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Aquinas and Hauerwas on the Religious and the Secular

Andrew Kim

Abstract

This essay supports William Cavanaugh's thesis in The Myth of Religious Violence that the distinction between the "religious" and the "secular" is arbitrary. This essay also accepts the claim that this arbitrary distinction can be used to form unhelpful inversely-valued dichotomies for the sake of ideological or sectarian ends. However, the current essay seeks to show that this binary goes in the opposite direction as well. Sectarian outlooks of various kinds also postulate a strict and inversely valued dichotomy between the believing community and the world, where the former is the locus of truth and life and the latter, falsehood and death. Instead of this model of ethics, I commend an approach that upholds the prospect of concord between the believing community and the world, of the religious and the secular, even if these are somewhat inevitably arbitrary categories. In this approach, religious and civil loyalties are not pitted against each other, but rather exist on a continuum of provenance and perfection.

Keywords

Aquinas, Hauerwas, Cavanaugh, Virtue, Sectarianism

In *The Myth of Religious Violence*, William Cavanaugh mounts a critique of an enlightenment narrative that postulates a strict and inversely valued dichotomy between the "religious" and the "secular," where the former is rejected as irrational and violent thus legitimating the so-called "rational" violence of the latter.[1] This essay seeks to show that this binary goes in the opposite direction as well. Sectarian outlooks of various kinds also postulate a strict and inversely valued dichotomy between the believing community and the world, where the former is the locus of truth and life and the latter, falsehood and death. Instead of this model of ethics, I commend an approach that

[1] William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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upholds the prospect of concord between the believing community and the world, of the religious and the secular, even if these are somewhat inevitably arbitrary categories. In this approach, religious and civil loyalties are not pitted against each other, but rather exist on a continuum of provenance and perfection.

The argument of this essay unfolds in three parts. The first part locates and analyzes a Christian version of the sectarian model through a critique of the work of Stanley Hauerwas on the question of Christian participation in war. Hauerwas rejects such participation as possible for the Christian, because it entails acceptance of the world as bearer of history and value and, concomitantly, the rejection of Christ and the Church as bearers of a fundamentally different and opposed ethic of life and love. Hauerwas develops his position through a contrast of Aristotle and Aquinas in which the former explains the relationship of civic virtue to war and the latter illuminates the Christian stance as stemming from and oriented toward charity. Through a careful critique of Hauerwas's use of Aquinas, the second part demonstrates that Hauerwas misunderstands Aquinas by forcing the latter's thought arbitrarily into a dichotomous "Christ against Culture" rationality. Through my own analysis of Aquinas's texts themselves, I show how Hauerwas fails to appreciate that Aquinas thinks in terms of a spectrum of virtue—the "triplex gradus." This three-fold typology allows Aquinas to see a middle position wherein virtue can exist in partially realized states. Moreover, just as one is not either fully virtuous or devoid of virtue, so, too, one is also not, in Aquinas's thought, forced into a strict choice between the world and the believing community, the secular and the religious. Rather the world and the believing community intersect. Therefore, individuals can live out their faith commitments while participating in the civic order in a responsible manner without contradiction. Thus, we discover a path to an ethics that both envisions and allows for a harmonious relation between religious communities and broader socio-political contexts in which those communities are embedded.

Finally, a concluding section reiterates how the findings of this essay relate to the many-sided debate regarding the compatibility of religion and secular democracy that has been taking place for at least a century.[2] Some engage the issue from a desire to protect that which

[2] Locating the origin of the debate is obviously somewhat arbitrary. The debate with which this essay is concerned can be traced back to William Hallock Johnson's *The Christian Faith Under Modern Searchlights* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916). Important subsequent works which develop the debate in the modern American context include but are not limited to the following: J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1923); H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951); John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages*

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they guard as distinctive to their religious identity against the threat of a secular agenda. Others engage the question out of a want to protect secular democracy from what they regard as the totalitarian impulses of monotheistic religions. Some seek to draw attention to the arbitrariness of the distinction between the "religious" and the "secular" and to show how this can quickly become ideological and dangerous. It is, indeed, this last motivation that informs the current work though, unlike Cavanaugh, my focus is on the "religious" side of this equation. However, I think this essay shares with Cavanaugh's work the aim of challenging notions of an insurmountable binary opposition between faith and the civil order by developing, or at least attempting to imagine, a creative synthesis.

I. Constructing Dichotomies

Though H. Richard Niebuhrs's typologies are somewhat outdated, they can still serve a useful purpose in elucidating the contrasting ways in which Christians have thought about how they are to interact with broader cultural norms.[3] Concerning us here is the "Christ against culture" model described by Niebuhr. Five things are distinctive of this model: First is absolute rejection of the possibility of loyalty to the civil order. Second, "rejection of the world" is emphasized, and the world "evidently means . . . the whole society outside of the church." Third, Christians are to form "a new and separated community" or "third race" of people set apart from other people. Fourth, virtue is found only "in the domain of Christ." There is no virtue "relative to the standards of non-Christian culture." Fifth, political life is to be shunned and military service avoided.[4] The purpose of this section is to show how this model rests on a series of totalizing dichotomies. I accomplish this through an analysis of relevant works by the prominent Christian ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas, who is arguably the leading representative of the Christ against culture model in contemporary ethical discourse.[5]

of Morals and Their Discontents (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1988); The debate is not limited to Christian compatibility with liberal democracy. Indeed, the Muslim world has had to face the question with increasing urgency particularly in the post 9/11 context. See Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2006).

[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). For an up to date critique of this groundbreaking study, see D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

[4] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 48–55.

[5] In my view, Carson is right to attribute this position to Hauerwas. See Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 13–15.

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James Gustafson has criticized Hauerwas as representing a "sectarian" understanding of the church.[6] Such an approach, according to Gustafson, makes moral judgments relative to the narrative of a particular historical community. It isolates its adherents from the larger community against which it wrongly presumes it is culturally isolable. It accepts, and in a sense even seeks out, marginalization as a badge of authenticity. Indeed, it conceives of the Christian faith as a kind of modern Gnosticism with esoteric language and rituals that have no point of contact with the inauthentic forms of knowledge that exist outside the sect. God is conceived of as the tribal God of a chosen few over and against the "godless" other. Though Gustafson's portrayal is overly simplistic and does not do justice to the nuance and complexity of Haurerwas's theological project understood in the context of post-liberalism, it seems hard to deny that Hauerwas conceives of Christians and "the world" (by which Hauerwas sometimes means the political establishment) in a framework of binary oppositionalism in the very least consistent with the Christ against culture viewpoint and at most exemplary of it. In order to demonstrate this, an analysis of specific texts is in order.

In *Courage Exemplified*, Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches construct a "significant tension" between civic virtue and Christian virtue and champion the latter over and against the former.[7] Employing Aristotle as the spokesperson for civic virtue and Aquinas as the representative of Christian virtue, the authors use the differing accounts of courage found in the aforementioned thinkers to advance their position. In so doing, they contrast dying on the battlefield, the paradigmatic act of civic courage, with martyrdom, the paradigmatic act of Christian courage. This leads up to a broader contrast between American courage and Christian courage.

Drawing from the thought of Jean Bethke Elshtain, the essay begins by introducing a notion of civic virtue as "armed."[8] War was the

[6] James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church and the University" *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society* 40 (1985), 84–94. For Hauerwas's response see "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson" in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright eds., *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 90–110.

[7] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). The earlier version authored by Hauerwas is titled "The Difference of Virtue and the Difference it Makes," *Modern Theology* 9, no. 3 (July 1993). In what follows I reference the pagination from "Courage Exemplified," in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright eds., *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 287–306.

[8] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Citizenship and Armed Civic Virtue: Some Questions on the Commitment to Public Life," in *Community in America: The Challenge of Habits of the Heart*, ed. Charles H. Reynolds and Ralph Norman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 50. Cited in Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplefied*, 288.

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foundation of civilization for the Greeks and so the conception of virtue which originates among them is intrinsically linked to "the presumption of war" which was also prominent in the understanding of virtue "continued by the great civil republicans such as Machiavelli and Rousseau."[9] Civic virtue, then, as well as national identity and cohesiveness are built upon "mounds of bodies" in societies, like the United States, which operate on the basis of "the presumption of war."[10] The authors note that we should not be surprised to find that in such societies the courage displayed by soldiers in battle is regarded as paradigmatic of the virtue of courage. Here Hauerwas and Pinches state their central thesis: "From a Christian point of view such 'courage' is not courage at all but only its semblance." A relative clause attached to their thesis statement adds that civic "courage," in addition to being only a "semblance" of virtue may also "turn demonic."[11] Christians must be committed to "another sort of courage not formed on war."[12]

At this point, the essay turns to an analysis of Aristotle's understanding of courage. Hauerwas and Pinches are flushing out the nature of the "semblance" of courage "formed on war" as upheld by the philosopher so as to demonstrate the significance of Aquinas's reformulation of fortitude formed by charity.[13] An analysis of the relevant points in Book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* ensues, and the connection of courage to prudence and temperance is analyzed in the context of distinguishing courage from recklessness. The authors rightly note that, according to Aristotle, courage does not entail the elimination of fear, but rather, being "properly affected by fear." This is what leads Aristotle to the conclusion that paradigmatic acts of courage must involve death which naturally evokes the greatest fear. But not all kinds of death lend themselves to displays of courage.

> For example, death by drowning or by disease does not. What kind of death, then, does bring out courage? Doubtless the noblest kind, and that is death in battle, for in battle a man is faced by the greatest and most noble of dangers. This is corroborated by the honors which states as well as monarchs bestow upon courage. Properly speaking, therefore, we might define as courageous a man who fearlessly faces a noble death and in situations that bring a sudden death. Such eventualities are usually brought about by war.[14]

[9] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 288.

[10] Elshtain, *Citizenship and Armed Civic Virtue*, 51; Cited in Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 289.

[11] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 289.

[12] Ibid., 290.

[13] Fortitude and courage are synonymous throughout.

[14] *NE* 1115a28–1115b5; Cited in Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 293.

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On this basis, the authors categorize Aristotle's notion of virtue as "inescapably conventional" since it entails the kinds of behavior which a given community regards as good. They further this point through a brief analysis of Lee H. Yearley's work with respect to Mencius.[15] Their conclusion is that, given the "presumption of war" context in which Aristotle developed his conception of virtue, it axiomatically follows that death in battle is not merely "an example of courage, it is rather the rightful *exemplification* of what true courage entails. It follows that without war courage could not be fully known."[16] According to the authors' read of Aristotle, then, "the courageous person is by necessity warlike."[17] Death in battle is the model of true courage, because war provides the soldier with the opportunity to sacrifice the highest good upon which all other particular goods depend, his very life, for the common good which is higher still.

Next, the essay shifts from Aristotle to Aquinas. While acknowledging that Aquinas commonly draws from Aristotle, the authors begin their treatment of Aquinas by presenting a binary conception of Thomistic virtue. On the one hand, there are the "natural virtues" which are mere "semblances" of true virtue. On the other hand, there are the true virtues formed by charity: "If we take Aquinas at his word, no true virtue is possible without charity."[18] Therefore, "acquired courage always is a semblance of infused courage."[19]

Though the authors recognize important similarities in the Thomistic and Aristotelian conceptions of courage, (such as courage consisting in the "mean between inordinate fear and daring") they reduce this to mere "structural similarity."[20] This structural similarity does not account for much, since inordinate fear and daring need to be specified in a larger context. According to Hauerwas and Pinches, it is charity which provides such a context: "If Aquinas is good to his word, we should expect that what we should fear and in what we should place our confidence will depend in some way upon charity, which ultimately determines the mean of courage. This turns out to be the case."[21] The Christian is concerned with spiritual goods, whereas the pagan is concerned with temporal goods. Nevertheless, since both kinds of good depend upon having a life, Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that "the virtue of fortitude is about the fear of dangers

[15] Lee H. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[16] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 294. Their italics.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 296.

[19] Ibid., 297.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

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and death."[22] But, again, this "structural similarity" does not count for much, since there is vast disagreement with respect to the "*kind* of death each thinks we should fear if we are to draw nearer to the thing Aquinas calls fortitude."[23]

Simply put, fortitude transformed by charity does not differ from acquired courage merely in degree but in kind. Whereas Aristotle had excluded some kinds of death from providing an opportunity to display courage, such as drowning or disease, this other "sort of courage not formed on war" can be exemplified in numerous ways: "A brave man behaves well in face of danger of any other kind of death; especially since man may be in danger of any kind of death on account of virtue: thus may a man not fail to attend on a sick friend through fear of deadly infection, or not refuse to undertake a journey with some godly object in view through fear of shipwreck or robbers."[24]

The kinds of behaviors in the face of death which display courage are thus expanded, and the authors proceed to fill in the content of courage so understood. True courage "connects to the journey of the Christian life." It is rooted, therefore, in patience and perseverance: "The moral life is a journey to God during which we must learn to endure much."[25] On the one hand are "natural, civic, pagan" semblances of true virtue formed on war and ordered only to political and temporal goods. On the other are "theological, Christian" virtues ordered to God. And these are set in binary opposition one to the other. Theological virtue is legitimated through repudiation of civic virtue. Areas of continuity are more or less dismissed as mere "structural similarities." Simply put, "the world of the courageous Christian is different from the world of the courageous pagan. This is so because of their differing visions of the good that exceeds the good of life itself."[26]

It is in this binary context that martyrdom is set against death on the battlefield as the "new paradigm for Aquinas."[27] The martyr, unlike the soldier, has been transformed. Her weapons are not the weapons of war, but rather the weapons of "patience and faith."[28] The exemplarity of martyrdom, according to Hauerwas and Pinches' read of Aquinas, confirms the binary distinction between true Christian courage and semblances of that courage as articulated by war cultures. In contrast, true Christian courage is a gift from the Holy

[22] *Summ. Theo.* IIa IIae 123. 4; Cited in Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 298.
[23] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 298. Their italics.
[24] *Summ. Theo.* IIa IIae 123. 5; Cited in Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 298.
[25] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 299.
[26] Ibid., 300.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

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Spirit which "transcends our capacities, since it demands that we love and serve God."[29] It is for this reason that "the martyr can *receive* her death in a way a warrior cannot."[30] This is because "Martyrs, in effect, have to be ready to lose to their persecutors, dying ingloriously. They can do so only because they recognize that neither their life nor their death carries its own (or anyone else's) weight of meaning; rather, that is carried by the God who supplies it."[31]

There is, for Aquinas, no such thing as a "freestanding category" of the "noble acts of war." Whether an act of war, such as giving up one's life, is virtuous is contingent on the link to justice: "the dangers of death which occur in battle come to man directly on account of some good, because, to wit, he is defending the common good by a just fight."[32] Merely defending one's country does not put one on the right side of the fight. The mere glamour of a seemingly heroic death does not make such an act noble if it is separate from justice. Again, honors and merits imputed by a nation-state do not render such an act noble if justice is lacking: "Rather, courage in battle is courage because in the face of great peril the soldier has persevered in doing what is just—according to a justice now formed by charity." In this way, the authors argue that Aquinas has effectively reoriented "the courage displayed in war on the new paradigm, namely, martyrdom."[33]

The final section of their essay is entitled "Courage: Christian or American." In this section, the authors import the chasm between semblances of courage and charity-formed Christian courage which they derived from their study of Aristotle and Aquinas and replicate this same chasm in order to differentiate between "armed civic virtue" in the United States which shares "little common history that is not also a history of war" and Christian virtue.[34] Though they acknowledge that Aquinas was not a pacifist, they argue that the justice and courage formed by charity, with which the just warrior fights, will necessarily make him a very problematic kind of soldier:

> Not only will he know what is at stake in his own death, he will be dogged by the concern that he not kill unjustly. He will not follow the command of his superiors or his country without giving this thought—which means, we think, that precisely as he is courageous according to the courage formed by charity he will be the more likely to subvert the political order as he seeks to serve it by fighting for it. Put ironically, Christian courage will subvert any political order based on courage,

[29] Ibid., 301.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 302.
[32] *Summ. Theo.* IIa IIae 123. 5; Cited in Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 303.
[33] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 304.
[34] Ibid., 303.

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> that is, upon the courage that derives its intelligibility from the practice of war. That is why Rousseau was right to think that Christians should be suppressed. Their "acts of courage," even when allegedly in service of the social order, do not sustain it, but rather threaten its very foundations.[35]

Indeed, the most that civic courage can do is dispose one to be "more easily led to the fuller account of courage offered by Christians." If dying in battle were "the rightful *exemplification* of what true courage entails," then courage could not be fully known without it."[36] But for Hauerwas and Pinches, it is only in the light of "Christian churches" clearly living out the true virtues that are formed by charity that the semblance of courage can be known for what "it truly is, namely, a semblance."[37]

In sum, what we find in both the Christ against culture model and the works reviewed above is the presumption of a mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive dichotomy between the holy community and the faithless, the religious and the secular. Everyone must belong to one or the other and no one can belong simultaneously to both. All virtue resides in the one and is absent in the other. Fidelity to God's will is placed in binary opposition to civil society in general and civic duty in particular. The courage of American soldiers is exposed as counterfeit in the light of the courage of martyrs who are prepared to die ingloriously in the face of their persecutors since they recognize that the meaning of their death is determined solely by the God who supplies it.[38] Sectarian repudiations of "the world" are essential to the distinctive identity of divinely favored communities. But how consistent is this with Aquinas?

II. Collapsing Dichotomies

This section argue that Hauerwas and Pinches have distorted the thought of Thomas by approaching it from a Christ against culture perspective. Specifically, they have inserted dichotomies into Aquinas's thought rather than discovered them there. Indeed, in the Christ above culture model attributed to Aquinas by Niebuhr, the Christian is not perpetually pitted against the nation in a clash of loyalties. Rather, "society itself is an expression of the desire for oneness; its ills are all forms of dissentions; peace is another name

[35] Ibid., 305. Hauerwas makes a similar argument in "Why Gays (as a Group) Are Morally Superior to Christians (as a Group)," in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright eds., *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 519–22.

[36] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 294. Their italics.

[37] Ibid., 305.

[38] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 302.

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for social health." Additionally, "the union of church and state, of state with state and class with class, and the union of all these with the supernatural Lord and Companion is the ineluctable desire of the believer." Niebuhr notes that "apart from some radical and exclusive believers, all Christians find themselves in agreement with the synthesists' affirmation of the importance of civil virtues and of just social institutions." According to this view, the Christian engages in "willing and intelligent co-operation . . . with non-believers in carrying on the work of the world, while yet maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith and life."[39] Such work may sometimes involve participating in a just war. A reevaluation of the relevant texts of Aquinas is thus in order.

A) The Triplex Gradus

In *De virtutibus cardinalibus* Aquinas explains that there are three grades of virtue (*triplex gradus virtutum*).[40] The first grade consists of virtues which are wholly imperfect (*virtutes omnino imperfectae*), because they exist without prudence and so do not achieve right reason.[41] The second grade of virtue achieves right reason but does not reach God because they are not combined with charity. These virtues are complete in relation to the human good (*perfectae per comparationem ad bonum humanum*) but not perfect simply.[42] They are true but imperfect virtues. The third grade of virtue entails virtues which are simply perfect (*virtutum simpliciter perfectarum*), because they are combined with charity (*simul cum caritate*).[43]

[39] Ibid., 143–44.

[40] *De virtut. card*., a. 2. My translation. *Gradus* literally translates as "step" or "position." For more on this topic see Andrew Kim, "Progress in the Good: A Defense of the Thomistic Unity Thesis," *Journal of Moral Theology* 3.1 (January 2014): 147–74.

[41] It could be reasonably maintained that a "virtue" which is wholly imperfect is not a virtue at all. I think it is important that Aquinas chooses to include grade 1 virtue in the *triplex gradus virtutes*. Doing so is consistent with Aquinas's understanding of virtue which is authentic even if imperfect or (wholly imperfect). At the same time, scholars are right to recognize that grade 1 "virtues" are not really virtues since Aquinas explicitly points out that natural dispositions to virtue "do not have the character of virtue, because no one can use virtue badly, according to Augustine; but one can use these inclinations badly and harmfully, if he uses them without discretion." See *De virtut. card.,* a. 2.

[42] For more on Aristotle's account of the human good see Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Regarding Aquinas's use of the term see Luke J. Lindon, "The Significance of the term *Virtutes Naturalis* in the Moral Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas" *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (1957): 97–104.

[43] *De virtut. card*., a. 2. My translation. Also see *Summ. Theo.* Ia IIae q. 65 a. 2. "It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate end. But

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This tripartite scheme is not found in the treatment of Thomistic virtue supplied by Hauerwas and Pinches. Instead, they present Thomistic virtue in a binary scheme according to which semblances of virtue and true Christian virtue are the only categories. Thus, their statement that natural courage "is not courage at all" is an accurate read of Thomas if they are referring to a natural disposition to courage. However, if they are referring to true but imperfect courage, then their essay misrepresents Aquinas's thought. In my view, their essay conflates Aquinas's understanding of natural dispositions to virtue with the notion of "armed" civic virtue they borrow from Elshtain. Thus, Aquinas's middle category is eliminated. This is, perhaps, most evident in their assertion that "If we take Aquinas at his word, no true virtue is possible without charity."[44] This is not an accurate representation of Aquinas's account of virtue, since he clearly affirms a category of true but imperfect virtues not combined with charity.[45]

Reading select texts from the *Summa Theologiae* without reference to the *triplex gradus* commonly leads to this misunderstanding. This is because in the *Prima Secundae* q. 65 a. 2, Aquinas defines perfect virtue as that which directs the agent to his or her supernatural end: "It is therefore clear from what has been said that only the infused virtues are perfect, and deserve to be called virtues simply: since they direct man well to the ultimate [i.e. supernatural] end."[46] This is consistent with *De virtutibus cardinalibus* a. 2, where Aquinas explains that the third grade of virtue "consists of virtues that are unqualifiedly perfect. For such virtues make a human action unqualifiedly good, in that it is something that attains our ultimate end."[47] But in the first article of *Prima Secundae* q. 65, Aquinas uses the perfect/imperfect distinction to distinguish natural dispositions to virtue (wholly imperfect) from true virtue whether perfect or imperfect:

> Moral virtue may be considered either as perfect or as imperfect. An imperfect moral virtue, temperance for instance, or fortitude, is nothing but an inclination in us to do some kind of good deed, whether such

the other virtues, those namely, that are acquired, are virtues in a restricted sense, but not simply, for they direct man well in respect of the last end in some particular genus of action, but not in respect to the last end simply."

[44] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 296.

[45] See Angela McKay-Knobel, "Can Aquinas's Infused and Acquired Virtues Co-Exist in the Christian Life?" *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23, no. 4 (2010): 381–96. See also William C. Mattison III, "Can Christians Possess the Acquired Virtues?" *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 558–85. More recently, see Arielle Harms, "Acquired and Infused Moral Virtue: A Distinction of Ends," *New Blackfriars* 75 (2013): 71–87. Harms rightly notices that those who misunderstand Aquinas's account of virtue also tend to misunderstand his view regarding the relationship of the Church to the civil order.

[46] *Summ. Theo.* Ia IIae q. 65 a. 2.

[47] *De virtut. card.* a. 2.

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> inclination be in us by nature or habituation. If we take the moral virtues in this way, they are not connected: since we find men who, by natural temperament or by being accustomed, are prompt in doing deeds of liberality, but are not prompt in doing deeds of chastity. But perfect moral virtue is a habit that inclines us to do a good deed well; and if we take moral virtues in this way, we must say that they are connected, as nearly all are agreed in saying.[48]

Interpreting this passage in isolation would lead to a binary understanding of Thomistic virtue as either imperfect or perfect. However, when read in the light of the *triplex gradus* it is evident that in the first set of texts, Aquinas is distinguishing supernatural, infused virtue from true but imperfect virtue (grade 2). In the q. 65 a. 1 text, Aquinas is distinguishing between natural dispositions to virtue which are not connected and true virtues, perfect or imperfect, which are. True but imperfect virtue is imperfect relative to the last end but is "perfect," in the sense of connected, relative to dispositions or habits that "fail to have the complete character of virtue." True virtue is true despite the fact that by it one does not attain the ultimate end.

In addition, Aquinas goes out of his way to differentiate his own understanding of virtue from binary conceptions which he associates with the Stoics and repudiates. He acknowledges the myriad ways that people can fail to attain "the distinctive character of virtue." But it does not follow that such people are necessarily devoid of virtue. The opinion that they must be devoid of virtue he equates with the Stoics who erred when they said "that no one possesses a virtue without possessing it supremely." According to Aquinas, the Stoic position "does not seem to follow from the character of a virtue, because there is such a variety of ways in which people share in a virtue."[49] Indeed, Aquinas follows in a long tradition, initiated by Augustine, of challenging the binary Stoic conception of virtue as either fully present or totally lacking.

It is, therefore, a misrepresentation to present Thomistic virtue as a series of binary oppositions between "natural, civic, pagan" semblances of true virtue formed on war and ordered only to political and temporal goods and "theological, Christian" virtues ordered to God. Aquinas provides us with a more complex and nuanced account of "the variety of ways in which people share in virtue." It may indeed be true that the "the world of the courageous Christian is different from the world of the courageous pagan," but this difference is not conceived of as total in Thomistic thought.[50] To reconstruct Aquinas's formulation of the virtues into a mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive dichotomy according to which virtue resides solely in one

[48] *Summ. Theo.* Ia IIae q. 65 a.1.
[49] *De virtut. card.* a. 3.
[50] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 300.

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of two non-overlapping parts which combined make up the whole of humanity does not adequately attend to the depth of Thomistic thought about the multiform gradations of goodness found in the universe.

B) Aquinas on Virtuous Martrydom

While it is true that Aquinas does not have a freestanding category of "noble acts of war," he does not have a freestanding category of Christian martyrdom either, nor is his understanding of martyrdom exclusive to Christian faith in the way Hauerwas and Pinches suppose. In the fifth article of q. 124 of the *Secunda Secundae*, which treats whether faith alone is the cause of martyrdom, Aquinas argues that "virtuous deeds, inasmuch as they are referred to God, are professions of the faith whereby we come to know that God requires these works of us, and rewards us for them: and in this way they can be the cause of martyrdom." Thus, though John the Baptist suffered death for reproving adultery, not for denying the faith, he still qualifies as a martyr. In the same way, even someone who suffers death for "avoidance of a lie, *to whatever truth it may be contrary*," may be counted as a martyr since "a lie is a sin against the Divine Law."[51]

More to the point of the current essay, when the objector argues that faith alone must be the cause of martyrdom since "the Church does not celebrate the martyrdom of those who die in a just war," Aquinas replies as follows:

> The good of one's country is paramount among human goods: yet the Divine good, which is the proper cause of martyrdom, is of more account than human good. Nevertheless, since human good may become Divine, for instance when it is referred to God, it follows that any human good in so far as it is referred to God, may be the cause of martyrdom.[52]

In my view, Aquinas has not reoriented "the courage displayed in war" on the new paradigm of martyrdom.[53] Nor has he argued that "the martyr can *receive* her death in a way a warrior cannot."[54] The martyr and the warrior may indeed be the same person. At the same time, one who is persecuted for expressing Christian faith in words is not necessarily a martyr since "it is by deeds that person shows that he has faith."[55] In a general sense, the mere fact that one believes oneself

[51] IIa IIae q. 125 a. 5. My emphasis.
[52] IIa IIae q. 125 a. 5 ad. 3.
[53] Hauerwas, *Courage Exemplified*, 304.
[54] Ibid.
[55] IIa IIae q. 125 a. 5.

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to be enduring suffering or attacking perceived injustice for the sake of God does not mean that endurance or that attack is virtuous. The mere presence of patience and perseverance does not guarantee this either. Neither does dying ingloriously. Hence, though Aquinas does not have a freestanding category of "noble acts of war," he does not have a freestanding category of Christian martyrdom either. Both are specified by alignment with truth and justice. The exemplarity act of fortitude is not put into one partition of a mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive dichotomy with two non-overlapping kinds of exemplary act (martyrdom or noble acts of war).

Finally, since the binary opposition between true and false virtue and between noble acts of war and martyrdom fail, the dichotomy between Christian and American courage fails as well. Contrary to Hauerwas and Pinches, nothing in Aquinas's treatment of virtue entails the claim that American soldiers who have not been formed by the Christian story and yet sacrifice their life in battle for a just cause do not possess true virtue. Indeed, this point provides one with the opportunity to advance beyond questions having to do merely with an accurate reading of Thomas. Though I have attempted to demonstrate that the authors misrepresent Thomistic thought for the sake of their argument, there is much more at stake here then questions of interpretation or historical accuracy. At issue is the relationship between the religious and the secular. I argue that since the Christ above culture model attributed to Aquinas eschews the totalizing dichotomies of the Christ against culture model, we can find in his thought a program for collaborative harmony between religious communities and broader socio-political contexts in which those communities are embedded, even if those communities sometimes wage war.

III. Summary

This essay supports Cavanaugh's claim that the distinction between the "religious" and the "secular" is arbitrary. This essay also accepts the claim that this arbitrary distinction can be used to form unhelpful inversely-valued dichotomies for the sake of ideological or sectarian ends. Consequently, this essay has sought to locate in Aquinas a path to an ethics that both envisions and allows for a melodious coexistence between religious communities and secular contexts in which those communities are entrenched. In order to consider such relations one must overcome facile assumptions and tendentious binaries.

It could be argued here that I have failed to appreciate the unsystematic nature of Hauerwas' thought. He claims, after all, not to advocate "an indiscriminate rejection of the secular order." Rather, it is only when "government and society resorts to violence in order to maintain internal order and external security [that] Christians

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must withhold their involvement with the state." Hauerwas asserts that such a view does not commit him to a "sectarian stance."[56] But I do not see how it cannot. In the first place, when taken together with his view of the United States as founded on a presumption of war and sharing "little common history that is not also a history of war," it would seem that "Christians must withhold their involvement with state" at least most of the time. But more importantly, what underwrites this view is a dichotomous way of thinking according to which Christian history is set in binary opposition to "a history of godlessness" and Christian virtue is set in binary opposition to demonic semblances of the same. The religious is legitimated through devaluation of the secular. Aquinas's outlook points to an alternative vision with respect to the possibility of responsible participation in the civic order.

Aquinas does not think that one is forced to make an irrevocable choice against the civic order to preserve the distinctive identity of his or her religious community. In this way, one is invited to reconsider the enlightenment narrative that postulates a strict and inversely valued dichotomy between the "religious" and the "secular" as well as sectarian religious outlooks of various kinds that postulate a strict and inversely valued dichotomy between the believing community and the world, where the former is the locus of truth and life and the latter, falsehood and death. Absent such totalizing assumptions, religious and civil loyalties may be thought of in more fruitful ways.

Andrew Kim
Walsh University Theology,
North Canton, Ohio, USA

akim@walsh.edu

[56] Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson," 105.

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