



Chapter Thirty-Four

We have to come to the same conclusion about the crime of human sacrifice, which is said to be one of their practices. It would not be right to make war on them for this reason because, as has been said, it is difficult for them to absorb in a short time the truth proclaimed to them through messengers and also because the Indians are under no obligation to believe the Spaniards, even if they force the truth on them a thousand times. Why will they believe such a proud, greedy, cruel, and rapacious nation? Why will they give up the religion of their ancestors, unanimously approved for so many centuries and supported by the authority of their teachers, on the basis of a warning from a people at whose words there are no miracles to confirm the faith or to lessen vice?

Even though the Indians cannot be excused in the sight of God for worshiping idols, they can be completely excused in the sight of men, for two reasons. First they are following a "probable" error, for, as the Philosopher notes, that is said to be probable which is approved by all men, either by the majority of wise men or by those whose wisdom has

the greatest following.¹ Further, he says: "That must necessarily be judged to be good or better which is so judged by all, or the majority of persons of good judgment, or by those who are thought to be the more prudent, even if only one person is forming the judgment."² Judgments of this type, approved by the opinions of such men, are called "morally certain," according to the same Philosopher, whom all philosophers and theologians follow.³

Convictions about the gods, the duty of offering sacrifice to them, and the manner and things to be sacrificed are fully agreed on by all the known Indian nations, and these gods are worshiped by those who are reputed to be sacred and holy men (that is, their priests) and their idolatry is established by the decrees of their laws, the sanction of their rulers, and the penalties leveled against transgressors. Finally, since their idols are not worshiped secretly but publicly and religiously in their temples—and this from the earliest centuries—it is clear that the error of these people is probable. Nor should we be surprised if they do not immediately respond to our first preaching.

Also, they are surely in probable error about their practice of human sacrifice, since the ancient history of pagans and Catholics alike testifies that almost all peoples used to do the same thing. This is what Eusebius says:

It was common for all men, on the day customarily set for human sacrifice, to sprinkle the altar with human blood. This was the practice in ancient times when calamity or danger threatened. The ruler of the city or nation would offer to the avenging demon his favorite child as a ransom for the redemption of the whole people and the one chosen would be slain in a mystic rite.⁴

He goes on:

Human sacrifice is demanded by the demons who from time to time afflict many cities and nations with plagues and sudden calamities and ceaselessly harass the people in frightful ways until appeased by the blood of the victims offered them.

1. *Topics*, Book 1.

2. *Rhetoric*, Book 1, chap. 20.

3. See *Ethics*, Book 1, chap. 2.

4. *De Praeparatione Evangelica*, Book 4, chap. 7.

Again, Clement says that some of the peoples of western India, who may have been very much like those we are dealing with, used to sacrifice foreigners to their gods and then eat them.⁵ Eusebius writes the same thing in the work we have already cited.

In addition, Lactantius says:

Among the people of Taurus, an inhuman and savage nation, there was a law that a stranger should be sacrificed to Diana and sacrifice was offered for a long time. The Gauls placated Hesus and Teutates with human blood. Even the Latins were not free of such barbarism. Indeed, even now the Latin Jupiter is worshiped with human blood. However, we should not be astonished at the barbarians whose religion matches their morals. Are not our own people who boast of their meekness and gentleness often more inhuman than those who practice such sacrilegious rites?⁶

Further on he notes: "It is now evident that this practice of human sacrifice is very ancient, for in honor of Saturn people used to be thrown into the Tiber from the Milvian Bridge."

And in regard to innocent children, he says:

I find no words to tell of the children who were sacrificed to the same Saturn because of a hatred for Jupiter. Men were so barbarous and so inhuman that they labeled as sacrifice that foul and detestable crime against the human race which is parricide, when, without any sign of family love, they blotted out tender and innocent lives at an age which is especially dear to parents, etc.

And again:

The Carthaginians had the custom of offering human victims to Saturn and when they had been conquered by Agathocles, the King of Sicily, they thought their god was angry with them and so that they might more diligently blot out their crime, they sacrificed two hundred noble children.

Plutarch writes that the Romans failed to punish some barbarians who were sacrificing men to the gods, because they knew that it was done from custom and law.⁷ Plutarch also says that the Romans themselves did the same thing at times. Here are his words:

5. *Recognitiones ad Iacobum, Fratrem Domini*, Book 9.

6. *Divinarum Institutionum*, Book 1, chap. 21.

7. *Problemata*, p. 465.

When the Romans discovered that certain barbarians had sacrificed a man to their immortal gods, the magistrates thought that they should be summoned and punished. Later they released them when they learned that the barbarians did this because of a certain law and custom and so they forbade them to do it again. This was because a few years before they themselves had struck down two men and two women in the cattle-market at Rome. It does not seem right that they should do this and yet find fault with the savages who did the same. Were they persuaded that to offer a man to the immortal gods was evil, but to offer him to the demons was a necessity? Did they think that those who did this sort of thing from custom and law committed sin, while they believed that by following the command of the Sibylline Books, they were not guilty of the same crime?

The Greek historian Herodotus tells us that the Scythians had a custom of sacrificing to their gods one out of every hundred prisoners of war.⁸ He also says that the Scytho-Tauran peoples in Germany sacrifice everyone who is shipwrecked on their shores, as well as strangers, to Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon. The same thing is recorded by Solinus⁹ and Pomponius Mela.¹⁰ Diodorus Siculus writes that the Galatians sacrificed to their gods captives or those condemned for their crimes. Strabo reminds us that our own Spanish people, who reproach the poor Indian peoples for human sacrifice, used to sacrifice captives and their horses.¹¹ He says that they forced some to live next to the Duero River in a Spartan manner. He continues:

Those who are given to sacrifice also practice divination with entrails, especially those of their captives. They cut off the right hands of their victims and offer them to the gods. They eat a goat which they sacrifice to Mars, as they do with prisoners and horses.

Moreover, similar practices of other peoples are narrated in other works of Strabo.¹² Polydor Vergil also has recorded many similar and significant details.¹³ Because, then, human sacrifice to the gods has been customary among so many different peoples, surely the Indians, in sacrificing men for many centuries, are in probable error.

8. Book 4, p. 299.

9. *Polyhistoria*, chap. 20.

10. Book 2, chap. 1.

11. *Polyhistoria*, Book 6, fol. 190.

12. *De Situ Orbis*, Book 3.

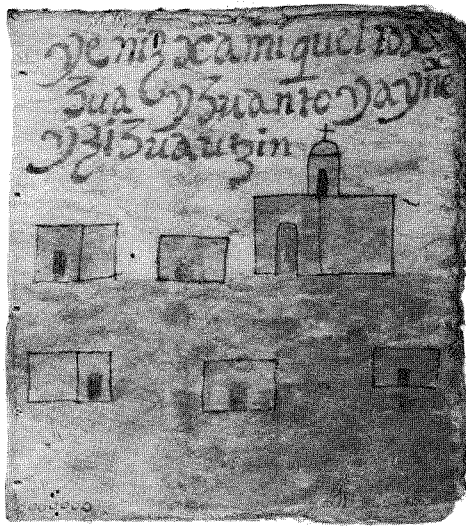
13. See *De Rerum Inventoribus*, Book 5, chap. 8.

We know that famous philosophers have lived in many parts of the world. According to Augustine, even though they knew the stories about the gods to be mere fables and judged them to be undeserving of divine honors (this group included Cicero and Seneca), they did not wish to turn the people from an ancient custom that had been accepted for so many centuries.¹⁴ Why, then, should it be thought that at the words of Christian soldiers, [who exceed the barbarous peoples in their wicked deeds, and are a nation not yet known and frightful in appearance, that does not eat human flesh but surpasses them in all wicked deeds], the Indians ought to turn from a religion that has been accepted for many centuries, sanctioned by the laws of many rulers, and strengthened by the example of so many of their prudent men? As Chrysostom says, in matters that are sacred and of great importance and very difficult to give up they would be fickle and worthy of reproach and punishment if they put aside the many and great testimonies of such great authority and believe these soldiers in this matter, without being convinced by more probable reasons (which cannot be done in a short time) that the Christian religion is more worthy of belief.¹⁵

They should be ashamed who think to spread the gospel by the mailed fist. Men want to be taught, not forced. There is no way, however, for our religion to be taught in a short time to those who are as ignorant of our language as we are of their language and their religion, until those who prudently hold fast [to these beliefs] are convinced by reason. For, as we have said, there is no greater or more difficult step than for a man to abandon the religion he has once embraced.

14. *De Civitate Dei*, Book 6, chap. 10.

15. In *1^{am} Epistolam ad Corinthios*, homily 7.



Chapter Thirty-Five

The second major proof why the Indians should not immediately believe that human sacrifice to their gods is evil is that evidence cannot be presented to them in a few, or even many, words [to show] that human sacrifice to the true God or the presumed god (if he is worshiped as the true God) is forbidden by natural reason. Rather, by the same natural reason they can show not only that men should be sacrificed to God but that it would not be enough to sacrifice angels (if it were possible to sacrifice angels).

We argue this point by first offering four principles.

The first principle is that no nation is so barbarous that it does not have at least some confused knowledge about God. Now all persons understand God as that than which there is nothing better or greater. This is the teaching of [John] Damascene.¹ He says: "God does not leave us totally engulfed in ignorance of himself. Rather, the knowledge that God exists has been naturally engrafted and implanted by him in all

1. At the beginning of his book *De Fide Orthodoxa*.

persons."² Again, Cicero says: "No man is so inhuman that an opinion about the divinity has not filled his mind."³ And, "No nation is so wild or fierce that it does not know that a god must be had," even if it does not know what sort.⁴ Aristotle says that all men are agreed that this glorious first body, that is, heaven, is the dwelling place of the supreme being, that is, God, [the expression "all men" referring] to the Greeks and others of the early nations who knew God exists and is divine.⁵ Boethius teaches both points in these words: "The common reasoning of human minds proves that the true God, the ruler or source of all things, is good. For since nothing can be imagined better than God, who doubts the goodness of him who has no better?"⁶

The second principle is that, by a natural inclination, men are led to worship God according to their capacities and in their own ways. The reason for this is that they naturally conclude and believe that they belong to him and that their lives and whatever they have come from him. And so Saint Thomas writes: "Now since men believe that all things are given by and proceed from him, the intellect judges that everything is owed to God."⁷ Moreover, the Philosopher writes: "Even natural reason itself dictates that the very highest and best things must be offered to God because of his excellence."⁸ Again, he says: "Man's friendship for the gods is the same as toward those who excel others in goodness. And in friendships, the greater the excellence of the friend, the more he deserves."⁹ Again, he says: "No one can ever give to the gods in accordance to their dignity, but each must do the most he can."¹⁰ Saint Thomas has the same teaching:

Man is in debt to God for two reasons. (1) Because of the benefits received from him; (2) because of the sins committed against him. . . . Man can never completely satisfy these two obligations to God, since, even according to the

2. Chap. 3. See also Gregory of Nazianzen, *Theology*, col. 11; Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum*, Book 3, chap. 11.

3. In his book *Tusculan Questions*.

4. *De Legibus*.

5. In the first and second books of *On Heaven and Earth* and in the third book of the *Physics*.

6. *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Book 3, prose 10.

7. *Contra Gentes*, Book 3, chap. 119.

8. *Politics*, Book 7, chap. 9.

9. *Ethics*, Book 8, chap. 10.

10. *Ethics*, Book 8, chap. 10.

Philosopher, in honors due to parents and to God, it is impossible for man to repay in any adequate way. However, it is enough that man repay proportionately what he can.¹¹

From these statements it is obvious that, by natural law, men are obliged to honor God by the best means available and to offer the best things in sacrifice. The conclusion that follows from this is that neither a particular man nor a whole community, taken as a unit, nor a whole kingdom can repay God for the benefits it received, even if they were to give their property and endure labors, vigils, and finally life and death itself for God's glory, no matter how unwilling God may be to reward such deeds in the other life, because God, who by his indescribable generosity has given us so many and so admirable benefits, owes us nothing. For this reason the Psalmist says: "What return can I make to the Lord for all his goodness to me?"¹² As if he were saying: "I have nothing and can do nothing to repay God for these things for which I recognize that I am indebted to him." The reason for this is that a man in no way injures his property even if he makes use of it without rewarding it because there is no political or civil right between a man and his property, according to the Philosopher.¹³ But all creatures, including us, are the property of God. Therefore it is absolutely impossible that God would do us harm if he were not to reward the services we might perform for his honor, because there cannot be a political right—or right in the strict sense—between God and us. For although God gives eternal happiness to those who have charity, he is not obliged to do so from justice, insofar as this implies a strict right that denotes complete equality between the two parties. As the Apostle says, "What we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory as yet unrevealed, which is waiting for us."¹⁴

Yet there is said to be between God and man a certain right of condescension; that is, the Lord, drawing on the riches of his mercy, is pleased to set up a certain kind of proportional equality between himself and men. In other words, he wills to be obligated to men, and men to him. Thus he is bound to give eternal life to those who persevere in faith

11. *In IV Sententiarum*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 2c.

12. Psalms 115[12].

13. *Ethics*, Book 4.

14. Romans 8[18].

and charity until death, not because our merits demand it but from the disposition established by him by which he wishes a kind of justice of condescension and, as it were, a kind of agreement between him and us, so that, in the works of charity, God may be bound to give us eternal life. And this is called justice, not in the strict sense but after a manner of speaking. Moreover, in this sense God would be said to do an injustice if he did not give eternal life to those who die in charity. And this is the meaning of the Apostle's words "All there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me,"¹⁵ that is, of justice by reason of this agreement or pact. God, then, owes us nothing except by right of condescension. But we must offer him whatever we have and are: our wealth, energies, life, and our very soul for his service. We are bound to this by a greater bond since he has given his life for us.

The third principle is that there is no better way to worship God than by sacrifice, which is the principal act of *latría*, which is owed to God alone. Nor is there any better way for men to show in their external acts that they are grateful and subject to God. For sacrifice is the sign that he to whom it is offered is God, and it is most certain that there has never been a nation so barbarous, brutal, and foolish as to offer sacrifice to anyone other than the one who was thought to be God. As Saint Augustine says:

For who has ever thought that sacrifice should be offered, except to the one whom he knew or thought or imagined to be God? . . . That the worship of God by means of sacrifice is ancient is sufficiently indicated by those two famous brothers, Cain and Abel. God found fault with the sacrifice of the older and looked favorably on that of the younger.¹⁶

Saint Thomas teaches the same thing: "Now no one has ever thought that sacrifice should be offered to anyone for any other reason than that he believed or thought he believed that he was God."¹⁷

The fourth principle is that offering sacrifice to the true God or to the one who is thought to be God comes from the natural law, whereas the things to be offered to God are a matter of human law and positive

15. Timothy 4[8].

16. *De Civitate Dei*, Book 10, chap. 4.

17. *Contra Gentes*, Book 3, chap. 120.

legislation. For this reason this matter is either left to the whole community or to those who represent it, such as the ruler, or, lacking this, it is entrusted to each private individual to decide what he will use for his sacrifice.

The first statement is evident from the three preceding principles. By nature, all nations know that God surpasses anything that can be imagined and that they have life and every possession from him. And by nature they understand that they owe God the greatest reverence and worship because of his incomparable excellence and majesty, and all agree that the principal act of *latría*, which is owed to God alone, is sacrifice. It follows, then, that they are obliged by the natural law to offer sacrifice, by which men show, more than by any other external act, that they are grateful and subject to God. And so there has never been a nation so barbarous as not to judge by a natural impulse that sacrifice is owed to the true God or to him whom they mistakenly thought is the true God.

The second proof of the first statement is what Saint Thomas says:

At all times and among all nations there has always been some offering of sacrifices.

And the reason for this is that

natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being, on account of the defects which he perceives in himself, and in which he needs help and direction from someone above him, and whatever this superior being may be, it is known to all under the name of God, and consequently the offering of sacrifice is a matter of the natural law.¹⁸

The same statement is proved, in the third place, from the lawyers who teach that religion belongs to the law of nations.¹⁹ They call the natural law the law of nations only because men use it.²⁰ Men put the law of nations into practice as soon as they began to grow in numbers, since the peoples who lived during the first centuries taught many things by natural instinct. From this, then, arose the practice of sacrifice

as produced by natural instinct. Offering sacrifices, therefore, is a very old practice, introduced by the natural law.

The second statement—that offering this or that thing as a sacrifice is a matter of human law, whereas the law of nature does not prescribe anything definite—is also proved by the fact that even if something may generally be of the natural law, the disposition and arrangement of when and how it should be done is positive; that is, a certain determination of the natural law is laid down by the ruler or the state. For example, men are obliged to give some time to divine matters and to worship God by some external acts, which the theologians call acts of *latría*. This is dictated by natural reason. But the fact that the seventh day should be dedicated to divine worship is a human statute that is laid down by the Church, to which Christ gave the right to establish laws concerning divine worship, even though the seventh day (Sunday) has taken the place of the Sabbath, which God commanded by positive law to be dedicated to divine things. So, too, the law of nature teaches that the guilty must be punished, but human law teaches what the penalty should be. In the same way, although nature itself teaches and leads man to offer sacrifice to God, it is not the law of nature but men themselves who, by means of human laws, teach what should be offered as sacrifice, that is, cattle or sheep or the like. This is clear in the sacrifices of the various nations cited above. Likewise, some sacrificed swine to Ceres, horses to Phoebus, geese to Diana, asses to Priapus, and other such things.²¹

The second statement is also proved by what the Philosopher says in the Fifth Book of the *Ethics*, where, speaking about the natural law and positive law, he writes that all men have the same opinion about natural truths but differ in laws and practices. For when he speaks about sacrifices, he says:

One law is natural, the other legitimate, that is, the legal or positive law. Now the natural is that which has the same force everywhere, for example, fire burns both here and in Persia, not because it seems so or does not seem so. But the legitimate, that is, the legal, is that which does not differ one way or another

18. [*Summa Theologiae*.] II-II, q. 85, a. 1.

19. Digests, 1, 1, 2.

20. Digests, 1, 1, 1. Institutes, 2, 1, 11.

21. As Ovid mentions in *Pastores*, chap. 1; Lucan in his *De Bello Civili*, Book 6, and Juvenal in the next to the last satire. I have taken the above-written argument from Saint Thomas [*Summa Theologiae*.] II-II, q. 85, a. 1, ad 1^{um}; in *IV Sententiarum*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1^{um}; and *Quodlibetale* II, a. 8c.

at its source but differs when it is established, as, for example, that the ransoming of captives be done at a certain price or that a goat be offered in sacrifice instead of two sheep, and whatever is provided for by individual laws, such as performing sacred rites to Brasis, etc.

Notice that he teaches that the law of nature does not change because one person wishes to fulfill it while another does not. For what is good cannot be made evil by the will of men. For example, the law of nature teaches us to redeem a captive who is suffering injury and to offer sacrifice to God. And, willingly or unwillingly, all men are obliged to do so, but how large the amount to be paid for captives and what should be sacrificed are taught by human laws. Once these are passed, they should be observed, and it is unlawful to violate them. For example, we read that the Athenians and the Spartans, during a war with each other, made an agreement that the freedom of prisoners could be bought for a certain price. Likewise, if it were established that not one but two sheep should be offered as a sacrifice or that sacrifices should be made and feasts celebrated by some well-deserving person in the state—as the Amphipolitans decreed that sacrifices should be offered by Brasis (who some think was a Spartan king, others a Spartan queen) because of the favors granted to his nation—it is in no way lawful to violate these sacrifices and the form as sanctioned by law. If, however, the law provides no sanction, each private individual could sacrifice whatever he wishes and could redeem a prisoner at any price he wishes. For the natural law does not teach these matters, and in morally indifferent matters each person can follow his own judgment and lay down rules for his wife and children as he wishes, according to the Philosopher.²² Speaking about families in his city, he says: "Every household is ruled by its oldest member, and so are the descendants who branch out from it, because of the blood relationship. And this is what Homer means, 'And each one must give laws to sons and to wives,' for people used to live scattered about in this way in ancient times."²³

Now Genesis (chapter 4) proves that unless a certain form or definite victim for sacrifice were defined by law, each person could lawfully sacrifice what he willed. In this chapter, Cain is said to have offered ears

22. In the first book of *Politics*, chap. 1.

23. Saint Thomas speaks of this in the [*Summa Theologiae*.] II-II, q. 57, a. 2, ad 2^{um}; q. 60, a. 5, ad 1^{um} et 2^{um}; q. 66, a. 7c.

of wheat and the fruits of the earth, while Abel, who was a shepherd, sacrificed the firstborn of his flock to the Lord. However, after he made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Lord, through Moses, regulated the sacrifices that were to be offered to him, that is, cattle and sheep from among the four-footed animals and turtledoves and pigeons from among the birds.²⁴

24. This is clear in Genesis 17 regarding the covenant and in Leviticus 1 regarding the offerings. Abulensis treats these matters in a learned way in his *Commentary on Leviticus*, q. 11 and 12; *Commentary on Exodus*, q. 9, col. 7, c. 25; and his partial *Commentary on Genesis*, chap. 15.



Chapter Thirty-Six

On the basis of these principles one can arrive at what we taught previously: within the limits of the natural light of reason (in other words, at the point at which divine or human positive law ceases and, one may add, where grace and doctrine are lacking), men should sacrifice human victims to the true God or the reputed god, if the latter is taken for the true God. We draw this conclusion: just as men naturally