

**‘Out of Zion the Deliverer Shall Come: St. Thomas Aquinas on Jewish  
Worship as *Figura Praesentis Spiritualis Beneficii*’  
Matthew Anthony Tapie**

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**“Out of Zion the Deliverer Shall Come”**  
**St. Thomas Aquinas on Jewish Worship as**  
***Figura praesentis spiritualis beneficii***

*Matthew Anthony Tapie*

In the decades that followed the Second Vatican Council, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews not only developed *Nostra Aetate*'s teaching that the Jews “remain dear to God” but did so while pointing out traditional Christian teachings that must be set aside. In 1985, the Commission insisted that the Jewish people are a “permanent reality,” and ongoing “witness” to the God of Israel. “The history of Israel did not end in 70 A.D. It continued, especially in numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the...world a witness - often heroic - of its fidelity to the one God.”<sup>1</sup> The Commission did not want its affirmation to be understood with reference to the Augustinian teaching that Jews unknowingly witness to the truth of Christianity by observing their religious customs.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Commission explicitly states that the Church must set aside this doctrine: “We must...rid

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<sup>1</sup> “Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church,” sec. 6.1. Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> “We see and know that it is in order to bear this witness—which they involuntarily supply on our behalf by possessing and preserving these same books—that they themselves are scattered among all peoples, in whatever direction the Church of Christ expands.” Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.46, ed. George E. McCracken et al.; 7 vols., Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957-60, 6:50-51. See also Paula Fredriksen’s explanation of the testamentary doctrine. Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*, Doubleday Religion, 2008, 276-77.

ourselves of the traditional idea of a people...preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic.”<sup>3</sup>

The Church’s affirmation of the positive and ongoing value of Judaism is an important step toward building the mutual respect between Christians and Jews called for by *Nostra Aetate*. Yet theological questions remain as to whether this contemporary teaching can be reconciled with premodern Christian interpretations of Jewish worship *post passionem Christi*. For example, it seems that the Commission’s teaching on the theological status of Jewish worship is in tension with the view of St. Thomas Aquinas on the duration of what Aquinas referred to as *caeremoniae veteris legis* or ceremonies of the old law.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> “Notes,” sec. 6.1.

<sup>4</sup> For Aquinas, “Jewish worship” can be considered under the category of *caeremoniae veteris legis* (ceremonies of the old law). Ceremonies of the old law are the precepts of the Mosaic law that concern the worship of God. *STh* I-II, q. 99, a. 3, ad 2. These ceremonies include the “sacraments” of circumcision, Passover, and dietary regulations. In *STh* I-II, q. 101, a. 4, Aquinas divides the ceremonies of the old law into four categories: 1) *sacrificia* or sacrifices; 2) *sacra* or sacred things; 3) *sacramenta* or sacraments; and 4) *observantiae* or observances. All of these categories are referred to together as *caeremoniae veteris legis*. The 1) *sacrificia* include sacrificial animals offered by the Levite priesthood. 2) *Sacra* include instruments such as the temple, tabernacle and the vessels. 3) *Sacramenta* include circumcision, “without which no one was admitted to the legal observances” (q. 102, a. 5) and the eating of the paschal banquet. Aquinas actually refers to the paschal banquet as an observance but it is treated in the same article on sacraments, indicating that the Passover, for him, may fit into both *sacramenta* and *observantiae* categories. 4) *Observantiae* mostly refers to dietary regulations, which include the prohibition of blood and fat of animals. According to Aquinas, the latter two precepts, which are the 3) sacrament of circumcision and 4) observances both function together to consecrate the Jewish people to the worship of God. In *STh* I-II, q. 102, a. 6 Aquinas affirms the literal, rational cause for the *observantiae* of the law as “a special prerogative of that people.” All of these precepts are ceremonial in character in the sense that they give public expression to divine worship. English translations are from the Benziger edition unless otherwise noted. *Summa*

*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 103 a. 4, Aquinas teaches that the ceremonial law, which includes circumcision, Sabbath, and dietary laws, was fitting only during the time in which it prefigured the passion of Christ.<sup>5</sup> However, to observe the rites after grace has been preached is a mortal sin since because it amounts to saying Christ has yet to be born. It seems that, for Aquinas, Jewish worship in the diaspora indicates not fidelity to God but unbelief.

However, Aquinas's teaching that Jewish observance of the ceremonial law in I-II, q. 103, a. 4, which emphasizes observance of the law as unbelief, does not represent his complete thought on Jewish worship after Christ.<sup>6</sup> I hope to show that when one reads

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*Theologica*, transl. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> For the Jew aware of the teaching that Christ is the First Truth (i.e. a Jew *not* in invincible ignorance), observation of the old sacraments is a mortal sin. *STh* I-II, q. 103, a. 4: "Just as it would be a mortal sin now for anyone, in making a profession of faith, to say that Christ is yet to be born, which the fathers of old said devoutly and truthfully; so too it would be a mortal sin now to observe those ceremonies which the fathers of old fulfilled with devotion and fidelity. Such is the teaching Augustine (*Contra Faust.* xix, 16), who says: 'It is no longer promised that He shall be born, shall suffer and rise again, truths of which their sacraments were a kind of image: but it is declared that He is already born, has suffered and risen again; of which our sacraments, in which Christians share, are the actual representation.'" Matthew Levering argues that Aquinas's teaching is directed at "Jewish Christians" only, and not Jews: "Aquinas does not condemn the observance of Torah by Jews who do not believe in Jesus Christ." Levering, *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation According to Thomas Aquinas*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, 161fn60. However, Aquinas explicitly states that the observation of the rites, for the Jew aware of the Church's teaching, is a mortal sin, in *In Galat.* 5.1.278: "To observe the legal ceremonies after grace had been preached is a mortal sin *for the Jews*. But during the interim, i.e., before the preaching of grace, they could be observed without sin even by those who had been converted from Judaism, provided they set no hope on them." [Emphasis added].

<sup>6</sup> I am speaking here of the idea of unbelief in Aquinas that refers to those who have heard of the Christian faith and willingly decide not to

Aquinas's comments on Judaism with attention to his Romans commentary, an important connection between his thought and the Church's contemporary teaching on Jewish worship emerges.<sup>7</sup> I am not the first scholar to discuss Aquinas's positive view of the Jews in the Romans commentary.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, these scholars

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accept it (*contrarietas*). Valkenberg helpfully refers to *contrarietas* as "an attitude of opposition to faith." See Valkenberg's contribution to this *Jaarboek*, page 67.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, English translations of the commentaries from the Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012. Aquinas conceived of the Pauline commentaries as a unit, not as individual books. This becomes quite clear from a reading of the prologues Aquinas attached to the beginning of each commentary. I examine the Pauline commentaries as a unit in another study that treats the relationship between the *Summa theologiae* and the commentaries on the theological status of Jewish observance of the ceremonial law after the passion of Christ. See my *Aquinas on Israel and the Church: A Study of the Question of Supersessionism in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Wipf & Stock, 2014 [forthcoming].

<sup>8</sup> See Steven C. Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews: Insights into His Commentary on Romans 9-11*, Paulist Press, 2008; Bruce Marshall, "Quasi in Figura: A Brief Reflection on Jewish Election, After Thomas Aquinas," *Nova Et Vetera* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 523–28. Neither scholar treats Aquinas's description of Jewish worship as "figures of present spiritual benefit." Aquinas's commentary on Romans has received more scholarly attention than any other of the commentaries on Paul's letters. However, studies of the *lectura* are understandably limited to one or two chapters. My examination of the *lectura* is no different. A comprehensive analysis of Aquinas's view of Israel in the Romans commentary would require a thorough examination of all sixteen chapters. For these reasons, I cannot give comprehensive treatment to the relevant themes that pertain to Israel, including those famous chapters, 9 through 11. My examination of the *lectura*, therefore, focuses rather narrowly on Aquinas's view of the ceremonial precepts, especially circumcision, in the era after grace. I view this essay as building on Marshall's work by drawing upon R. Kendall Soulen's insightful reading of the significance of Paul's present tense descriptions of Israel for Jewish-Christian relations. I discuss Soulen's work below.

have not addressed Aquinas's view of Jewish worship as "figures of present spiritual benefit" or its relevance for contemporary Jewish-Christian relations.

In what follows, I argue that in places in the Romans commentary there exist an affirmation of postbiblical Jewish worship after the passion of Christ as 1) a present spiritual benefit *for Jews* and that 2) retains a figural function, although in a way unspecified. Aquinas's affirmation of the present spiritual value of Jewish observances, which includes circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath, lends significant theological support for the Commission's claim that Jewish worship retains a positive theological significance in the diaspora.

I proceed in two steps. First, I show that several positive and present tense descriptions of the Jewish people in Paul's letter to the Romans afford Aquinas the opportunity to elaborate upon the theological significance of Jewish religion after the passion of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Aquinas affirms Jewish election and worship, despite unbelief in Christ, as one aspect of what he calls "prerogatives of the Jews" (*praerogativae Iudaeorum*). Aquinas also teaches that Jewish observances, including circumcision, are "figures of present spiritual benefit" (*figura praesentis spiritualis beneficii*).<sup>10</sup> Second, I argue that the way in which these rites might remain "figures" even after the passion might be explained via Aquinas's statement in IIa-IIae q. 10 a. 11, that the rites of the Jews, although unbelievers, continue to figure the Christian faith "in a way."<sup>11</sup> Here, I suggest the ceremonial law continues to figure

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<sup>9</sup> *Nostra Aetate* 4.

<sup>10</sup> My translation of *In Romanos* 9.1.744, is based on Robert Busa, ed., *Opera Omnia: Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 1980. The editors of the recent Aquinas Institute English translation also render these figures of spiritual benefit (9.1.744) in the present tense.

<sup>11</sup> *STh* II-II, q. 10, a. 11. "Thus from the fact that the Jews observe their rites, which, of old, foreshadowed the truth of the faith which we hold, there follows this good--that our very enemies bear witness to our faith, *and that our faith is represented in a figure, so to speak.*" [Emphasis added]. Marshall, "Quasi in Figura: A Brief Reflection on

Christ by pointing forward to that Day which the Church awaits, in company with the Apostle and Prophets, when “Out of Zion the Deliverer shall come.”<sup>12</sup>

### **A. Aquinas’s Affirmation of Jewish Election and Worship after the Passion of Christ**

Aquinas views the letter to the Romans as the first piece of a larger theological work that includes nine other Pauline letters all focused on the topic of grace as it exists in the Church.<sup>13</sup> The theme of Gentiles and Jews is prominently featured throughout the commentary, and can be said to function as a secondary theme, under the more general theme of the gospel of grace. Aquinas writes that most of Romans treats the power of Christ’s grace as it relates to “the people for whom the Gospel works salvation, namely both Jews and Gentiles.”<sup>14</sup>

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Jewish Election, After Thomas Aquinas,” *Nova et Vetera* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 523–28.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 11:26, cited in Aquinas, *In Rom* 11.4.918. I am not implying that the figural meaning of Jewish worship is “the conversion of the Jews.” My intention is to echo the eschatological theme in *Nostra Aetate*.

<sup>13</sup> *In Rom, prologus* 11. Aquinas assumes Paul authored Hebrews. The book is considered the first of fourteen epistles on grace in general. Aquinas understands nine of the epistles to consider grace as it exists in the Church. He explains that grace as it exists in the Church can be considered in three ways. First, in itself, and this is in the epistle to the Romans. Second, is grace as it is in the sacraments. This is treated in 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. The third way is in the effect of grace, which is, namely, the unity of the mystical body that is the Church. The foundation of the Church’s unity is treated in Ephesians; The progress and confirmation of the Church’s unity is treated in Philippians; and lastly, the defense of unity against error and persecution is treated in Colossians, and 1 and II Thessalonians. See the preface he attaches to the commentary on Romans. *In Rom, prol.*

<sup>14</sup> *In Rom* 1.5.74; 1.5.97. Regarding the major division of the text, Aquinas explains that the greater portion of the commentary (chapters 1 through 11) consider three things in relation to the power of Christ’s

It is in this context of his theological account of grace that Aquinas references the “prerogatives of the Jews” at least eight times in the commentary.<sup>15</sup> Aquinas also refers to the Jews’ “advantage” (*amplius*), and their “dignity” or “greatness” (*dignitatem*), and seems to use these terms interchangeably with the term “prerogatives.” For Aquinas, the “prerogatives of the Jews” includes the Mosaic law in general, and that aspect of the Mosaic law he calls “ceremonial,” which includes (but is not limited to) circumcision, Passover, and dietary laws. In the Romans commentary, Aquinas uses the term “prerogatives of Israel” to refer to the matrix of advantages he ascribes to Judaism, especially circumcision, Passover, and dietary laws.<sup>16</sup>

Below, I treat four reflections on the “prerogatives of the Jews” in the commentary on Romans, each of which shares an important characteristic. In each reflection, a positive and present tense Pauline phrase about the Jews provides Aquinas the opportunity to comment on the theological significance of the prerogatives of Israel after Christ.

Kendall Soulen’s work suggests this connection between Paul’s present tense descriptions of Israel and Aquinas’s affirmation of

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grace: to what the gospel of grace extends, which is salvation; how the gospel confers salvation, which is through faith; and finally, “the people for whom the Gospel works salvation, namely, both Jews and the Gentiles.” *In Rom* 1.6.98-101.

<sup>15</sup> The first two occurrences can be found in 2.4.224, the third is in 2.4.226. Each of these occurrences refers to the *praerogativa Iudaeorum* in regard to the Law. The fourth time occurs in 2.4.227 in regard to the “fruit of the Law.” The fifth and sixth times are in regard to “Judaism’s prerogative” as it relates to circumcision. Both these references appear in 3.1.248. The seventh time is in reference to the idea that someone might “belittle the Jews’ prerogative” in 3.1.252. The eighth time is in reference to the idea of the prerogatives being “taken away” and appears in 3.1.253. In 3.1.249 he refers to the Jews as having “great and important” advantages. In 9.1.743-47, Aquinas refers to the Jew’s “dignity” or “greatness” (*dignitas*).

<sup>16</sup> In addition to law and circumcision Aquinas includes the term *gens* which he interprets as “race”, “tribe”, or “people.”



the prerogatives is not a coincidence.<sup>17</sup> For Soulen, the most important element of Paul's letter to the Romans for Jewish-Christian relations is its use of the present tense to characterize the Jewish people.<sup>18</sup> Soulen warns that when present tense descriptions of the Jews are ignored it leads to a reading of the election of the Jewish people as a phenomenon of the past:

When Christians do not attend in a serious way to “the shock of the present tense” in Romans 9-11, they are prone to read their Scriptures in ways that lead them to conclude that God's election of the Jewish people was a phenomenon of the *ancient past*. Perhaps if they pay a little attention to Rom 11, they will also think of Israel's election as a phenomenon of the *eschatological future*, when ‘all Israel will be saved’ 11:26. This traditional Christian view of Israel's election may remind us of the Queen's attitude toward tea in *Alice in Wonderland*: “Tea yesterday, and tea tomorrow, but never tea today!” ... To the degree that Christians submit themselves to this shock, they will turn to their Jewish neighbor and see one who is God's beloved – not *only* in the primordial past and eschatological future – but *also* and *above all* in the abiding *now* of covenant history.<sup>19</sup>

Below, I show that Aquinas's four reflections on the prerogatives of the Jewish people reflect a perspective shaped by Paul's present tense descriptions of Israel in Romans.<sup>20</sup> All of the reflections, which are selected and organized with attention to Aquinas's reading of Paul's positive and present tense language

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<sup>17</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, “‘They are Israelites’: The Priority of the Present Tense for Jewish-Christian Relations,” in Florian Wilk, J. Ross Wagner, and Frank Schleritt, eds., *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9-11*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Soulen, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Boguslawski points out that Aquinas uses Israel and Jews interchangeably throughout his *lectura*. I therefore refer to the Jews' prerogatives or Israel's prerogatives interchangeably. The phrase “era after grace” appears in the *lectura* in 2.4.238; 4.2.357. Aquinas uses the term to refer to the period of salvation history after the passion of Christ.

about the Jews, contain the theme of Jewish election and relate to Jewish worship indirectly. The first and the third reflection concern the status of Jewish observances after Christ directly, especially circumcision. I present each reflection according to the order in which it appears in the commentary.

The first reflection includes an affirmation, elaboration, and defense of the prerogatives of the Jews and unfolds as a comment Aquinas makes upon the emphatic present tense statement Paul supplies to his own rhetorical question in Romans 3:1-2 “What advantage has the Jew?” (after grace) which is, “Much in everyway!”

The second reflection includes Aquinas’s defense of Jewish prerogatives despite the vice of unbelief. Aquinas considers an objection he understands Paul to raise regarding the advantage of the Jew: The objection is represented by Paul’s rhetorical question in Romans 3:3, “What if some of them have not believed? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” and his answer: “God forbid!”<sup>21</sup>

The third reflection includes an affirmation of the ceremonial law as “figures of present spiritual benefit” after Christ and unfolds as a comment upon Paul’s present tense statement “They are Israel,” in Romans 9:4-5.

The fourth reflection includes an affirmation of the prerogatives of the Jews as promises that cannot be revoked in Romans 11:28-9: “They are most dear for the sake of their fathers. For the gifts and the call of God are without repentance.”<sup>22</sup>

### **1. The Great Advantages of the Jews in the Era After Grace**

Aquinas’s first reflection is on the great advantages of the Jews. Near the end of the second chapter of his commentary on Romans, Aquinas contrasts “inward and outward Judaism,” based on Paul’s words that circumcision in one who breaks the law becomes

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<sup>21</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.251.

<sup>22</sup> *In Rom* 11.4.912-26.

“uncircumcision.”<sup>23</sup> Aquinas understands Paul to argue that inward Judaism amounts to keeping the moral precepts, while an “outward Jew” is one who *only* keeps the ceremonial law and neglects the moral law. Based on Paul’s language of “uncircumcision” it seems that circumcision profits *only* if the law, i.e., the moral precepts of the old law, are also observed.<sup>24</sup> “He is truly a Jew,” explains Aquinas, “who is one *inwardly*, i.e., whose heart is possessed by the precepts of the Law, which the Jews professed.”<sup>25</sup>

In chapter three, Aquinas presents what he refers to as Paul’s objection to his own teaching on outward Judaism. After Paul has argued that the Gentile, just like a Jew, can obtain the status of being a “true Jew,” by observing the moral precepts, Aquinas says Paul “objects to his own doctrine.”<sup>26</sup> According to Aquinas, the objection is represented by Paul’s rhetorical question, “Then what advantage has the Jew?” Aquinas then summarizes Paul’s rhetorical question in his own terms, and, in Paul’s voice, in order

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<sup>23</sup> *In Rom* 2.4.243.

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas divides the Mosaic legislation into moral, ceremonial, and judicial law. The moral law more or less corresponds with the natural law. The ceremonial and judicial laws deal with the application of the universal precepts of the natural law to the particular occasions of worship of God and human relations. The latter two forms of law derive their force from God’s command and not from natural law alone. The ceremonial law had a twofold purpose that corresponds to the literal and spiritual meaning of the law. The literal meaning of the ceremonial law is that it enclosed the Jewish people in the worship of the one God. The spiritual meaning of the old law is that it prefigured Christ. Christ perfectly fulfills the Old Law in his passion and does so in order to bring it to an end in His own self, so as to show that it was ordained to Him. After Christ, the judicial laws can be observed in any political community, so long as the precepts are no longer viewed as binding through enactment by God in the old law. This is not the case for the ceremonial law. In *STh* Ia-IIae q. 103.4, Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Law ultimately means that the ceremonial precepts become dead and deadly after the passion.

<sup>25</sup> *In Rom* 2.4.244.

<sup>26</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.246.

to further clarify his view of the objection to outward Judaism: “If what I say is so, i.e., that the true Jew and true circumcision are not something outward but inward in the heart, ‘Then what advantage has the Jew,’ i.e., what has been given to him more than others? *It seems to be nothing.*”<sup>27</sup> Aquinas then puts the question in even more precise terms and asks: “Or what is the value of circumcision, i.e., outward?” and states, “it seems from his previous teaching [on outward Judaism] that there is no value.”<sup>28</sup>

In his response to the objection that it seems circumcision has no value in the era of grace, Aquinas seems to shift away from the traditional position that Jewish observances become dead after the passion of Christ.<sup>29</sup> Aquinas appeals directly to Paul’s answer to his own rhetorical question in order to reject the idea that circumcision in the era after grace is superfluous. He understands Paul to answer his own objection, “What is the value of circumcision, i.e., outward?” with Paul’s own emphatic and immediate reply in Romans 3:2: “Much in everyway!!” Aquinas writes, “when [Paul] says ‘Much in every way’ he answers the objection [that circumcision has no value].”<sup>30</sup>

This Pauline affirmation of the theological status of the ceremonial law after Christ’s passion then compels Aquinas to embark on a lengthy defense of the advantage of outward Judaism. Aquinas explains that “when [Paul] says ‘Much in every way!’ he answers the objection: first, in regard to Judaism’s prerogative; secondly, in regard to the value of circumcision....” While Aquinas does not seem to think the rites provide justifying grace, he appears to hold that circumcision remains valuable as a prerogative of the Jewish people. Indeed, in his extended reply to the objection that circumcision is superfluous, Aquinas seems

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<sup>27</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.247. [Emphasis added]

<sup>28</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.247. *Videtur quod non* is of course a phrase used to introduce a scholastic objection. That Aquinas uses the phrase to introduce the latter part of the objection (i.e. that circumcision has no value) seems to show he thinks there is a difficulty regarding the value of circumcision in the era after grace.

<sup>29</sup> *STh* I-II, q. 103, a. 4

<sup>30</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.248.

concerned to state, in four ways, the positive theological status of this Jewish rite *in the present tense*.

First, Aquinas attempts to elaborate on why circumcision is of value in the era after grace by linking the rite to the doctrine of the election of Israel—that the Jewish people are God’s special possession. Aquinas writes, “[the idea that there is no advantage to the Jew] is not fitting, since the Lord had said: ‘The Lord, your God, has chosen you to be a people for his own possession’ Deut 7:6.”<sup>31</sup> For Aquinas, the election of Israel is the ground of the ongoing value of circumcision. The advantage is grounded in the theological claim that God has chosen this people.

Second, Aquinas states that another reason that the idea of circumcision being superfluous is not fitting in the era after grace is because God imposed it upon this chosen people. It is “not fitting” to say there is no value in circumcision because, Aquinas writes, “[circumcision] was imposed by God, Who says: ‘I am the Lord, your God, who teaches you unto profit’ Is 48:17.”<sup>32</sup>

Aquinas then adds a third theological defense against the idea that there is “no value” to this significant Jewish rite after Christ. That he understands Paul’s “Much in everyway!!” to solidly defeat the objection that there is no advantage to the Jew and no longer a theological value in circumcision becomes quite clear as he elaborates upon the advantage of the prerogatives of the Jews in the present by listing the advantages of Judaism. Aquinas argues that Judaism’s “advantage is both quantitative, which is indicated when [the Apostle] says, ‘much,’ and numerical, which is indicated when he says, ‘in every way.’”<sup>33</sup> He then outlines several advantages including, “contemplating divine matters,” by which he means their receiving the revealed knowledge of God, and “the provision of temporal things,” by which he means deliverance from Egypt. The third advantage is “advantages relating to their ancestors,” which he explains are “the promises to their offspring.” In reference to these “promises” he cites Romans 9:4, which states, “They are Israelites, and to them belong the

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<sup>31</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.247.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.249.

sonship, the glory, the covenant.”<sup>34</sup> Each advantage of the Jews is described in the present, not in the past, which indicates that Aquinas understands these advantages of the election of Israel as an ongoing reality.

Fourth, Aquinas adds that, “In each of these there is no small advantage, but great and important ones, which are summed up when [the Apostle] says, ‘much.’”<sup>35</sup> The great and important Jewish advantage that Aquinas specifies as a chief advantage (*praecipue amplius*), is that “[the Jews] are entrusted the oracles of God, being His friends: ‘I have called you friends’ Jn 15:15.”<sup>36</sup> Their chief advantage is expressed in their closeness to God. This is because man’s “greatest good lies in knowing and clinging to God and being instructed by God.”<sup>37</sup> Here, Aquinas’s remarkably positive and present tense affirmation of the Jews as the friends of God now is reminiscent of Pope John Paul II’s positive language about the Jews as “elder brothers.”<sup>38</sup> To cite John 15:15 to support the idea that the Jews are entrusted with knowledge of God and enjoy a closeness to God seems to raise the theological status of Israel after the era of grace to a level not commonly affirmed in the history of Christian theology. Indeed, Aquinas seems to move well beyond Augustine’s negative but protective stance, “slay them not,” and constructs a literal theological ground for the Jewish people as the elect who remain the friends of God even after the passion of Christ.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* I show below that Aquinas thinks the covenant mentioned here, in 9:4, is the old covenant.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.250.

<sup>37</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.249.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Marshall, “Elder Brothers: John Paul II’s Teaching on the Jewish People as a Question to the Church,” in *John Paul II and the Jewish People: A Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, ed. Dalin David and Matthew Levering, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007, 113–29.

## 2. Advantages of the Jews Despite Unbelief in Christ

Next, Aquinas considers the challenge of unbelief in Christ to this doctrine. In reply to the objection he makes the argument that God's faithfulness would actually be compromised if the prerogatives of Israel were annulled due to unbelief. He does this when he considers an objection he understands Paul to raise regarding the advantage of the Jew.

The objection is represented by Paul's question, "What if some were unfaithful?"<sup>39</sup> Aquinas then restates the objection in his own terms: the unfaithfulness of Israel seems manifest in their ingratitude and lack of belief in God. Would not such unbelief mean the annulment of their prerogatives?<sup>40</sup> Aquinas then builds the strength of the objection by explaining that someone could belittle the Jews' prerogative on the basis that they were ungrateful to God's message and lack belief. He writes, "Someone could belittle the Jews' prerogative by citing their ingratitude, through which they would seem to have set aside the value of God's message." Aquinas then explains that this is exactly why Paul takes the time to suggest the objection, "What if some were unfaithful?" and Aquinas once more explains the objection, but in his own terms: "Does this show that the Jew has no advantage?"<sup>41</sup> Aquinas then sharpens the objection by pointing out the nature of the unbelief he thinks is assumed by the question. Jewish unbelief is not only lack of belief in God's message, but also lack of belief in the mediators of the message: the Lawgiver himself, the prophets, and even the Son of God. Aquinas then lends biblical support to the objection by stringing together witnesses from the Old and New Testaments concerning unbelief: "For they did not

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<sup>39</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.251.

<sup>40</sup> *In Rom* 2.4.253. Aquinas's description of this objection seems rather reminiscent of the "punitive supersessionism" of the *adversus Iudaeos* tradition. Soulen defines punitive supersessionism as follows: "According to punitive supersessionism, God abrogates God's covenant with Israel on account of Israel's rejection of Christ and the gospel." See Soulen, *The God of Israel*, 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.252.

believe the Lawgiver: ‘They had no faith in his promises’ Ps 106:24 or the prophets: they are a rebellious house Ez 2:6.” The objection even becomes more pointed with the last citation—the words of Christ to the Jews: “. . . Or the Son of God: ‘If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?’”<sup>42</sup>

In his reply to this sharp objection to Jewish prerogatives Aquinas unpacks a robust theology of God’s promise to Israel. He bases his reply to the objection that the prerogatives of Israel are threatened by Jewish unbelief on Paul’s answer to the rhetorical question “Does their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God?” which is, “Let it not be!” Aquinas explains Paul’s “Let it not be!” by appealing to the idea of the faithfulness of God. He cites Hebrews 10:23: “God is faithful in keeping His promises: ‘He who promised is faithful.’”<sup>43</sup> Here, it becomes clear that Aquinas understands God’s faithfulness as the foundation of the election of Israel and it is a foundation that remains steadfast in the face of the vice of unbelief in the Son of God: “[God’s] faithfulness would be nullified, if it happened that the Jews had no advantage, just because some have not believed.” Aquinas goes on, “For God promised to multiply that people and make it great,” and then cites Genesis 22:16: “I will multiply your descendants.”<sup>44</sup> God’s faithfulness cannot be nullified, explains Aquinas, because “it is unacceptable for God’s faithfulness to be nullified on account of men’s belief.”<sup>45</sup>

Aquinas then goes on to state how the prerogatives of Israel relate to God’s permanent promise of Jewish election. Aquinas argues that the prerogatives cannot be taken away without compromising God’s faithfulness. The perpetuity attributed to the prerogatives of Israel, which includes the ceremonial law, is wrapped up with the very faithfulness of God. Aquinas understands Paul to exclude the objection that there is now, after Christ, no longer an advantage to the Jew by arguing against “the unacceptable conclusion it engenders.” Aquinas states:

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<sup>42</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.252.

<sup>43</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.254.

<sup>44</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.253.

<sup>45</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.254. [Emended]



For if the Jews' prerogative were abrogated (*praerogativa Iudaeorum tolleretur*) on account of the unbelief of some, it would follow that man's unbelief would nullify God's faithfulness—which is an unacceptable conclusion.<sup>46</sup>

For Aquinas, to hold that the prerogatives of Israel are annulled is “an unacceptable conclusion” because it calls into question the faithfulness of God.<sup>47</sup> “God's justice, which involves keeping His promises,” writes Aquinas, “is not changed on account of sin.”<sup>48</sup> He then cites Proverbs 8:8: “All the words of my mouth are righteous.” And Psalm 145:13: “The Lord is faithful in all his words...”<sup>49</sup> For Aquinas, the perpetuity of the value of the prerogatives is connected to God's promise to this people, which he will keep because God is “faithful in all [God's] words” and does not lie.

### 3. Spiritual Benefits of the Jewish People

Aquinas discusses the prerogatives of Israel as these relate to election once more in chapter 9, and under the category of the *dignitatem Iudaeorum* or greatness of the Jews. However, in this third reflection, the positive theological significance of Jewish worship is stated in a more explicit way when the rites are described as “figures” even after the passion of Christ. For Aquinas, *dignitatem Iudaeorum* is demonstrated in three ways: a) the Jewish people are the descendants of Jacob; b) the Jewish people enjoy benefits from God now and in the future; and c) the

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<sup>46</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.253. [Emended]

<sup>47</sup> Although *inconueniens* is an adjective that can be translated “unfitting,” Aquinas uses the term to refer to a statement (the theory that the prerogatives might be removed). In the context of his usage of the term, it seems the word should carry more force: unreasonable, absurd. See Roy J. Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas, Based on The Summa Theologica and Selected Passages of His Other Writings*, St. Paul Editions, 1986, 533.

<sup>48</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.257.

<sup>49</sup> *In Rom* 3.1.257.

observances of Jewish worship are “figures of present spiritual benefit.”

a. *Dignitatem Iudaeorum* as Descendants of Jacob

First, their dignity is from their being Israelites according to the flesh. Aquinas states: “‘Who are Israelites,’ i.e., descending from the stock of Jacob who was called Israel (Gen 32:28). This pertains to their greatness (*dignitatem*), for it is said: ‘neither is there any nation so great as to have their gods coming to them’ (Deut 4:7).<sup>50</sup> Aquinas once again acknowledges God’s election of this particular people and names it as a benefit in the present.<sup>51</sup> This view of the Jewish people can be viewed as an echo of Aquinas’s high view of election before the passion of Christ in the *Summa theologiae*. There, Aquinas remarks that the Israelites were “specially chosen” based on gratuitous election (I-II, q. 98, a. 4) for the worship of God (I-II, q. 102, a. 6), and that it was fitting that the people of whom Christ was to be born should be signalized by a “special sanctification (I-II, q. 98, a. 4).”<sup>52</sup> For both of these reasons, the Jew enjoys a special dignity in Aquinas’s thought. However, in the *Prima Secundae* the special designation for the Jews becomes, after the passion of Christ, fades into the past. The significance of this view in the Romans commentary is that Aquinas explicitly extends the affirmation of the greatness of the Jewish people into the era of grace, despite unbelief in Christ.

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<sup>50</sup> *In Rom* 9.1.743.

<sup>51</sup> *In Rom* 9.1.745.

<sup>52</sup> Citing Augustine’s own warning (in the *Lectures on the Gospel of John XXVI*), Aquinas points out that one should not judge why God chose this people for a special designation, and not another: ‘Why He draweth one and draweth not another, seek not thou to judge, if thou wish not to err.’”

b. *Dignitatem Iudaeorum* from God's Present and Future Spiritual Benefits

Second, Aquinas says the Jews enjoy dignity from two spiritual benefits (*spiritualia beneficia*) from God (*Dei beneficiis*), a present spiritual benefit, and a future spiritual benefit.

The first spiritual benefit from God is identified as a *present* spiritual benefit and described as Israel's adoption as "sons of God."<sup>53</sup> Aquinas writes, "Second, [Paul] shows the greatness (*dignitatem*) of that race (*gentis*) from God's benefits: first, the spiritual blessings, one of which refers to the present: to whom belongs the adoption of sons of God. Hence it says in Exodus: Israel is my son, my firstborn (Exod 4:22):"<sup>54</sup>

Aquinas then explains that the literal meaning of this sonship refers to "spiritual men" who arose among the Jewish people (*spirituales viros qui fuerunt in illo populo*). As he does in other places, Aquinas contrasts spiritual men to "worldly men" of the nations: ". . . but as to worldly men he stated above (Rom 8:15) that they received the spirit of slavery in fear." The high view of the spiritual men of Israel should not be overlooked. Aquinas uses the term in other places to refer to Christians and monks.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Second, he shows the greatness of that race from God's blessings . . . the spiritual blessings, one of which refers to the present . . ." *In Rom* 9.1.744.

<sup>54</sup> *In Rom* 9.1.744.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Aquinas's *Commentary on John* 6.3.896; In *STh* III, q. 41. a. 4. Aquinas uses the term "spiritual men" as a synonym for "sons of God." There may also be an important connection present between the term "spiritual men" in this text and the Galatians commentary, in which the ceremonial law is also discussed. He is concerned to protect the idea that Christ observed the ceremonial law, which he says seems to be undermined by the opposition of spirit to law in Ga. 5:18. "But here a difficulty comes to mind from what is said below, namely: If you are 'led by the spirit, you are not under the law' (5:18). Hence if Christ is not only spiritual but the giver of the Spirit, it seems unbecoming to say that He was made under the Law. [Emphasis added] I answer that "to be under the Law" can be taken in two ways: in one way so that "under" denotes the mere observance of the Law, and in this sense Christ was made under

Aquinas refers to the second benefit from God as a *future* spiritual benefit. He explains that this “spiritual blessing refers to the future when Paul says: ‘the glory.’ Aquinas explains that this glory refers to “the sons of God promised to them,” which may refer to the existence of “spiritual men” rising among future generations of Israel or to what he expects as the conversion of the Jews at the second coming. Aquinas bases this interpretation in Exodus 40:32: “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”<sup>56</sup>

c. *Dignitatem Iudaeorum* from Circumcision, Law, and Worship as “Figures of Present Spiritual Benefit”

Aquinas then goes on to introduce another classification of spiritual benefits from God. He explains that Paul sets out three “figures of present spiritual benefit” (*figura praesentis spiritualis beneficii*). Aquinas frequently uses the term *figura* throughout his works to refer to the symbolic meaning of the ceremonial law as foreshadowing Christ. However, this is the only place in his work where he employs the phrase “figures of present spiritual benefit,” and this novelty seems to indicate something important. I list these “present figures” which are also spiritual benefits as 3, 4, 5, in

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the Law, because He was circumcised and presented in the temple: “I am not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Mt 5:17). In another way so that “under” denotes oppression. And in this way one is said to be under the Law if he is oppressed by fear of the Law. *But neither Christ nor spiritual men are said to be under the Law in this way. Ad Galatas 4.2.* [Emphasis added] In both texts the “spiritual men” under the old law are affirmed as a positive theological possibility. In the Galatians commentary the spiritual men are discussed as under the law in a positive way, as Christ was. But in Galatians, Aquinas clearly thinks this time has passed. However, in the Romans commentary, it appears Aquinas employs the concept of “spiritual men” of Israel under the law as a present spiritual benefit after the passion of Christ. This would mean that Aquinas may have been open to the Spirit allowing for the observation of the Jewish law by Jews beyond the promulgation of grace (see *STh* II-II, q. 103, a. 4). I realize that this is highly speculative but it seems the category of “under the law” is worthy of further investigation.

<sup>56</sup> *In Rom* 9.1.744.

order to maintain continuity with the second category (present and future spiritual benefits). The difference between the second category and the third is that this last set of spiritual benefits are not only present benefits, but “figures.” It is important to note that Aquinas explicitly lists the figures of present spiritual benefit as the third proof for the “greatness” of *the Jews, not Christians*.<sup>57</sup>

The first “figure of present spiritual benefit” is identified as the covenant mentioned in Romans 9:4, which Aquinas says is “the pact of circumcision [*pactum circumcisionis*] given to Abraham, as is recorded in Gen 17 . . . .” Here, Aquinas explicitly states that circumcision is a figure of a *present* spiritual benefit (*praesentis spiritualis beneficii*). That circumcision is described as a “present” figure that remains connected in any way to a spiritual benefit after the passion of Christ is incredibly significant given Aquinas’s standard teaching, a point I will return to below. Additionally, Aquinas’s identification of the covenant of Romans 9:4 as the pact of circumcision diverges from the standard biblical commentary of his day, the *Glossa ordinaria*, which is careful to state that the covenant mentioned in Romans 9:4 refers to “the New Testament” covenant, *not* the old.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *In Rom 9.1.744*: “...beneficia figuralia, quorum tria sunt figura praesentis spiritualis beneficii....” Larcher’s original translation of these benefits as “were figures of present spiritual benefit” rather than “are figures of present spiritual benefit.” However, the Italian Dominican Study Edition of the Romans commentary translates these benefits in the present tense. See Tommaso d’Aquino (san), *Commento al Corpus Paulinum (expositio et lectura super epistolas Pauli apostoli) vol. 1-3 - Seconda Lettera ai corinzi-Lettera ai galati*, ESD-Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2006, 601. Additionally, the Aquinas Institute translation (2012) of the commentary also noticed Larcher’s mistranslation and amended it to the present tense.

<sup>58</sup> *In Rom 9.1.744*: “Deinde ponit alia beneficia figuralia, quorum tria sunt figura praesentis spiritualis beneficii. Et horum primum est testamentum, id est, pactum circumcisionis Abrahae datum.” Aquinas considers the possibility that Paul might be referring not to the covenant with Israel but to the New covenant: “although this could be referred to the new covenant preached first to the Jews. Hence, the Lord Himself said: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24);

The second “figure of present spiritual benefit” is the Law given through Moses. “Hence, he continues: ‘the giving of the law: Moses commanded a law to us (Sir 24:33).’”

The third “figure of present spiritual benefit” is divine worship, which Aquinas describes as “the service with which they served God,” and he places Jewish observances in contrast to the idolatry of the nations.

What is the relationship of these “figures of present spiritual benefits” to the first category of Jewish greatness as well as the “present” and “future” benefits of the second category of Jewish greatness?

It may help to examine what Aquinas says about each dignity or greatness in light of what Aquinas teaches on the notion of *figura* and the election of Israel in the *Summa theologiae*. Aquinas teaches that the ceremonial law, which was indeed good, had a twofold purpose: the literal purpose is that the law was that it a) enclosed the Jewish people in the worship of the one God. The figurative purpose of the law was b) to prefigure Christ.<sup>59</sup> The first dignity listed above (in the Romans commentary) seems to pertain to what Aquinas usually understands as the literal meaning of Israel, or God’s choice of these particular people to be his own possession. Aquinas does not say that God’s choice of this people

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and Jer (31:31): “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.” Despite the alternative interpretation Aquinas offers regarding the reference to the covenant—that it “could be” the new covenant—he thinks the “pact of circumcision” is the literal meaning. That he mentions the possibility of it being the new testament seems to be a nod to the standard medieval interpretation, the *Glossa ordinaria* on Romans, which explicitly states that this reference to the covenant means the new covenant and not the old: “*the glory*--because they are a peculiar people, or because of what they do through miracles. *The testament*--the New Testament. *The legislation*--which the Old Testament presented through figures...” Nevertheless, by listing circumcision first Aquinas seems to deliberately move away from this interpretation. See Michael Scott Woodward, tran., *The Glossa Ordinaria on Romans*, Western Michigan University, 2011, 138-9.

<sup>59</sup> *STh* I-II, q. 102, a. 2.

is figurative.<sup>60</sup> Although Aquinas teaches that it is fitting that the Jewish people enjoy a special, literal sanctification, because they are the people from whom Christ will come, God's election of these people is not referred to as a figure.

The second dignity listed above, which discusses the present benefit of sonship, also seems to refer to the literal meaning of the elect people in general. The Jews are not only the people chosen by God but also a people called to be set apart or distinct from the nations. Aquinas seems not to attribute a spiritual meaning to the notion that the Jews are "adopted sons" from among the nations. Aquinas may consider the future glory a literal benefit because he is aware of Paul's teaching that all Israel will be saved.

However, the ceremonial precepts, by which the Jewish people are enclosed in the worship of the God of Israel (literal meaning), are usually referred to as figures of Christ. Perhaps this is why the third category, which is the only category that explicitly mentions circumcision, the Law of Moses, and divine worship, are named as figures. When Aquinas uses the phrase "figures of present spiritual benefit" he is discussing the sacraments he usually refers to as figures of Christ.<sup>61</sup>

However, what is especially noteworthy about Aquinas's description of the ceremonial rites as "figures of present spiritual benefit" is that these observances are explicitly named *present figures*. Indeed, the concept of Jewish worship as "present figure" after the passion of Christ represents a divergence from his standard teaching, as represented in *STh*. q. 103 a. 4, and the commentaries on Galatians and Hebrews, that the rites *were* figures.

According to Aquinas's standard position, the old sacraments have been made void because the prefiguring function has been exhausted by the arrival of the reality to which the rites pointed. In

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<sup>60</sup> See *STh* I-II, q. 98, a. 4.

<sup>61</sup> This is not to say that the first and second forms of dignity (election of Israel; present and future benefits) cannot have spiritual meanings. I am pointing out that it is Aquinas's usual practice to identify the ceremonial law as figures of Christ whereas his language about the election of Israel seems to leave out references to the spiritual meaning.

the Hebrews commentary, Aquinas explains why the ceremonial laws are no longer to be followed when he explains why it is acceptable to tithe even though tithing is a commandment of the old law, which has passed away. When he introduces his comment on the problem, Aquinas summarizes this objection to tithing and mentions that observing the ceremonial law is now a sin: “since the observance of a commandment of the law is now a sin, it seems unlawful to give or receive tithes now.”<sup>62</sup> Aquinas then responds to this objection by presenting the famous distinction between moral and ceremonial law:

I answer that there were in the law some precepts purely ceremonial, such as circumcision, the offering of the lamb, and so on. *Such laws, since they were only figurative, it is no longer licit to observe*, for they were a figure of something to come; hence, anyone who observes them now would be signifying that Christ is still to come. But others were purely moral, and these must be observed now. Among these was the giving of tithes . . . but the determination of such a portion is now made by the Church, just as in the Old Testament it was determined by the law.<sup>63</sup>

Later, Aquinas asks why God would command sacrifices if he did not desire them. He states once more that observance of the ceremonial law after Christ is a sin. God does not want these observances “for that time in which the shadows cease with the advent of truth, and hence a person would sin by offering them now.”<sup>64</sup> These ceremonies were accepted because “they *were* figures of Christ whose passion was accepted by God.”<sup>65</sup> After Christ, these observances are no longer figures. Indeed, to observe

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<sup>62</sup> *In Heb.* 7.2.339. [Emphasis added]

<sup>63</sup> *In Heb.* 7.2.339.

<sup>64</sup> *In Heb.* 10.1.488. It seems clear here that Aquinas is describing how observing the ceremonial law, in this case, the sacrifices, is a sin for anyone who offers such things, not only Jewish believers in Christ.

<sup>65</sup> *In Heb.* 10.1.488. This twofold meaning of the ceremonial law echoes that of the *Summa theologiae* in that it prefigures Christ’s passion and also served as to enclose the Jewish people in worship.



the ceremonies after the passion “would be an insult (*iniuria*) to the sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>66</sup>

In almost every place where Aquinas discusses the sacraments of the Old Testament, the twofold ratio of the rites is affirmed as something in the past. The rites are no longer figures. The ceremonial law enclosed the Jewish people in proper worship of God and it served to prefigure the perfect priesthood of the One who was to come. After Christ, however, to observe these rites brings spiritual death for Jews. In *In Galatas* 5.1.278: Aquinas states the hard consequences of observing the law after grace: “To observe the legal ceremonies after grace had been preached is a mortal sin for the Jews.”<sup>67</sup>

However, in the Romans commentary, Jewish observances are not described as rites that *were* figures that are now *mortua et mortifera*.<sup>68</sup> Rather, Aquinas thinks the rites somehow retain a figuring function. Why? It seems that the present tense force of Paul’s words (“Much in every way!” and “They are Israelites . . .”) may have pushed Aquinas to reconfirm the literal and figural ratio for the rites based on Pauline authority.

First, Aquinas locates a literal meaning for the theological value of Jewish worship in Paul’s teaching that the advantages of the Jews cannot be abrogated without calling into question God’s faithfulness. Second, Aquinas asserts a figural meaning for the value of Jewish worship when he says that these rites are “figures of present spiritual benefit.” To say the pact of circumcision is spiritually beneficial for Jews in any way seems a significant step away from the “dead and deadly” view of Jewish worship in ST I-II 103.4. Aquinas’s teaching seems to imply that the sacrament of circumcision retains a present figural meaning, although he does

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<sup>66</sup> *In Heb* 10.1.500.

<sup>67</sup> *In Gal* 5.1.278.

<sup>68</sup> *STh* I-II, q. 103, a. 4. References to figures in the Old Testament appears in *In Heb* 1.3.51; 4.1.202. The first time Aquinas elaborates on the prefiguring aspect of the old law is in his explanation of the sense in which the Levitical priesthood is described as “perpetual” in Exodus 27:21. The most explicit treatment of the prefiguring function of the ceremonial law seems to be in 7.3.352.

not specify what this is.<sup>69</sup> Next, I briefly treat the last reflection on the prerogatives of the Jewish people in the Romans commentary. I then suggest how this continuing figuring function might be understood via a text on the “toleration” of Jewish rites in the *Secunda Secundae*.

d. *The Certainty of God’s Promise to Israel*

The final reflection in the Romans commentary that I want to highlight is when Aquinas comments on Paul’s famous words in Romans 11:29, “For the gifts and the call of God are without repentance.” Here, Aquinas once again secures the perpetuity of the election of Israel by grounding it in God’s unchanging promise.<sup>70</sup> In particular, he does this when he responds to an objection he raises to the idea that God’s command can change.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Aquinas explains the objection as follows: “God’s call seems to be changed sometimes, since it is written ‘Many are called but few are chosen’ Mt 22:14.”

In his reply, Aquinas once again explains that the ongoing election of Israel is secured by God’s promise, which is a promise that is, because of God’s predestination, “as good as given.” Commenting upon Romans 11:29, “For the gifts and the call of God are without repentance,” Aquinas says that: “it should be noted that ‘gift’ is taken here for a promise [*promissione*] made according to God’s foreknowledge or predestination, and ‘call’ is taken for election.” “Because both are so certain,” explains

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<sup>69</sup> In the second part of the essay, I propose how the rite might continue to figure Christ below.

<sup>70</sup> *In Rom* 11.4.926.

<sup>71</sup> In the Hebrews commentary, Aquinas actually argues for the opposite position when drawing upon Augustine. He argues that God’s providence is different than God and that while God does not change, his providence can. The difference between these two texts is that in the Romans *lectura*, Aquinas is more aware of the robust depth and perpetuity of the promise to carnal Israel while in the Hebrews *lectura* the promise is defined narrowly, as a temporal and physical phenomenon. See *In Heb* 7.3.352.

Aquinas, “whatever God promises *is as good as given* and whomever [God] elects is somehow already called.”<sup>72</sup>

However, Aquinas then adds an eternal/temporal distinction regarding God’s promise in order to explain that a promise from God can “change” in the sense that human persons can cast off God’s grace. Aquinas says this change is not because God’s eternal acts change, but because man changes when he throws off God’s grace.

Nevertheless, what Aquinas’s says concerning God’s promise to Israel seems secured by his argument concerning the unbelief of the Jews in *In Rom* 3.1.257. If one were to claim that the promise to Israel can be invalidated not by a change in God but by a change in man, e.g., the Jews’ rejection of Christ understood as the “fall” of the Jews, the problem of the cancelled promise remains. As Aquinas states in 3.1.257, if the election of the Jews was abrogated on account of their unbelief in God in Christ (i.e. “change in man”), this would be unacceptable because it calls into question God’s faithfulness. In other words, when Aquinas does address Jewish unbelief at length in *In Rom* 3.1.257, the conclusion he draws seems to employ a notion of *promissione* that is not dislocated from the idea of God’s faithfulness to the particular people, the Jews.

Overall, these reflections seem to affirm the election of Israel and Jewish worship and undermine the teaching that observance of the ceremonial law is, after the passion of Christ, superfluous at best and sinful at worst. Yet it is not at all clear how exactly the spiritual benefits of the law and circumcision can be said to remain figures if the exact relationship of the rites to Christ and to his passion is not specified. I attempt to address this difficulty in the final section of the essay.

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<sup>72</sup> *In Rom* 11.4.926.

**B. “Out of Zion the Deliverer shall come”: Jewish Worship as a Figure of that Day which the Church awaits with the Apostle and Prophets**

It is well known that Aquinas follows the traditional view of the preparatory role Judaism played in salvation history:<sup>73</sup> In so far as the old sacrament of circumcision prefigured Christ it also conferred grace. Whether this can be the case after the passion, and on Aquinas’s terms, is problematic to say the least. In the Romans commentary, Aquinas does not explain how the rites can be said to remain figures and spiritually beneficial in so far as the rites relate to Christ. How can Aquinas describe the old sacrament as a present figure *and* a spiritual benefit if Christ has already come? What can we say about the logic of the concept of a “figure of present spiritual benefit”?

First, it is important to briefly reflect upon the historical theological context of Aquinas’s thought on duration of the figuring function of the old sacraments. Medieval preoccupation with the relationship between the old and new covenants was commonplace. According to Marie-Dominique Chenu, the twelfth-century theological world understood fulfillment of the Old Law within a dialectic between two poles: 1) continuity with the old law and 2) break with the old law.<sup>74</sup> Chenu explains that

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<sup>73</sup> Schoot and Valkenberg’s description of this prefigurative formula is one of the most concise: “What has been said in the Old Law figuratively is now revealed in Christ in truth.” Pim Valkenberg and Henk Schoot, “Thomas Aquinas and Judaism,” in *Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Jim Fodor and Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, Wiley-Blackwell, 2004, 56. Although Valkenberg and Schoot’s discussion of the prefiguring concept concerns Aquinas’s christological interpretation of the Psalms, their insights about this hermeneutical approach can be said to apply to Aquinas’s interpretation of the Old Testament in general.

<sup>74</sup> See Marie-Dominique Chenu, “The Old Testament in Twelfth-Century Theology,” in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997, 160. See also Beryl Smalley “William of Auvergne, John of La Rochelle

this century experienced an increasingly positive attention to figures in the old covenant and did not treat it as a bygone and defunct stage. Rather, theologians sought to elaborate upon how it might illuminate various aspects of Christendom. It was thought that the new lies enveloped in the old and thus typological exploration of the old abounded.<sup>75</sup> Attending to the two poles of what Chenu refers to as the “textual continuum” was “intrinsic to the progress of the economy of salvation, a progress that anticipated its final course through prefigurations of the future.”<sup>76</sup> Continuity with biblical history was encapsulated in Christ’s words “I have not come to destroy the Law.” And yet breaks with this same biblical history were encapsulated in Christ’s words “but I say to you.”<sup>77</sup>

That Aquinas shared this medieval preoccupation with the old covenant and its relation to the new is evidenced in a number of ways. First, the *Libri Sententiarium* contains few references to the old covenant. But by the time Aquinas writes the *Prima Secundae* his interest in the old law had expanded so much that the articles

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and St. Thomas Aquinas on the Old Law,” in *Studies in Medieval Thought and Learning From Abelard to Wyclif*, Hambleton Continuum, 1981; Richard Schenk, “Covenant Initiation: Thomas Aquinas and Robert Kilwardby on the Sacrament of Circumcision,” in *Ordo Sapientiae et Amoris: Image et Message de Saint Thomas d’Aquin à travers les Récentes Études Historiques, Herméneutiques et Doctrinales: Hommage au Professeur Jean-Pierre Torrell OP à l’occasion de son 65e Anniversaire*, ed. Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira, Fribourg, Suisse: Editions universitaires, 1993, 555–93; “Views of the Two Covenants in Medieval Theology,” *Nova Et Vetera* 4, no. 4 (2006): 891–916. Of course, exploring “the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament in light of Christ and the New Testament” is not simply a medieval theological tradition but the traditional Christian approach to the Old Testament. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture: Volume 1*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998, ix.

<sup>75</sup> Chenu, 158.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

on the ceremonial law represent the longest in the entire *Summa*.<sup>78</sup> Second, Aquinas discusses the famous controversy between Augustine and Jerome on the intention of the apostles' observance of the law in both the *Prima Secundae* and *ad Galatas*. Third, Aquinas wrestled with the interpretation of the relationship of the rites to the grace of Christ throughout his advanced teaching career. As Pim Valkenberg and Henk Schoot point out, in his *Libri Sententiarum*, Aquinas taught that the sacrament of circumcision mediated grace in and of itself. In the *Summa theologiae*, he shifts his view toward a more Christocentric teaching and argues that the sacrament mediates grace in so far as the rites prefigure Christ.<sup>79</sup>

In the Romans commentary Aquinas seems to view the Pauline affirmations of the greatness of the Jews despite unbelief as a reconfirmation of the twofold purpose of Jewish worship. Aquinas seems to identify a literal meaning for the Jewish rites in the era of grace—the advantages of the Jews are bound up with God's faithfulness. Aquinas also introduces a novel concept of the figural meaning for the old sacraments when he suggests that these rites are present figures even after Christ. Is it possible that the language of "figures of present spiritual benefit" represents another stage in the development in Aquinas's thought?

Indeed, in addition to the "figures of present spiritual benefit" of *ad Romanos* 9.1.744, there is another text that indicates a possible development in Aquinas's view of the figuring function of Jewish worship. In *IIa-IIae* q. 10 a. 11, the old sacraments are also described as present tense *figura* after the passion. In his discussion of unbelief (*infidelitas*) as a vice against faith, and whether such unbelief should be tolerated in Christendom, Aquinas states that Jewish rites should be tolerated because of a

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<sup>78</sup> John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews*, 40; Wyschogrod, "A Jewish Reading of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Old Law," 126; Edward Synan, "Some Medieval Perceptions on Jewish Law," 120; Coolman points out that *I-II*, q. 102, a. 3 ad 5 runs for more than 8,000 words. Holly Taylor Coolman, "Christological Torah," 5.

<sup>79</sup> The old view is in *In IV Sent* d. 1, q. 2, qua. 3. Aquinas revises his view in *STh* III, q. 62, a. 6 ad 3; q. 70, a. 4.

particular good: “Thus from the fact that the Jews observe their rites, which, of old, foreshadowed the truth of the faith which we hold, there follows this good—that our very enemies bear witness to our faith, *and that our faith is represented in a figure, so to speak.*”<sup>80</sup> Although the standard view is confirmed when Aquinas says the rites prefigured the truth of the Christian faith, in the past, he seems open to a continuing figuring function in relation to the Christian faith. The rites are also said to continue to bear witness to Christianity, somehow, even in the present. Bruce Marshall helpfully explains the significance of this text:

Given the tremendous weight Thomas ascribes to the figurative meaning of Jewish worship *before* Christ, to say that this worship retains a figurative significance after Christ is not a trivial claim. If Jewish worship even now attests Christian truth in a figurative way, it must somehow still do what it *did* from the beginning: point to Jesus Christ in its own distinctive fashion, join the faithful worshipper to his incarnation and passion, and so confer the grace of justification (cf. *STh* I-II, q. 103, a. 2 c; *In Gal.* 3, 4, no. 145).<sup>81</sup>

It is important to note that this teaching differs from Augustine’s doctrine of Jewish witness. Augustine’s teaching on the apologetic function of Judaism does not teach that Jewish worship is a figure of Christ. Rather, Augustine’s witness doctrine teaches that when the Jews embrace their scriptures they unknowingly prove that Christians do not make up the prophecies about Christ. The traditional Augustinian concept of Jewish witness therefore has nothing to do with the concept of the rites as “figures” of Christ. On Augustine’s terms, the old sacraments become dead after the passion.

This text in Aquinas reflects an idea about the spiritual meaning of Jewish law that seems similar the Aquinas’s Romans commentary. II-II, q. 10, a. 11 is noteworthy because Aquinas

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<sup>80</sup> *STh* II-II, q. 10, a. 11: “Ex hoc autem quod Iudaei ritus suos observant, in quibus olim praefigurabatur veritas fidei quam tenemus, hoc bonum provenit quod testimonium fidei nostrae habemus ab hostibus, et quasi in figura nobis repraesentatur quod credimus.”

<sup>81</sup> Marshall, “Quasi in Figura,” 483.

does not refer to Jewish worship *only* as rites that *prefigured* the Christian faith, which was the function of Jewish worship *before* Christ. Rather, the observances of the Jews are said to continue to figure Christ so to speak. In the Romans commentary, it is asserted that Jewish worship possesses a present figuring function. Yet the reality the rites figure is unspecified. In II-II, q. 10, a. 11, however, Aquinas is more specific, and he says that Jewish worship continues to figure the Christian faith.

In what way might the religion of our Jewish brothers and sisters continue to “figure” the Christian faith, “so to speak,” even after the advent of Christ? As Marshall says, “It is a bit hard to see how Jewish worship could be a denial of Christ (*STh* I-II, q. 103, a. 4) and at the same time could figurally attest Christ.”<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps the way in which the ceremonial law could continue to figure Christ can be explained by way of the claim Aquinas makes concerning the rites continuing to figure the Christian faith, not only the passion. Although I am on quite speculative ground here, it seems Jewish worship could be said to figure that Day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice. *Nostra Aetate* highlights the importance of Paul’s witness concerning this day: “In company with the Prophets and...the Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice.”<sup>83</sup> It is this future day when, “Out of Zion the Deliverer shall come,” that there will be a *perfect fulfillment* of God’s promise. As the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews stated in 1985, “We believe that those promises were fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. But it is nonetheless true that we still await their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time.”<sup>84</sup> Faithful Jewish observation of the rites in the

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

<sup>83</sup> *Nostra Aetate* 4.

<sup>84</sup> Christ’s fulfillment of the promises does not necessarily entail a perfect and complete fulfillment. It seems that, at least for the Commission, there is a notion of eschatological fulfillment of Israel’s promise that has yet to be worked out theologically. “When commenting on biblical texts, emphasis will be laid on the continuity of our faith with



diaspora, after the passion, might be said to figure this complete fulfillment of God's promise on that Day known to God alone.

In summary, at several places in his commentary on Romans, Aquinas seems to allow present tense, positive descriptions of Israel to shape his views of the theological status of Jewish worship even in the face of unbelief in Christ. Aquinas affirms and defends the ongoing election of Israel when and he argues that abrogating the prerogatives of the Jews would compromise God's faithfulness. Aquinas's Romans commentary contains a theological affirmation of the Jewish practices of circumcision, law, and worship, as beneficial to the Jewish people. Aquinas recognizes such observance as spiritually beneficial despite the fact that observance of Jewish rites does not constitute faith in Christ. The Jewish rites are not only beneficial to the Jewish people but these rites are also described as figures, although Aquinas does not specify their relation to Christ's ministry or how this might be reconciled with his teaching from I-II, q. 103, a. 4, which states the observance of the rites is mortal sin. Perhaps the rites continue to figure the future reality the Church awaits with the Apostle Paul and the Prophets, when, "out of Zion the Deliverer shall come."

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that of the earlier Covenant, in the perspective of the promises, without minimizing those elements of Christianity which are original. We believe that those promises were fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. *But it is none the less true that we still await their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time.*" "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*," 1974. Additionally, the Pontifical Biblical Committee has stated that the Jewish reading of the Old Testament and the Jewish messianic hope remain valid. "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures affirms that "Christians can and ought to admit that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Sacred Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion. Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible." The Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible", Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002.

According to John Connelly, one of the most revolutionary aspects of *Nostra Aetate*, is that the Church employs the “use of the present tense to refer to the Jews’ ‘sonship’ [Romans 9:4-5].<sup>85</sup> At some level, Aquinas seems to have absorbed the “shock of the present tense” in Paul’s letter to the Romans sometime during his teaching career as *magister in sacra pagina*. Aquinas’s positive view of Jewish worship after the passion of Christ provides premodern support for the Church’s contemporary teaching that the Judaism of the diaspora retains positive theological significance. It is my hope that this reading of the Romans commentary, alongside of II-II q. 10, a. 11, might contribute to the sort of bridge-building between Aquinas and the vision of the Second Vatican Council that my colleague Pim Valkenberg has suggested is necessary.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012, 261.

<sup>86</sup> Valkenberg, “Three Ways of Not Living By Faith,” 2.