; St. Alphonsus on steadiness under prudent spiritual direction; the International OCD Foundation on the clinical boundary of scrupulosity; Aquinas on justice, religion, sacrifice, act, virtue, merit, devotion, grace, and hope; Vatican II on Eucharistic and ordinary self-offering; CCC 618, 1459–1460, 1505, 1508, and 2006–2011 on participation in Christ’s sacrifice, satisfaction, suffering, and merit, together with the *Catechism*’s broader treatment of sacramental life, Reconciliation, Church precepts, Sunday, and Christ’s created human will; Benedict XVI on Gethsemane; and current universal Latin law in CIC cc. 1, 11, 85–93, 1244–1248, and 912–923 where separately noted.

Excluded are a comprehensive treatise on moral theology, virtue, conscience, sin, sacramental theology, liturgy, ecclesiology, Christology, asceticism, spiritual direction, scrupulosity, or canonical interpretation; a calendar of territorial holy days; national conference and diocesan norms; Eastern Catholic law beyond naming the boundary; obligations of clerics or religious arising from office, vows, constitutions, or proper law; remote-participation questions; Eucharistic reception in irregular or disputed circumstances; canonical penalties; individualized penitential prescriptions; and any judgment about a named person's obligation, excuse, sin, or imputability.

The Sunday case is illustrative, not exhaustive. The Ten Commandments and the Latin Sunday precept do not stand at the same level of authority. The article does not flatten natural moral law, revealed divine law, and ecclesiastical positive law into one inventory.

A.4 Material qualifications

1. Creation is neither compelled by a lack in God nor antecedently owed to a recipient not yet existing. Genuine created dues arise within the order willed by divine wisdom (ST I, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3).
2. "Debt" and "return" are analogical, not commercial. No creature confers actuality, beatitude, or utility upon God or makes God a debtor by worship.
3. Religion is a moral virtue annexed to justice because worship is due but cannot be rendered in absolute equality. It is not itself faith, hope, or charity (ST II-II, q. 81, a. 5).
4. The necessity of command differs from physical or psychological constraint. Obligation does not eliminate voluntariness, while external compliance alone does not constitute complete virtue.
5. Objective conformity, the full moral mode of an act of virtue, and supernatural merit are distinct. A due act can be objectively good before affection matures. CCC 2006–2011 places grace before cooperation, denies that anyone merits initial grace, and locates Christian merit in Christ's charity; merit cannot be inferred from an exterior act.
6. Natural reason grounds worship generically; determinate rites and times can arise from divine or human positive law (ST II-II, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3; q. 85, a. 1, ad 1).
7. The Decalogue is revealed and expresses natural moral law. Its moral substance, its covenantal promulgation, and its ceremonial or juridical determinations must be distinguished.
8. Sunday fulfills the Sabbath's spiritual truth in the Paschal mystery; it is not identified with every Mosaic Sabbath determination (CCC 2174–2176).
9. CIC c. 1247 contains both Mass participation and festal-rest duties. The latter is governed by what impedes worship, joy, works of mercy, and appropriate rest, not by a universal ban on all work.
10. Participation in Mass and reception of Holy Communion are distinct juridical and sacramental questions. CIC cc. 912–923 govern reception; this article decides no sacramental-access case.
11. Excuse, impossibility, dispensation, and commutation have different grounds and effects. Private preference is not competent dispensation.
12. Objective grave matter and mortal culpability are distinct. Full knowledge and deliberate consent must be established; a general article cannot judge a person's soul (CCC 1857–1861).
13. Scrupulosity is neither more exact law nor superior devotion. St. Alphonsus is used as ascetical witness for stable spiritual counsel, not as clinical protocol or current universal rule. The International OCD Foundation is used for the OCD boundary and clergy-clinician distinction, not as Catholic doctrinal authority. The article neither diagnoses a reader nor treats every sensitive conscience as disordered.
14. Violation of a moral or disciplinary norm does not without an applicable penal norm establish a canonical delict or penalty.
15. The sacraments are Christ's efficacious ecclesial means, not private techniques or rewards for emotional readiness. Their differentiated necessity, valid and fruitful reception, and governing discipline are not reduced to one formula.
16. Reconciliation resolves failures of justice through Christ's mercy; absolution removes sin without necessarily remedying every injury and disorder it caused. Satisfaction in CCC 1459–1460 concerns repair and spiritual health, is adapted to the penitent, and has efficacy through Christ; it neither earns initial forgiveness nor supplements his atonement.

17. Moderate asceticism is ordered to charity, health, duties of state, and care owed to others. Extraordinary bodily penance and weighty self-imposed burdens require prudent spiritual direction; no voluntary practice may be selected to impair bodily function.
18. Preventable suffering and remediable social evil are not sanctified by neglect. Voluntary penance never excuses failure to heal, protect, reform, or relieve where justice and charity require action.
19. Unavoidable suffering may be united to Christ only within his unique redemptive sacrifice (CCC 618, 1505, 1508). This makes neither pain itself good nor suffering automatically meritorious, and it never forbids treatment, relief, necessary disclosure, or resistance to preventable harm.
20. Hope is not a species of justice. It trusts divine assistance for the arduous supernatural good; presumption and despair each falsify that trust.
21. Grace does not abolish command or secondary agency. The New Law's inward gift heals and elevates the person to act freely (ST I-II, q. 106, aa. 1-2).
22. Charity perfects and commands the acts of other virtues by ordering them to the final end. It does not make injustice or impiety optional (ST II-II, q. 23, a. 8).
23. The living sacrifice is neither autonomous nor commensurate with Christ's. The Church's self-offering depends wholly upon union with her High Priest and Victim and his perfect prior oblation.
24. Gethsemane does not teach that Christ's human will is sinful, fictitious, or absorbed. His complete created human will freely adheres to the divine saving will; createdness is predicated of the assumed human nature and will, never of the divine Person. His unique redemptive obedience is more than a moral example.
25. Gethsemane is not made a universal command to seek pain or physical abnegation. Creaturely consent normally takes the form proper to one's state of life and concrete duties.
26. Worship is not proposed as therapeutic self-management. Its objective truth and formal fruits do not promise sensible calm, and continuing disturbance is not treated as evidence of refusal.
27. The resolution at issue does not reduce dependence. Justice, religion, and hope bring action into agreement with it; charity's direct unification of desire remains the subject of Part III.

A.5 Translations, rights, and review

Scripture is cited by book and locus, with short working-English phrases checked against the Holy See-hosted NAB witness. Patristic working English comes from identified public-domain ANF or NPNF witnesses. Aquinas is cited by work, part, question, article, and reply; Latin loci are governed by the Corpus Thomisticum, with public English used as an aid. St. Alphonsus is consulted in an identified public-domain working edition. The International OCD Foundation's current online resources are paraphrased only within their clinical competence and retain their own rights and authority status. Official Catholic and canonical texts retain their own status. No bulk source text, modern commentary, or source-site wrapper is incorporated.

The legal currentness audit was refreshed through 23 July 2026. The added scriptural, sacramental, Christological, Teresian, Benedictine, Carmelite, Alphonsian, Thomistic, and clinical-boundary loci were checked on 23 July 2026. The exact Buffalo 1887 ANF facsimile and raw OCR for the cited Irenaeus passages were also checked on that date. Endnotes carry branch qualifications and source detail while the main argumentative chain remains in the body. This is a source-audited working study. It has not received independent scriptural, patristic, Thomistic, moral-theological, mystical-theological, liturgical, canonical, literary, clinical, or ecclesiastical review. It claims no imprimatur, nihil obstat, legal opinion, or ecclesiastical approval.

B References

Sacred Scripture

- Exod 19:3-6 and 20:1-17; Deut 5:1-22; Psalm 116:1-19, especially vv. 12-19; Matt 21:28-31 and 22:34-40; Luke 22:39-46; John 14:15; Rom 11:33-12:5 and 13:8-10; Jas 1:22-27; 1 John 4:19-21 and 5:3. Short English wording is used as a working rendering; Scripture and translations retain their own status.

- Holy See-hosted New American Bible working witnesses: Exodus 20, Psalm 116, Romans 11, and Romans 12.

Authoritative Catholic witnesses

- Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), nos. 7, 10–12, 14, 47–48, and 106, on Christ’s sacrifice, the faithful’s self-offering with the divine Victim, liturgical participation, and the Lord’s Day; official English.
- Second Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), nos. 10–11 and 34, on the baptized offering spiritual sacrifices, the faithful offering the divine Victim and themselves with him, and ordinary life offered through Christ; official English.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1730–1748 (freedom and responsibility); 1854–1864 (grave matter and culpability); 1950–1974 (eternal, natural, old, and new law); 2006–2011 (merit within God’s gratuitous initiative and Christ’s charity); 2030–2043 (the Church’s moral teaching and precepts); 2060–2082 (covenant, Decalogue, and natural law); 2084–2100 (faith, hope, charity, adoration, prayer, and sacrifice); 2168–2195, especially 2174–2187 (Sabbath, Lord’s Day, Sunday obligation, serious reason, rest, and mercy). Official English pages: culpability, moral law, merit, Church precepts, faith, hope, and charity, and the Lord’s Day.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1127–1129 (Christ acting in the sacraments, their fruits, and necessity for believers); 1422 and 1440–1460, especially 1459–1460 (forgiveness, remaining injury and disorder, satisfaction, and its efficacy through Christ); sacraments of salvation and Penance and Reconciliation.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 613–618, especially 618 (Christ’s unique sacrifice and the Christian’s participation in it); 1505 and 1508 (Christ’s healings, the Cross’s new meaning for suffering, and union with Christ when healing is not given); Christ’s redemptive sacrifice and illness in the economy of salvation.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 475, receiving Constantinople III on Christ’s divine will and complete created human will, the latter freely adhering to the former; createdness belongs to the assumed humanity, never the divine Person; official English.
- St. John Paul II, apostolic letter *Dies Domini* (31 May 1998), especially nos. 6–8, 18–20, 31–34, and 46–53, on the Paschal, ecclesial, moral, and juridical dimensions of Sunday; official English.
- Benedict XVI, general audience (1 February 2012), on Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane, his real human anguish, the human will’s unreserved adherence to the divine will, and true freedom; official English.

Patristic witnesses

- St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* IV.14.1–3, on divine non-need, service for the creature’s good, fellowship with God, and instruction away from idols; IV.17.1 and 18.1–6, on sacrifice, justice, and offerings that do not supply a divine need. The Roberts–Rambaut English as printed in ANF volume 1 (Buffalo, 1887) was checked in the exact facsimile; New Advent supplies a distinct revised web presentation: IV.14, IV.17, and IV.18.
- St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67, on the Sunday assembly, Scripture, common prayer, Eucharistic thanksgiving and Communion, and care of those in need. The Dods–Reith English as printed in ANF volume 1 (Buffalo, 1887) was checked in the exact facsimile; New Advent supplies a distinct Kevin Knight–revised web presentation.
- Augustine, *City of God* X.1, 3, 5–6, and 19–20, on *latría*, true religion, outward signs, every work ordered to holy fellowship with God as sacrifice, the redeemed city offered through Christ, and God as needing no offering; public-domain NPNF working English, online witness.
- St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 14.23–25, on received existence and created goods answered by kindness, love, and just stewardship toward the poor; Holy See-hosted working excerpt. See also *Oration* 39.8–10, on prior grace, commandment, purification, illumination, and desire; NPNF working English.
- St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 50.3–4, on honoring Christ’s Eucharistic body without neglecting Christ in the poor and on almsgiving alongside liturgical splendor; public-domain NPNF working English, online witness.

Monastic and mystical witnesses

- St. Teresa of Jesus, *Interior Castle* V.3.11–12 and VII.4, on works of charity as the test and fruit of union and on contemplation issuing in service. The article paraphrases the argument; Holy See-hosted excerpt and Benedict XVI’s authoritative catechesis.
- St. Benedict of Nursia, *Rule*, ch. 49, on a joyful Lenten offering disclosed to and approved by the abbot so that presumption and vainglory do not govern it; public-domain working witness, online edition.
- St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night* I.6, on immoderate fasting and bodily penance pursued beyond one’s strength and without obedience or advice; David Lewis, trans., Benedict Zimmerman, rev. (1912), public-domain working edition.
- St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 18, sec. 2, “On Scruples,” especially “Obedience to the Director Is the Great Remedy Against Scruples,” pp. 545–563, in *The Complete Ascetical Works*, vols. X–XI, Eugene Grimm, trans. and ed. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1929 combined edition); ascetical witness addressed in a religious context, not a clinical protocol or statement of current universal law; public-domain working scan.

Pastoral and clinical boundary

- International OCD Foundation, Faith and OCD Resource Center, “What Is OCD & Scrupulosity?,” and “For Faith Leaders” (accessed 23 July 2026), on scrupulosity as an OCD presentation, compulsive reassurance and confession, and the distinct,

potentially collaborative roles of faith leaders and qualified clinicians. These current clinical-education pages are neither Catholic doctrinal authority nor an individual diagnosis; the article paraphrases them without adopting their broader theological or moral language.

Thomistic framework

- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 21, a. 1, especially ad 2–3, and a. 4, ad 4, on divine justice, derivative created dues, and God’s owing no debt to creatures; q. 44, a. 4, on God as final cause.
- Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I–II, q. 10, a. 4 (divine motion according to the voluntary mode); q. 18 (object, end, and circumstances of human acts); q. 65 (virtues and charity); q. 90, aa. 1–4; q. 91, aa. 1–5; q. 94, aa. 1–6 (law, its kinds, and natural law); q. 100, aa. 1, 3, 7, and 8 (the Decalogue, natural law, the two tablets, and moral versus determinate observance); q. 106, aa. 1–2 (the New Law chiefly as inward grace); q. 108, a. 4 (precepts and counsels); q. 109, especially aa. 2–4, 6, and 8 (the need of grace and the graced turning of the will); q. 114, especially aa. 2 and 4 (merit within grace).
- Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 17, aa. 1–2 (hope and divine assistance); q. 23, a. 8 (charity as form of the virtues); q. 29, a. 3 (justice, charity, and peace); q. 58, aa. 1–4, especially a. 3, ad 2 (justice and necessity of command without constraint); q. 80, a. 1 and q. 81, aa. 1–7 (religion as an unequal part of justice, its acts, and relation to the theological virtues); q. 82, aa. 1–4 (devotion, meditation, joy, and hope); q. 85, aa. 1–4 (sacrifice and natural versus positive determination); q. 122, a. 4 (the Sabbath precept).
- Governing Latin loci checked through the Corpus Thomisticum Leonine-text corpus. The New Advent Summa served as a working public English index; particularly relevant English aids include justice, religion, devotion, the Decalogue, and the New Law. Work and exact locus take precedence over either site’s wording.

Current Latin canon law

- John Paul II, apostolic constitution *Sacrae disciplinae leges* (25 January 1983) and the 1983 *Codex Iuris Canonici* as amended. CIC c. 1 (Latin jurisdiction); cc. 7–22, especially 11–18 (promulgation, persons bound, territory, doubt, interpretation); cc. 85–93 (dispensations); cc. 912–923 (Eucharistic reception); and cc. 1244–1248 (sacred times, feast days, obligation, satisfaction, impossibility, dispensation, and commutation).
- Official Latin: Book I and Book IV. Holy See-hosted working English: cc. 7–22, cc. 35–93, and cc. 1244–1253.
- Currentness controls checked through 23 July 2026: Holy See Code and amendment archive; Dicastery for Legislative Texts, published compilation of authentic interpretations. No located act amended or authentically interpreted CIC cc. 1246–1248 in a way material to this article.
- Eastern boundary only: CCEO c. 881 contains the Eastern common-law feast-day obligation and preserves the prescriptions or legitimate customs of each Church *sui iuris*. It is not analyzed or replaced by the Latin canons in this article.

Last revised (UTC): 2026-07-23T21:12:55Z

Reuse and rights. To the extent Triptych holds the rights, project-created content and design are licensed under CC BY 4.0. Scripture, liturgical or official texts, received prayers or hymns, quotations, fonts, and other third-party material retain their own status; public-domain material remains public domain. Identify changes. Attribution implies neither Triptych nor ecclesiastical approval. See LICENSE and THIRD_PARTY.md in the source.