**“I’m Spiritual. I’m a good person. but I’m not religious”**

**MUST We Worship God? In An Organized Religion?**

**Reading: *The True Religion,* by Msgr. G. Van Noort, pp. 1-31.**

**Supplemental Reading: *Sacrae Theologiae Summa, v. IA* by Michaele Nicholau, S.J. pp. 59-84; IIa IIae, Q.81.**

Why should we worship God?

I want to answer that question by telling a story

e.g., take a man: he had great parents, they really worked hard for him, sacrificed for him, clothed, and fed him, educated him, listened to him, loved him, gave him a solid foundation for his future.

- imagine that man goes on to be kind to strangers, disciplined in his personal life, professionally successful, but simply cuts off his parents and refuses to speak to them.

* (There can be extreme cases where a family situation is so damaging or destructive, that a lack of contact would be a reasonable means of self-protection:
* But that is NOT WHAT we’re talking about here…)

The man in this story just doesn’t have any interest in his parents: he doesn’t call them, even on their birthday, or on family holidays, doesn’t do anything for mothers’ day or father’s day, they die and he doesn’t go to their funerals.

Would you say he was a good man?

* At most you would say he has many good qualities, but there is definitely something missing.

What is missing?

* Gratitude, respect for his parents, what the ancients called *pietas*
* After all his parents had done for him, he was indebted to them, but he didn’t expend the effort to do the least thing to thank them, or even acknowledge their sacrifices and the benefits he had received from them

If we met such a person we would think he was an entitled brat, and acting childishly, even if he was an adult

Many people say – I am a good person, I’m a spiritual person, but I am spiritual in my own way. I don’t need to pray or to worship God.

* It is not necessary to deny the good that such a person is doing, or their sincerity.
* But the Perennial Philosophy would contend that to be good from every point of view, a person should keep ALL of their obligations
  + Not just to order their own life by reason, but to be just and fair in their dealings with others – giving to each what is due to them.
* Philosophers in this tradition (including Catholics) claim that religious practice is how we give God is something that is owed to Him, and so we cannot omit to worship God without failing in an important obligation.
* Back to our ungrateful man – he failed to acknowledge the good that his parents had given him, failed to be grateful, failed to recognize and thank them, failed to communicate with them at all.
* Perhaps you look at such a man and think, “what a monster”
* But in fact, if this ingratitude toward parents has something inhuman and cold to it, what can we say of ignoring God, who gave us every good in this world:
* And EVEN gave us our parents!?

So HOW do we repay this debt of gratitude and honor towards God

By acts of **religion**

**What is religion?**

“Religion” for Catholics is not a bad word

Where the word comes from is disputed.

Some derive the word from ***religare***, which denotes that **one “unite himself,” or “bind himself fast” to God.**

**But what religion is =** The sum total of all theoretical[[1]](#footnote-1) and practical truths concerning God and our relationship with Him.

**The relationship by which a rational creature, who recognizes his dependence on God and the duties which follow from that dependence, pays honor to God both in theory and in practice.**

**Since honor accompanied by submission is called worship, religion may be defined as the virtue whereby we offer God the worship that is due to Him.**

Note – this is not just a matter of intellect alone, or will alone, or feelings alone: it will encompass all three.

**This *sum total of duties* is accurately and succinctly summarized in the formula: *creed*, *cult, code.***

**Describes the carrying out of Our Duties towards God – i.e.,**

1. **what we think about God,**
2. **what we do to worship Him, and**
3. **how we conduct our moral lives.**

**Religion is a type of JUSTICE**

Justice means to give a person what is due or owed to him, *debitum reddere*

* **sometimes we can pay exactly what we owe** 
  + e.g. You lend me $50, I owe you $50
  + I still your bike, I owe you your bike back
* **Sometimes we can’t pay back all that we have been given, because we have been given too much**

**"Whatever man renders to God is due, yet it cannot be equal, as though man rendered to God as much as he owes Him!" STQ**

**The same is true of our relations to our parents – how can we ever repay the gift of LIFE.**

We see that there is an **unequalness** in the relationships that are the most fundamental for human existence.

* From our parents we receive, our life, our sustainance, our education, our emotional base.
* From God we received all of this, and we received our parents themselves, our continuance in being, every good we have every had, every beauty this world has to offer (art, nature, the love of a spouse, the smile of a friend, the laugh of a baby), every good in this world…

**In all of this we have to see that we can never “pay the debt” such that we can say to our parents, or to God: “There, we’re even…” As if we had no further obligation of thanks, gratitude, love…**

**So in other words: we have an OBJECTIVE obligation to acts of religion**

**objective foundation** – i.e. any solid basis in reality.

* Objective – having an independent and real basis outside of the human mind / perception / heart (the subject, the I)
* Subjective – having a basis only WITHIN the human mind / perception / heart (the subject, the I)

People say, “I don’t get anything out of religion”: we respond, that’s not fundamentally why we pray or worship God. It is because it is the reasonable way to act, just as it is reasonable to communicate with, thank and love our parents.

Claim of Catholics

**- Religion possesses an objective foundation**, namely**, the objectively true knowledge of an existing and governing God.**

Natural law obliges the practice of religion.

**Natural Religion**: The sum total of all theoretical (philosophy) and practical (natural law) truths concerning God and our relationship with Him, as known by natural reason

* (We are not talking about revelation)

1. **God in Himself is a being of infinite excellence and worth. Man owes Him special esteem / respect.**
2. **God is man's First Cause giving him being and all that he has. Man owes Him special gratitude.**
3. **God is man's Last End and Highest Good in whom alone he can find happiness. Man owes Him special love.**

**All of these fall under justice…**

**Religion (in a person) is a virtue allied to justice. Justice is the virtue that inclines us to give to each one what is his own, and religion inclines us to give God what belongs to Him.**

**The object of religion is God, its motive is man's absolute dependence on and indebtedness to God, and its act is divine worship. By divine worship man gives to God the reverence, service, and love that is God's due; thus, divine worship is the duty that man owes to God.**

**What is Worship?**

**Worship is how you express admiration, esteem, gratitude, love and praise for God.**

**God in Himself is a being of infinite excellence and worth. It is normal and reasonable to honor and respect excellence in a Person, or even to admire a good and beautiful thing!**

C. S. Lewis asks what do we mean when we say that a thing is “admirable”?

* We mean more than that it is admired by others; bad works are often admired and good works ignored, so something can be admired without being truly admirable.
* Rather an admirable object deserves or demands admiration in the sense that “admiration is the correct, adequate, appropriate, response to it,” and conversely that failing to admire it means we are “stupid, insensible, and great losers” because “we shall have missed something.” (Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 92.)

He applies this to God:

* “He is that Object to admire which (or, if you like, to appreciate which) is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world; not to appreciate which is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all.” (Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 92.)

**Praise**

C. S. Lewis makes sense of the need to worship God simply by noticing: “all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise.”

The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. (Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 94.)

**We instinctively urge others to join in our praise, asking, “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” (Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 95.)**

Praise – says Lewis – actually “completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”

It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with . . . . (Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 97.)

**So – praise is a natural response to seeing that God is good, that God is beautiful.**

**How are we able to see this?**

1. **The Excellence of God**

Metaphysical considerations – true but dry

* In the Mirror of **Art**:
* **In the mirror of nature:**
* “The mind really aware of the splendor of creation cannot but feel how superb must be the infinite Being, if He can make this admirable stuff out of nothing. It is no compliment to God’s omnipotence to treat what He has made of nothing as if it were little better than nothing. It is no compliment to a poet to be always seeking him and resolutely refusing to read his poetry. God is communicating with us, telling us something, by way of his universe.” Sheed, Thology and Sanity”
* **In the mirror of Intellectual goods**
* **In the mirror of human good / noble / beautiful actions**

**Gratitude and love must be expressed too:**

**How do we express Gratitude and Love to a person – by speaking to them (i.e. by praying)**

**GRATITUDE – we have receive all from GOD**

Gratitude – CKC

**“When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings at Christmas time. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?”**

“You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.”

**Wonder, Appreciation (Respect) and Thanks**

Wonder:

“The finest emotion of which we are capable is the mystic emotion. Herein lies the germ of all art and all true science. **Anyone to whom this feeling is alien, who is no longer capable of wonderment and lives in a state of fear is a dead man.** To know that **what is impenetrable for us really exists and manifests itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, whose gross forms alone are intelligible to our poor faculties—this knowledge, this feeling … that is the core of the true religious sentiment.** In this sense, and in this sense alone, I rank myself among profoundly religious men.” (Albert Einstein) [10 Einstein Quotes on Science and Religion - Pillai Center Blog](https://www.pillaicenter.com/blog/10-einstein-quotes-on-science-and-religion/)

1. **Man is Created**

Theology and Sanity – Sheed:

On Creation from Nothing:

I can recall with great clarity the moment when for the first time

I heard myself saying that God had made me and all things of

nothing. I had known it, like any other Catholic, from childhood; but I had never properly taken it in. I had said it a thousand times but I had never heard what I was saying. In the sudden realization of this particular truth there is something quite peculiarly shattering.

If a carpenter makes a chair, he can leave it and the chair will not cease to be. For the material he used in its making has a quality called rigidity, by virtue of which it will retain its nature as a chair.

The maker of the chair has left it, but the chair can still rely for

continuance in existence upon the material he used, the wood.

Similarly if the Maker of the Universe left it, the Universe too

would have to rely for continuance in existence upon the material

He used — nothing. In short, the truth that God used no ma-

terial in our making carries with it the not-sufficiently-realized

truth that God continues to hold us in being, and that unless He

did so we should simply cease to be.

This is the truth about the Universe as a whole and about

Every part of it. Material beings — the human body, for instance

— are made up of atoms, and these again of electrons and

protons, and these again of who knows what; but whatever may

be the ultimate constituents of matter, God made them of noth-

ing, so that they and the beings so imposingly built up of them

exist only because He keeps them in existence. Spiritual beings —

the human soul, for instance — have no constituent parts. Yet

they do not escape this universal law. They are created by God

of nothing and could not survive an instant without His con-

serving power. We are held above the surface of our native

nothingness solely by God’s continuing Will to hold us so. “In

Him, we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17.28).

Therefore if we see anything at all — ourself or some other man,

or the Universe as a whole or any part of it — without at the same

time seeing God holding it there, then we are seeing it all wrong.

If we saw a coat hanging on a wall and did not realize that it

was held there by a hook, we should not be living in the real

world at all, but in some fantastic world of our own in which

coats defied the law of gravity and hung on walls by their own

power. Similarly if we see things in existence and do not in the

same act see that they are held in existence by God, then equally

we are living in a fantastic world, not the real world. Seeing

God everywhere and all things upheld by Him is not a matter

of sanctity, but of plain sanity, because God is everywhere and

all things are upheld by Him. What we do about it may be

sanctity; but merely seeing it is sanity. To overlook God’s

presence is not simply to be irreligious; it is a kind of insanity,

like overlooking anything else that is actually there.

It is part of the atmosphere in which we live — and which

therefore we too must breathe — to take for granted that these

considerations are edifying, and possibly even relevant if one

happens to be of a religious temperament: but not otherwise.

It may be a first step towards a fumigation of the atmosphere if

we see the fallacy of this too easy view. If you were driving in

a car, saw it heading straight for a tree, and called out to the

driver to swerve or he would hit it; and if he answered “It is no

good talking to me about trees: I’m a motorist, not a botanist,”

you would fed that he was carrying respect for the rights of the

specialist too far. A tree is not only a fact of botany: it is a fact

God is not only a fact of religion: He is a fact. Not to see Him

is to be wrong about everything, which includes being wrong

about one’s self. It does not require any extreme of religious

fanaticism for a man to want to know what he is: and this he

cannot know without some study of the Being Who alone brought

him into existence and holds him there.

**It is hard for us to process these things in the 21st Century**

**Fulton Sheen said (something like) – we live in a world where man is more impressed by the disorder within him than by the order outside of him…**

**In the past these things were taken for Granted**

* **Pietas for Country / Patriotism**
* **Pietas for your family**
* **Gratitude**

**They were all seen as types of Justice.**

**Objections -**

1. **God is just an impersonal “Higher Power” (like the Force or something) Not personal**

**to see Him as Personal (knowing, willing) is like seeing a white beard in the sky – (Anthropormophism)**

* **Nemodat quod non habet**

1. **“God does not really care whether we worship Him or not” = absolute indifference in religious matters.**

**Objection: God does need our worship.**

* Answer: True, but *irrelevant*
  + Debt exists even if the creditor has no need of receiving it
    - Who would say that a beggar is dispensed from the duty of gratitude, just because that gratitude would bring hardly any profit to a powerful benefactor?
  + God has established this order; must want us to act according to it
    - He cannot contradict Himself
  + Even if religion adds nothing to God, it profits man b/c God is his end
    - A thing is made for its end

1. **“I get nothing out of religion”**

**If it is something that we just do on the basis of an emotional, psychological need, obviously there is no obligation – do it if it helps you, don’t do it if it doesn’t.**

**A false notion – religious sentimentalism**

We have seen the correct notion of religion – Religion is a matter of JUSTICE. This means that it is concerned with what is right, and not merely with what is pleasant, useful, fashionable or consoling.

We see a contrary attitude common today, although often unarticulated, which would make religion a matter of feelings or of consolation (i.e. emotional / aesthetic pleasure). We see this error in the lives of Catholics who neglect to attend Mass on Sundays because **“they get nothing out of it.”**

“These people are not interested in doing their duty to God; they want Him to serve them. For them, the center of their universe is self, not God. Somewhat similar are the people whose only concern with religion is that it may be useful for themselves. When things go wrong, they turn to God; when all is well, they ignore Him. This is an abuse of religion akin to that practiced by those who only seek what they can make out of religion by commercializing it and turning it into a racket

It is perfectly true that religion *is* often a **source of consolation** and happiness, but this is **a consequence of it and not the reason for practicing it!** The reason for practicing religion must simply be **the will to be just”**[[2]](#footnote-2)– i.e.to render to God what is His due.

**Proposition 2: Natural law obliges the practice of external (and internal) religion**

Internal vs. External

* **Internal religion** – worship accomplished in the soul by purely spiritual acts (e.g. meditation, contemplation, etc.) It is the most essential; w/o it there is no real worship.
* **External religion** – worship visible to the senses and accomplished by the body as well as the soul e.g. vocal prayers, ceremonies, hymns, etc.
* By natural law, man has an obligation to practice external worship.
  1. Man is body and soul and must worship God with His whole nature (the body is a creature, too). The body cannot participate w/o external worship
  2. External worship is necessary to sustain internal worship. By our nature, internal acts are stimulated and strengthened by external acts.
  3. Irrational creatures must also be led to glorify their Creator and this I done principally by external worship.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Proposition 3: Natural Law obliges the practice of public/social religion**

1. **Private religion** – the worship each man as an individual renders to God on his own initiative
2. **Public religion** – worship rendered to God by society through forms prescribed by an authority

**Society (def) – A permanent stable union of individuals working together under a common authority to pursue some common end**

1. Man is obliged by natural law to practice public worship
   1. M: Man must worship God according to his entire nature
   2. m: But man is both individual and social by nature
   3. cl: Man must worship God both individually and socially

**Proof that man is social by nature:**

Man’s Social nature

* It is natural for man to live in society
* Society is necessary for the preservation and the full development of human life.
* Like other animals, man needs parents to be born, but – unlike other animals – man remains in great dependence on his parents long after he is born.
* Again, a child must be supported and educated by others; he needs the guidance and support of mature minds; he needs association with cultivated persons if he is to cultivate the powers of his soul; we need society for the development of social virtues.
* Finally, man needs society in his old age; wretched indeed would be his condition if, after a solitary life, he were to die alone of starvation, unable to provide for self. In short, from his crib his deathbed man depends on others for the means to sustain his life as well as the means to perfect his highest faculties.
* Left completely to his own, he finds innumerable goods of the physical, intellectual, moral order completely unattainable or attainable only with great difficulty.
* Man is social and political animal – it is natural for him to live in a group.
* “social” i.e. it is natural for man to live in association with others for pursuit of some goods
* “political” (polis, body politic), i.e. it is natural for man to live in association with others for attainment of highest and most inclusive good.

**Arguments:**

**1) Man needs society to preserve life**

* Just by birth man is radically helpless, and without parents he would die

The baby cannot feed himself, dress himself, keep himself warm, protect himself from predators. We need the association of other humans just to preserve life.

* We are not equipped by nature to survive alone without other

Man has no natural provision of food (instinct does not tell us what is good to eat and what poisonous),

* Man has no natural provision of clothing (no fur…)
* Man has no natural defense (no talons, claws)
* Man does have reason to procure himself food, clothing and defense
* But one man alone cannot provide for all these needs
* Especially since reason is not perfectly exercised for years (and cannot be developed at all without language!)

**2) Society is essentially demanded for man’s physical and moral perfection.**

Without society man cannot:

* Know and love God,
* Or live reasonably and virtuously
* To do these things, man needs instruction, education, warning, correction, example and encouragement. This is only possible if man lives in association with others.
* Man cannot satisfy all by himself the multiple demands of his body and soul.
  + This is already clearly said of man’s physical perfection.
  + But it is particularly clear in the spiritual, cultural and moral realms.
  + Each depends on development of language and transmission of knowledge.

Man has rational speech by nature, and speech has a political function. In other animals, sounds can communicate emotions, e.g. pleasure and pain, and can indicate something – barking because a stranger is present (= Karl Popper’s expressive / signaling functions of language). In man rational language communicates thoughts and concepts, can argue rationally from point to point, articulating of what is advantageous and good, disadvantageous and bad, just and unjust (= Karl Popper’s descriptive / argumentative functions of language).

LANGUAGE –

Karl Popper [distinguished four functions](http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2011/01/buhler-buhler.html) of language: the expressive function, which involves the outward expression of an inner state; the signaling function, which adds to the expressive function the generation of a reaction in others; the descriptive function, which involves the statement of a complete thought of the sort that might be expressed in a declarative sentence; and the argumentative function, which involves the statement of an inference from one thought to another.  Some non-human animals are capable of the first two functions, and in that sense might be said to have “language.”  But the latter two functions involve the grasp of concepts, and human beings alone posses language of the sort which expresses concepts, thoughts, and arguments.

You don’t have to be a Thomist to see this.  Donald Davidson presented an influential set of arguments to the effect that thought and language go hand in hand, so that no creature which lacks language (in the relevant sense of “language”) can be said to think or reason in the strict sense.  (See Davidson’s essays “Thought and Talk” and “Rational Animals.”)   Hence, suppose a dog hears someone jangling some keys outside the door and starts wagging its tail and jumping about excitedly.  A natural way to describe what is going on is to say that the dog thinks that its master is home.  If what this amounts to is (say) merely that the sound of the keys jangling triggers in the dog’s consciousness a visual image of the master walking in the door, which in turn generates a feeling of excitement, then the Thomist (and, presumably, Davidson) are happy to agree.  But what the dog does not have is a thought in the sense in which a human being might have the thought that the master is home.  That is to say, the dog does not have the concept “master” or the concept “home,” and thus lacks any mental state with the conceptual content of the thought that “The master is home.”

cf - <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/animal-souls-part-i.html>

* Other animals may exhibit a certain social tendency (as bees preserving the hive, which they do by instinct),
* But only men are social in the sense that they cooperate through speech to pursue a common end or good, understood as such.
* Such articulation of thought makes a political association, an arrangement by which goods and burdens are distributed.
* Since speech is the outward expression of his inner rationality, man is political by nature for the same reason he is naturally rational.
* Sociability is not founded on man’s fallen state under Original Sin
* It arises from human nature itself, by which man is intelligent and free creature,
* Even in the state of innocence, men would have lived in society, under an authority. (Ia Pars, Q. 96, a.4).

The first and most necessary of all societies is the family, which provides the individual with the first indispensable support for his preservation and welfare.

But the family is not self-sufficient either – neither sufficient for all material goods, nor for all intellectual and moral goods, which are the fruit of long study, and are transmitted by tradition.

Families are thus led by a necessity imposed by nature, (and so by God, the author of nature), to unite in a more perfect society – the city or *polis* – in order to supply for the insufficiencies of the domestic society and to assure its conservation and prosperity in the public order.

The philosophy of Aristotle and the teaching of the Catholic Church concur that society is based on human nature, and so ultimately, has its origin in God, author of human nature.

The Church’s teaching is well expressed in Leo XIII’s Encyclical Diuturnum Illud, June 29, 1881:

“And, indeed, nature, or rather God who is the Author of nature, wills that man should live in a civil society; and this is clearly shown both by the faculty of language, the greatest medium of intercourse, and by numerous innate desires of the mind, and the many necessary things, and things of great importance, which men isolated cannot procure, but which they can procure when joined and associated with others.”

**Another way of expressing the proof that man is held to social religion**

M: All creatures are bound to worship God in accord with their natures

m: Human societies are creatures

cl: Human societies must worship God, as societies

Corollary - Public worship (i.e. liturgy) is necessary, and demanded by natural law

* Liturgy = official, formally ritualized public worship
* A priesthood is necessary to offer worship, especially sacrifice, in the name of society

**Proposition 4: Religion (natural or supernatural) is the most important of all duties**

**If I owe my fellow man what is due to him, I owe my parents more – because I have received so much: but I have received ALL from God, so I must so much more thank and respect and communicate with Him.**

* Moreover, unless society recognizes God, the whole of morality is placed on a doubtful footing
* If there is no God, the universe has no inherent meaning.
* It is hard to speak of a random collection of atoms, with no purpose, being OBLIGED to do anything.
* You can say “this is reasonable”, but if I say “I refuse your reasoning” or “why should that determine my course?” it is hard to find a conclusive answer.
* WHY SHOULD a random collection of atoms, existing in a meaningless universe, for no set purpose feel obliged to act this way or that way?

**Proposition 5: Man is bound to inquire into a positive religion that with the appearance of truth presents itself as manifested by God and prescribed for him**

* + God COULD indicate positively that He wants a certain type of worship
  + Or he could teach us truths about Himself that mere philosophy cannot
  + Not to believe what God told me would be to refuse to acknowledge the **knowledge and veracity of God** by not believing;
  + No to do what he asked me would be to refuse that **I depend on Him** and He has authority over me.
    - If God is not my legitimate superior, who is?!!!
    - That brings us back to pure independence, entitlement, and the spirit of total rebellion
    - This is appealing to us perhaps because of our cultural conditioning
    - But it is not a truly adult or mature attitude
      * Imagine a child who – for no good reason – would not come down from his room for lunch on Mother’s day, even when it was a reasonable request and he knew his Mom was asking for it, because he would rather play video games…
    - To have a sense that it is reasonable to think God has revealed a religion, and refuse to look into it is like the kid who hears his mom calling, suspects she is saying “come to lunch” and so turns his music up so he can’t hear, and keeps playing video games, because he “didn’t know she was asking him to do something…”

1. *speculative* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Ripley, Rev. Canon Francis. *This is the Faith* (p. 20). TAN Books.** [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Could be a particularly useful argument for today. The earth and her children should not be excluded from worshipping God.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)