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The Theology of Thomas Aquinas, Selected Topics

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### Obedient Unto Death

After describing the nature of the passion of Christ in III, 46, St. Thomas turns his attention to the efficient cause of the passion in III, 47, including the motivation of Christ to undergo the passion, and whether it was out of obedience (III, 47, 2).

First of all, in the corpus, Thomas argues that it was fitting for Christ to undergo the passion out of obedience because it was through the disobedience of Adam that sin entered the world, so by the obedience of Christ, all are justified (Rom. 5:19). His second argument begins with Christ's death as an acceptable sacrifice which is pleasing to God, looking back to the Old Testament concept of sacrifice. However, he remembers Samuel's words to Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22), so Christ's obedience is necessary for the perfection of His sacrifice. The third argument comes from Christ's victory over death and an analogy to a victorious soldier. A soldier cannot have victory unless he is obedient to his captain, so likewise, Christ cannot be victorious unless He is obedient to the Father.

The replies to objections in III, 47, 2 are especially interesting as they elaborate the implications of Christ as obedient unto death. In ad1, Thomas makes the case that the passion was in obedience to the Old Testament law given by the Father. The moral aspect of the law is summarized as love of God and love of neighbor. In John 14:31, Jesus says that He goes to the cross so that the world may know that He loves the Father. Thomas quotes Gal 2:20 as proof that Christ gave himself up out of love for us. The passion also fulfills the ceremonial aspect of the law by being the sacrifice which is the fulfillment of all of the OT sacrifices.

In ad2, Thomas addresses the relationship between Christ's voluntarily undergoing the passion, and being under obedience. Although there is no freedom in a precept, there is freedom in the decision of the one who follows it, and Christ freely desired to do the Father's will (Ps. 39:9). The ultimate picture of this is in Gethsemane, where we see Jesus go through the process of agony and prayer leading up to his free decision to do the Father's will (Mat 26:42).

Finally, ad3 examines the relationship between love and obedience showing that they are reciprocally related. Jesus fulfilled the law of love by obeying the Father, and He obeyed the Father out of love for Him.

These arguments address people today who claim it is cruel for God to send his Son to die. Although the Father does send his Son who goes to the cross out of obedience, we see here the other side of it. The Son goes freely to the cross, motivated not only by love for His Father, but love for us as well.