

QUESTION 101

The Ceremonial Precepts of the Old Law in Themselves

We next have to consider the ceremonial precepts. First, we have to consider them in themselves (question 101); second, we have to consider the reasons for them (question 102); and, third, we have to consider their duration (question 103).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) What is the reason for the ceremonial precepts? (2) Are the ceremonial precepts figurative (*figuralia*)? (3) Was it right for there to have been a multiplicity of ceremonial precepts? (4) How are the ceremonial precepts distinguished from one another?

Article 1

Does the reason for the ceremonial precepts lie in their having to do with the worship of God?

It seems that the reason for the ceremonial precepts does not lie in their having to do with the worship of God:

Objection 1: As is clear from Leviticus 11, precepts about abstaining from certain foods are given to the Jews in the Old Law; and as is clear from Leviticus 19:19 (“You shall not wear a garment that is woven from two [kinds of thread]”) and, again, from the command given at Numbers 15:38 (“Tell them to make to themselves fringes in the corners of their garments”), there are also precepts about avoiding certain kinds of clothing. But precepts of this sort are not moral precepts, since they do not remain in the New Law; nor are they judicial precepts, since they do not have to do with making judgments among men. Therefore, they are ceremonial precepts. But they seem to have nothing to do with the worship of God. Therefore, it is not the case that the reason for the ceremonial precepts is that they have to do with the worship of God.

Objection 2: Some claim that the ceremonial precepts are the ones having to do with the solemn feasts (*solemnitates*), and that the name ‘ceremonial’ is taken from the word for wax candles (*cerei*), which are lit on the feast days. But there are many other things besides the solemn feasts that have to do with the worship of God. Therefore, it does not seem that the reason why these precepts are called ‘ceremonial’ is that they have to do with the worship of God.

Objection 3: According to some, the precepts in question are called ‘ceremonial’ because they are norms or rules for salvation (*regulae salutis*), where ‘*χαίρε*’ in Greek is the same as the Latin ‘*salve*’. But all the precepts of the Law—and not just those having to do with the worship of God—are rules for salvation. Therefore, it is not the case that the only precepts called ‘ceremonial’ are those that have to do with the worship of God.

Objection 4: Rabbi Moses claims that the precepts called ‘ceremonial’ are such that the reason behind them is not obvious. But many things that have to do with the worship of God have an obvious reason behind them, e.g., the observance of the Sabbath, the celebration of the Passover (*Phase*), and the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (*Secopegia*). Therefore, it is not the case that the ceremonial precepts are the ones that have to do with the worship of God.

But contrary to this: Exodus 18:19-20 says, “Be present to the people in those things that pertain to God to show the people the ceremonies and the rite of worship.”

I respond: As was explained above (q. 99, a. 4), the ceremonial precepts specify the moral precepts with respect to God, whereas the judicial precepts specify the moral precepts with respect to one’s neighbor. But man is ordered to God through the worship that is owed to Him, and so the precepts that have to do with the worship of God are properly called ‘ceremonial precepts’.

Moreover, the explanation of the name ‘ceremonial’ was given above (q. 99, a. 3) when the

ceremonial precepts were distinguished from the other precepts.

Reply to objection 1: Sacrifices and other such things that seem to be immediately ordered to God are not the only things having to do with the worship of God. In addition, those who worship God have to be duly prepared for worshipping Him—just as, in other subject matters, whatever serves as a preparation for the end falls under the science that deals with the end.

Now precepts of the sort that are given in the Law about the clothing and food of those who worship God, along with other such things, have to do with the preparation of the ministers themselves, in order that they might be fit for worshipping God—in just the way that some of those who minister to a king engage in special observances. Hence, these precepts are likewise contained among the ceremonial precepts.

Reply to objection 2: This explanation of the name ‘ceremonial’ does not seem very plausible, especially in light of the fact that there is little in the Law about wax candles being lit on the solemn feasts; instead, as is clear from Leviticus 24:2, even the lamps of the Candlestick itself were prepared with olive oil.

Still, one could claim that on the solemn feasts everything that had to do with the worship of God was observed more carefully and that, accordingly, all the ceremonial precepts are included in the observance of the solemn feasts.

Reply to objection 3: This explanation of the name ‘ceremonial’ does not seem very plausible, either. For the name ‘ceremony’ (*ceremonia*) comes from the Latin rather than the Greek.

Still, one could claim that since man’s salvation (*salus*) is from God, it is the precepts that order man toward God which seem to be the rules of salvation, and that it is for this reason that the precepts pertaining to the worship of God are called ceremonial.

Reply to objection 4: This explanation of the nature of the ceremonial precepts is in a certain sense plausible—not that these precepts are called ‘ceremonial’ because the reason behind them is not obvious, but rather that this is a certain consequence of their being ceremonial. For, as will be explained below (a. 2), the precepts having to do with the worship of God must necessarily be figurative, and so in this regard the reason behind them is not very obvious.

Article 2

Are the ceremonial precepts figurative?

It seems that the ceremonial precepts are not figurative (*figurativa*):

Objection 1: As Augustine says in *De Doctrina Christiana* 4, every teacher (*doctor*) has the responsibility of speaking in such a way that he can be easily understood—and this seems especially necessary in the giving of law, since the precepts of the law are being proposed to ordinary people (*populus*). Hence, as Isidore puts it, law ought to be evident. Therefore, if the ceremonial precepts were given as figures of something else, then Moses, in not explaining what they were figures of, seems to have handed down precepts of this kind in the wrong way.

Objection 2: What is done in the worship of God ought to have the highest integrity (*maxime debent habere honestatem*). But performing certain actions in order to represent other actions seems theatrical or poetical; for in the theater it used to be that certain actions of others were represented by the things enacted there. Therefore, it seems that actions of this sort ought not to be performed in the worship of God. But as has been explained, (a. 1), the ceremonial precepts are ordered toward the worship of God. Therefore, the ceremonial precepts ought not to be figurative (*figuralia*).

Objection 3: In *Enchiridion* Augustine says, “God is especially worshiped by faith, hope, and charity.” But the precepts given about faith, hope, and charity are not figurative. Therefore, the ceremonial precepts should not be figurative.

Objection 4: In John 4:24 our Lord says, “God is a spirit, and those who adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth.” But a figure is not the truth itself—in fact, *figure* and *truth* are divided off from one another as contraries. Therefore, the ceremonial precepts, which have to do with the worship of God, should not be figurative.

But contrary to this: In Colossians 2:16-17 the Apostle says, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or with respect to a feast day or a new moon or the Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come.”

I respond: As has already been explained (a. 1), the precepts called ‘ceremonial’ are the ones that are ordered toward the worship of God. Now there are two types of worship of God, interior and exterior. For since man is composed of body and soul, both must be applied to the worship of God—so that, namely, the soul worships with interior worship and the body worships with exterior worship. This is why Psalm 83:3 says, “My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.” And just as the body is ordered toward God through the soul, so too exterior worship is ordered toward interior worship.

Now interior worship consists in the soul’s being joined to God through understanding and affection (*per intellectum et affectum*). And so insofar as there are different modes in which the understanding and affection of the worshiper of God are correctly joined to God, there are correspondingly different ways in which a man’s exterior acts are applied to worshipping God.

For instance, in the state of future beatitude the human intellect will see the divine Truth in itself, and so exterior worship will consist not in any sort of figures but solely in the praise of God that proceeds from interior cognition and affection—this according to Isaiah 51:3 (“Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of praise”).

On the other hand, in the state of the present life, we are unable to see the divine Truth in itself; instead, as Dionysius puts it in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 1, the ray of divine truth must illumine us under certain sensible figures—though in diverse ways corresponding to the diverse states of human cognition.

For instance, as the Apostle says in Hebrews 9:8, in the Old Law it was not the case either that the divine truth was evident in itself or even that the way to attain it was made known. And so it was necessary for exterior worship under the Old Law not only to prefigure the future truth that is going to be made manifest in heaven, but also to prefigure Christ, who is the Way leading men to that truth in heaven.

By contrast, in the state of the New Law this Way has already been revealed. Hence, the Way does not have to be prefigured as something future, but instead has to be brought to mind as something past or present—and the only thing that needs to be prefigured is the truth of the glory that has not yet been revealed.

And so it is that the Apostle says in Hebrews 10:1, “The Law has the shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things.” For a shadow is something less than an image, and so ‘image’ has to do with the New Law and ‘shadow’ with the Old Law.

Reply to objection 1: What is divine must be revealed to men only in a way corresponding to their capacity for understanding; otherwise, there would be an occasion for their downfall, since they might scorn what they cannot understand. And thus it was more advantageous for the divine mysteries to be handed down to an unsophisticated people under the veil of figures, so that they might have at least an implicit cognition of the mysteries as long as they used the figures to honor God.

Reply to objection 2: Just as poetical things fail to be understood by human reason because of the

imperfect nature of the truth contained in them, so human reason cannot perfectly understand divine things because of their excess of truth. And so in both cases what is needed is a representation by means of sensible figures.

Reply to objection 3: In this passage Augustine is talking about interior worship. Still, as has been explained, exterior worship must be ordered toward interior worship.

Reply to objection 4: The same reply holds for the fourth objection, since it is through Christ that men are introduced more fully to the spiritual worship of God.

Article 3

Was it right for there to be a multiplicity of ceremonial precepts?

It seems that it was not right for there to be a multiplicity of ceremonial precepts:

Objection 1: Things that are ordered toward an end should be proportioned to that end. But as has been explained (a. 1-2), the ceremonial precepts are ordered toward the worship of God and toward being a figure of Christ. But as 1 Corinthians 8:6 says, “There is but one God, from whom are all things and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.” Therefore, the ceremonial precepts should not have been multiplied.

Objection 2: The multitude of ceremonial precepts was an occasion of sin (*occasio transgressionis*)—this according to Peter in Acts 15:10 (“Why do you tempt God by putting a yoke upon the necks of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”) But the transgression of divine precepts is contrary to human salvation. Therefore, since, as Isidore says, every law should be consistent with human salvation, it seems that a multiplicity of ceremonial precepts should not have been given.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 2), the ceremonial precepts have to do with the exterior and corporeal worship of God. But the law ought to have put less emphasis on (*diminuere*) this sort of corporeal worship, since it was ordered toward Christ, who taught men to worship God “in spirit and in truth,” as John 2:23-24 says. Therefore, it was not right for a multiplicity of ceremonial precepts to be given.

But contrary to this: Hosea 8:12 says, “I shall write within them my many laws.” And Job 11:6 says, “..... that He might show you the secrets of wisdom, and that His law is manifold.”

I respond: As was explained above (q. 96, a. 1), every law is given to a particular people, and every people contains two kinds of men. Some men are prone to evil, and they have to be coerced by the precepts of the law, as was noted above (q. 95, a. 1); other men have an inclination toward the good—either by nature or by habit (or, better, by grace)—and they have to be instructed by the precepts of the law and moved to become better.

It was with respect to both kinds of men that it was advantageous for the ceremonial precepts to be multiplied in the Old Law.

For among this people there were some prone to idolatry, and so they had to be recalled from idolatrous worship to the worship of God by means of the ceremonial precepts. And since there were many ways in which men devoted themselves to idolatry, a multiplicity of contrary precepts had to be instituted in order to repress each of those ways. Again, a multiplicity of precepts had to be imposed on such men, so that burdened, as it were, by things that had to do with the worship of God, they would not have the free time to devote themselves to idolatry.

On the other hand, as far as those who were inclined toward the good are concerned, the

multiplication of ceremonial precepts was likewise necessary, both because in this way their minds were recalled to God in diverse ways and more assiduously, and also because the mystery of Christ, which was prefigured through these ceremonial precepts, brought a multiplicity of benefits to the world, and there were many things to consider about this mystery that needed to be prefigured through diverse ceremonial precepts.

Reply to objection 1: When what is ordered to an end is sufficient for attaining that end, then a single such thing is sufficient for a single end. For instance, if a single medicine is efficacious, then it is sometimes sufficient for inducing health, and in such a case there is no need for the medicines to be multiplied.

On the other hand, if there is a lack of power or perfection on the part of what is ordered to the end, then it has to be multiplied, in the way that many remedies are applied to someone who is sick when a single remedy is not sufficient to cure him.

Now the ceremonies of the Old Law were weak and imperfect both in representing the mystery of Christ, which is surpassing, and in subjecting the minds of men to God. Hence, in Hebrews 7:18-19 the Apostle says, "There is indeed a setting aside of the former commandment, because of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law brought nothing to perfection." And that is why ceremonies of this sort had to be multiplied.

Reply to objection 2: A wise lawgiver permits lesser sins in order that greater sins might be avoided. And so in order that the sin of idolatry might be avoided, along with the sin of pride, which would be nurtured in the hearts of the Jews if they were to fulfill all the precepts of the Law, God did not refrain from handing down a multiplicity of ceremonial precepts simply because the Jews might easily take this as an occasion for sinning.

Reply to objection 3: In many ways the Old Law put less emphasis on corporeal worship. It was for this reason that the Law decreed that sacrifices were not to be offered in every place or by just anyone. And it established a multiplicity of precepts of this sort in order to put less emphasis on exterior worship, as Rabbi Moses of Egypt likewise points out. Yet it was necessary not to attenuate the corporeal worship of God to such an extent that men would fall into the worship of demons.

Article 4

Are the ceremonies of the Old Law correctly divided into sacrifices, sacred things, sacraments, and observances?

It seems that the ceremonies of the Old Law are not correctly divided into sacrifices (*sacrificia*), sacred things (*sacra*), sacraments (*sacramenta*), and observances (*observantiae*):

Objection 1: The ceremonies of the Old Law prefigured Christ. But this was done solely through the sacrifices, which prefigured the sacrifice by which Christ offered Himself, in the words of Ephesians 5:2, "as an oblation and a sacrifice to God." Therefore, only the sacrifices were ceremonial.

Objection 2: The Old Law was ordered toward the New Law. But in the New Law the sacrifice is itself the Sacrament of the Altar. Therefore, in the Old Law sacrifices should not have been distinguished from sacraments.

Objection 3: A thing called 'sacred' is one that has been dedicated to God, in the sense in which a tabernacle and its vessels were said to be 'made sacred' (*sacrificari*). But as has been explained (a. 1), all the ceremonial precepts were ordered toward the worship of God. Therefore, all the ceremonial precepts were sacred things. Therefore, it is incorrect for just one part of the ceremonial precepts to be

named ‘sacred things’.

Objection 4: Observances (*observantiae*) are so-called from ‘observing’ (*ab observando*). But all the precepts of the Law were supposed to be observed; for Deuteronomy 8:11 says, “Take heed, and beware lest at any time you forget the Lord your God, and neglect His commandments and judgments and ceremonies.” Therefore, observances should not be posited as just one part of the ceremonies.

Objection 5: The solemn feasts (*solemnitates*) are counted among the ceremonies, since they are a foreshadowing of what is to come, as is clear from Colossians 2:16-17; the same holds for oblations (*oblaciones*) and gifts (*munera*), as is clear from the Apostle in Hebrews 9:9. But none of these seems to be contained under any of the above divisions. Therefore, the division of the ceremonies set forth above is incorrect.

But contrary to this: In the Old Law each of the divisions set forth above is called a ceremony. For *sacrifices* are called ceremonies in Numbers 15:24 (“The multitude shall offer a calf and the sacrifices and libations thereof, as the ceremonies require”). Again, Leviticus 7:35 says of the *sacrament* of Orders, “This is the anointing of Aaron and his sons in the ceremonies.” Likewise, Exodus 38:21 says of the *sacred things*, “These are the instruments of the tabernacle of the testimony in the ceremonies of the Levites.” And 3 Kings 9:6 says of the *observances*, “If you shall turn away from following me and will not observe my ceremonies which I have set before you

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), the ceremonial precepts are ordered toward the worship of God. In this worship we can consider (a) the worship itself, (b) the worshipers, and (c) the instruments of worship.

The worship itself consists specifically in the *sacrifices* that are offered in reverence for God.

The instruments of worship are the *sacred things*, e.g., the tabernacle, the vessels, and other things of this sort.

As for the worshipers, there are two things to consider:

The first is their being ordained for divine worship (*institutio ad cultum divinum*), which takes place through a consecration of the people or of the ministers; and this is what the *sacraments* have to do with.

The second is their unique way of life (*singularis conversatio*), through which they are distinguished from those who do not worship God; and this is what the *observances* concerning food, clothing, and other such things have to do with.

Reply to objection 1: Sacrifices had to be offered in certain places by certain men, and all of this pertains to the worship of God. Hence, just as the immolated Christ is signified through their sacrifices, so too the sacraments and sacred things of the New Law were prefigured through their sacraments and sacred things. What’s more, the way of life of the people of the New Law was prefigured through their observances. And all these things have to do with Christ.

Reply to objection 2: The sacrifice of the New Law, i.e., the Eucharist, contains Christ Himself, who is the author of sanctification; for as Hebrews 13:12 says, “He sanctified the people by His own blood.” And that is why this sacrifice is also a sacrament.

By contrast, the sacrifices of the Old Law did not contain Christ but instead prefigured Him, and so they are not called sacraments. Instead, in order to signify this separately, there were certain sacraments in the Old Law that were figures of the future consecration—even though it was also the case that sacrifices were adjoined to some of the consecrations.

Reply to objection 3: The sacrifices and sacraments were also ‘sacred things’. However, there were certain things which were called ‘sacred’ because they had been dedicated to the worship of God and yet which were neither sacrifices nor sacraments. And so these things retained for themselves the general name ‘sacred things’.

Reply to objection 4: Those things that had to do with the way of life of the people worshiping God retained for themselves the general name ‘observances’ insofar as they did not fall under the previously mentioned divisions. For instance, they were not called ‘sacred things’, since they did not have an immediate relation to the worship of God in the way that the tabernacle and its vessels did. Instead, they were ceremonial through a certain entailment, viz., insofar as they had to do with the fitness of the people worshiping God.

Reply to objection 5: Just as sacrifices were offered in a determinate place, so too they were offered at determinate times. Hence, the solemn feasts seem to be numbered among the sacred things.

On the other hand, oblations and gifts are counted with the sacrifices, since they were offered to God. Thus in Hebrews 5:1 the Apostle says, “Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things that pertain to God, that he might offer up gifts and sacrifices.”