

## QUESTION 103

### The Duration of the Ceremonial Precepts

The next thing to consider is the duration of the ceremonial precepts. On this topic there are four questions: (1) Were there ceremonial precepts before the Law? (2) Did the Law have the power to give justification? (3) Did the ceremonial precepts cease to apply after Christ came? (4) Is it a mortal sin to observe the ceremonial precepts in the time after Christ?

#### Article 1

##### Did the ceremonies of the Law exist before the Law existed?

It seems that the ceremonies of the Law existed before the Law did:

**Objection 1:** As was explained above (q. 102, a. 3), sacrifices and holocausts have to do with the ceremonies of the Old Law. But there were sacrifices and holocausts before the Law; for Genesis 4:3-4 says, “Cain offered gifts to the Lord from the fruits of the earth, whereas Abel offered gifts from the first-born of his flock and from their fat.” Again, Noah offered holocausts to the Lord, as Genesis 18:20 states; and Abraham did so, too, as Genesis 22:13 reports. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Old Law existed before the Law existed.

**Objection 2:** The construction and anointing (*injunctio*) of an altar have to do with the ceremonies relating to the sacred things. But these things existed before the Law did; for Genesis 13:18 says, “Abraham built an altar to the Lord,” and Genesis 28:18 says of Jacob, “He took the stone ..... and set it up as a monument (*vitulus*), pouring oil over it.” Therefore, the ceremonies of the Law existed before the Law existed.

**Objection 3:** Among the sacraments of the Law the primary one (*primum*) seems to have been circumcision. But as is clear from Genesis 17:10ff., circumcision existed before the Law did. Likewise, the priesthood existed before the Law did; for Genesis 14:18 says, “Melchisedech was a priest of the most high God.” Therefore, the ceremonies of the sacraments existed before the Law existed.

**Objection 4:** As was explained above (q. 102, a. 6), the distinction between clean and unclean animals has to do with the ceremonies of the observances. But this distinction existed before the Law did; for Genesis 7:2-3 says, “Take seven and seven of all the clean animals, but two and two of the unclean animals.” Therefore, the ceremonies of the Law existed before the Law existed.

**But contrary to this:** Deuteronomy 6:1 says, “These are the precepts and ceremonies that the Lord your God has commanded that I should teach you.” But they would not have needed to be taught about them if these ceremonies had already existed. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Law did not exist before the Law existed.

**I respond:** As is clear from what has been said (q. 102, a. 2), the ceremonies of the Law were ordered toward two things, viz., worshipping God and being figures of Christ.

Now whoever worships God must worship Him in specific ways that bear upon exterior worship. But this specification (*determinatio*) of divine worship involves ceremonies in the same way that, as was explained above (q. 99, a.4), the specification of how we are ordered to our neighbor involves judicial precepts. And so just as it was common among men for there to be judicial precepts that were not instituted by God’s authority but were instead ordained by human reason, so too there were certain ceremonies that were specified not by the authority of any law but rather solely by the will and devotion of the men who were worshipping God.

However, since even before the Law existed there were certain outstanding men empowered with a prophetic spirit, it is plausible to believe that they were led by a divine instinct—by a private law, as it were—to a certain set way (*ad aliquem certum modum*) of worshipping God which was appropriate for

interior worship and which was also fit to signify the mysteries of Christ that other actions of theirs were also figures of—this according to 1 Corinthians 10:11 (“All things happened to them in figure”).

Therefore, there were ceremonies before the Law existed, but they were not the ceremonies of the Law, since they were not instituted through any legislation.

**Reply to objection 1:** Before the Law existed, the ancients offered oblations and sacrifices and holocausts out of the devotion of their own will, insofar as it seemed fitting to them that in those things which they had received from God and which they offered out of reverence for God, they should give witness (*protestarentur*) to the fact that they were worshipping God, who is the source and end of all things.

**Reply to objection 2:** They likewise instituted certain sacred things because it seemed fitting to them that there should be some places that were set off from others and tied to divine worship.

**Reply to objection 3:** The sacrament of circumcision was established by God’s command before the Law existed. Hence, circumcision can be called a sacrament of the Law only in the sense that it was observed under the Law and not in the sense that it was instituted by the Law. This is why our Lord says in John 7:22, “Circumcision is not from Moses, but from his fathers.”

Likewise, among those who worshipped God the priesthood existed according to a human specification before the Law existed, since they gave this dignity to the first-born.

**Reply to objection 4:** Before the Law existed, the distinction between clean and unclean animals did not exist as far as eating was concerned, since Genesis 9:3 says, “Everything that moves and lives will be food for you.” Rather, the distinction existed only with respect to the offering of sacrifices, since they offered certain specific animals as sacrifices.

However, if there was any distinction among animals that pertained to eating, this was not because the eating of the animals was illegal—for it was not forbidden by any law—but rather because of abhorrence or custom, just as even now we see that certain foods that are eaten in some lands are abhorred in others.

## Article 2

### Did the ceremonies of the Old Law have the power to confer justification at the time of the Law?

It seems that the ceremonies of the Old Law had the power to confer justification (*habuerint virtutem justificandi*) at the time of the Law:

**Objection 1:** Expiation from sin and the consecration of a man have to do with justification. But Exodus 29:21 says that the priests and their vestments were consecrated through the sprinkling of blood and anointing with oil, while Leviticus 16:16 says that through the sprinkling of the blood of the heifer the priest expiated the sanctuary from the impurities of the children of Israel and from their deceits and sins. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Old Law had the power to confer justification.

**Objection 2:** That by which a man is pleasing to God pertains to justification—this according to Psalm 10:8 (“The Lord is just, and He loved just acts”). But some men were pleasing to God because of the ceremonies—this according to Leviticus 10:19 (“How could I have been pleasing to the Lord in the ceremonies with the mind of a sad man?”) Therefore, the ceremonies of the Old Law had the power to confer justification.

**Objection 3:** What belongs to the worship of God involves the soul as well as the body—this according to Psalm 18:8 (“The Law of the Lord is pure, converting souls”). But as Leviticus 14 points out, lepers were cleansed by the ceremonies of the Old Law. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the ceremonies of the

Old Law were capable of cleansing the soul by conferring justification on it.

**But contrary to this:** In Galatians 2:21 the Apostle says, “If a law had been given that was capable of conferring justification, then Christ would have died for nothing (*gratis*),” i.e., for no reason. But this is absurd. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Old Law did not confer justification.

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 102, a. 5), there were two kinds of uncleanness under the Old Law. The one kind was spiritual, and this is the uncleanness of sin (*immunditia culpae*). The other kind, by contrast, was corporeal (*immunditia corporalis*) and took away one’s fitness for divine worship; this is the sense in which a leper was unclean, or one who touched something associated with death. Uncleanness of this kind was nothing other than a certain irregularity (*irregularitas*).

The ceremonies of the Old Law had the power to cleanse this second kind of uncleanness, since these ceremonies were remedies applied by legal ordinance to remove those sorts of uncleanness, like the ones mentioned above, which had been induced by a statute of the Law. This is why in Hebrews 9:13 the Apostle says, “The blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkled ashes of a heifer sanctify those who are defiled as far as the cleansing of the flesh is concerned.” And just as the uncleanness that was washed away by these ceremonies was an uncleanness of the flesh rather than of the mind, so shortly before the cited passage (Hebrews 9:10) the Apostle calls these ceremonies ‘justifications of the flesh’ (*iustitiae carnis*). “They are justifications of the flesh,” he says, “imposed during the time of correction.”

However, these ceremonies did not have the power to expiate uncleanness of the mind, i.e., the uncleanness of sin. This is because the expiation from sins could never have been brought about except through Christ, who “takes away the sins of the world,” as John 1:29 says; and since the mystery of Christ’s incarnation and passion had not yet been accomplished in reality, the ceremonies of the Old Law were unable in their own right to have a real power that flowed from the incarnate and suffering Christ in the way that the sacraments of the New Law do. And so these ceremonies were unable to wash away sin. As the Apostle puts it in Hebrews 10:4, “It was impossible for sins to be removed by the blood of bulls and goats.” This is what in Galatians 4:9 the Apostle calls “those empty and weak elements”—weak because they cannot wash away sin, whereas the weakness arises from the fact that they are empty, i.e., from the fact that they do not contain grace in their own right.

Still, at the time of the Law the mind of the faithful ones was able, through faith, to be joined to Christ incarnate and suffering, and so the faithful were justified by their faith in Christ. The observance of the ceremonies in question was a kind of profession of this faith, insofar as the ceremonies were figures of Christ. And the reason that sacrifices were offered for sins in the Old Law was not that the sacrifices themselves washed away sin, but rather that they were a kind of profession of that faith which did wash away sin. The Law itself lends support to this claim by its mode of speaking; for Leviticus 4-5 says that in the offering of sacrifices for sin the priest “will pray for him and his sin will be forgiven”—as if to say that the sin is forgiven not by the power of the sacrifices, but rather because of the faith and devotion of those offering the sacrifices. Note, however, that the fact that the ceremonies of the Old Law expiated corporeal impurities was itself a figure of the expiation of sins that is made through Christ.

So, then, it is clear that the ceremonies under the status of the Old Law did not themselves have the power to confer justification.

**Reply to objection 1:** The sanctification of the priests and their sons and of their vestments, or of any other things, through the sprinkling of blood was nothing other than a deputation for divine worship and a removal of impediments to the purity of the flesh, as the Apostle puts it. This was done as a prefigurement of the sanctification by which Jesus sanctified the people by His own blood.

Similarly, the expiation in question should be thought of as removing corporeal impurities and not sins. Hence, the sanctuary, which was not capable of sinning (*culpae subiectum esse non poterat*), is likewise said to be expiated.

**Reply to objection 2:** In the ceremonies the priests were pleasing to God because of their

obedience and devotion and because of their faith in the reality prefigured by the ceremonies—and not because of the ceremonies themselves considered in their own right.

**Reply to objection 3:** The ceremonies that had been instituted for the cleansing of a leper were not ordered toward removing the uncleanness of the disease of leprosy. This is clear from the fact that these ceremonies were applied only to someone who was already cleansed of the disease; hence, Leviticus 14:3-4 says, “When the priest, upon leaving the camp, finds that the leprosy has been cleansed, he will command that the one *who is purified* should offer, etc.”—and not “*who is about to be purified*.” From this it is clear that the priest was set up as the judge of an already cleansed leper and not of a leper who was about to be cleansed.

Ceremonies of this sort were used to remove an uncleanness of irregularity. However, they say that sometimes, if the priest happened to make a mistake in his judgment, the leper was miraculously cleansed by God through His divine power—and not through the power of the sacrifices. In the same way, as Numbers 5:27 reports, the thigh of the adulterous woman rotted when she drank the water upon which the priest had “heaped curses.”

### Article 3

#### Did the ceremonies of the Old Law cease with the coming of Christ?

It seems that the ceremonies of the Old Law did not cease with the coming of Christ:

**Objection 1:** Baruch 4:1 says, “This is the book of God’s commandments and the law which lasts forever.” But the ceremonies of the Law are part of the Law. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Law were to last forever.

**Objection 2:** A cleansed leper’s offering belongs to the ceremonies of the Law. But even in the Gospel a cleansed leper is ordered to make offerings of this sort. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Old Law did not cease when Christ came.

**Objection 3:** As long as a cause remains, its effect remains. But the ceremonies of the Old Law had certain reasoned causes insofar as they were ordered toward divine worship, even beyond the fact that they were ordered toward being figures of Christ. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Old Law were not supposed to cease.

**Objection 4:** As was explained above (q. 102, a. 4), circumcision was instituted as a sign of Abraham’s faith, and the observance of the Sabbath was instituted to recall the favor of creation, and the other solemn feasts of the Law were instituted to recall others of God’s favors. But Abraham’s faith should be imitated even by us; and the favor of creation, along with God’s other favors, should always be recalled. Therefore, it is even less the case that circumcision and the solemn feasts of the Law should cease.

**But contrary to this:** In Colossians 2:16-17 the Apostle says, “Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or with respect to a festival day or the new moon or the Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come.” And Hebrews 8:13 says, “In saying ‘a new [covenant]’, He has made the former [covenant] old, and that which decays and grows old is near its end.”

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 102, a. 1 and 2), all the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law were ordered toward the worship of God. Now exterior worship should be proportioned to interior worship, which consists in faith, hope, and charity. Hence, exterior worship should be diversified in a way corresponding to the diversity of interior worship.

Now one can distinguish three states (*status*) of interior worship:

The first state is that in which faith and hope are had both (a) with respect to heavenly goods and also (b) with respect to the means by which we are led to those heavenly goods, where both of these are seen as something future. This is the state of faith and hope under the Old Law.

The second state of interior worship is that in which faith and hope are had (a) with respect to heavenly goods seen as something future, but (b) with respect to the means by which we are led to those goods seen as something present or past. This is the state of the New Law.

The third state is that in which both things are had as something present, and nothing is believed in or hoped for as something absent. This is the state of the blessed in heaven (*beati*). Thus, in the state of the blessed nothing that has to do with divine worship is figurative; instead, there is only the act of thanksgiving and the voicing of praise. Thus, Apocalypse 21:22 says of the city of the blessed, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord, the almighty God, is its temple, and the Lamb."

Therefore, by parity of reasoning, it was fitting that the ceremonies of the first state, which were figures of the second and third states, should cease when the second state arrived, and that other ceremonies should be introduced which corresponded to the state of divine worship for that later time, in which the heavenly goods are something future, but the divine favors by which we are led to the heavenly goods are something present.

**Reply to objection 1:** The Old Law is said to be eternal in an absolute and unqualified way with respect to its moral precepts. On the other hand, as far as its ceremonial precepts are concerned, it is eternal with respect to the truth that the ceremonies are figures of.

**Reply to objection 2:** The mystery of the redemption of the human race was completed in Christ's passion; hence, at John 19:30 our Lord says, "It is finished" (*consummatum est*). As a sign of this, we read that during Christ's passion the veil of the temple was rent (Matthew 27:51).

And so before Christ's passion, when Christ was preaching and working miracles, the Law and the Gospel were running side by side, since the mystery of Christ had already begun but had not yet been finished. And it was for this reason that our Lord ordered the leper to observe the ceremonies of the Law.

**Reply to objection 3:** The literal reasons given above (q. 102) for the ceremonies have to do with divine worship, which was worship with faith in something yet to come. And so when He who was to come had already come, the first state of worship ceased and all the reasons were ordered toward the second state of worship.

**Reply to objection 4:** Abraham's faith was commended because he trusted God's promise about his future seed, in which all nations were to be blessed. And so as long as this was still something future, Abraham's faith had to be professed in circumcision. However, after it had already been accomplished, the same reality was declared by another sign, viz., Baptism, which was in this regard the successor to circumcision—this according to the Apostle in Colossians 2:11-12 ("You have been circumcised with a circumcision made not by hand in the despoiling of the body's flesh, but rather with the circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ, buried with Him in Baptism.")

Moreover, the Sabbath, which signified the first creation, is changed to Sunday (*dies dominicus*), on which the new creature, begun in the Christ's resurrection, is commemorated.

Likewise, the other solemn feasts of the Old Law are succeeded by the new solemn feasts, since the favors granted to that people signify the favors granted to us through Christ. Hence, the feast of the Passover is succeeded by the feast of the passion and resurrection of Christ. The feast of Pentecost, on which the Old Law was given, is succeeded by Feast of Pentecost, on which the Law of the Spirit of life was given. The feast of the New Moon is succeeded by the feast of the Blessed Virgin on which the illumination of the sun, i.e., Christ, first appeared through the outpouring of grace. The feast of Trumpets is succeeded by the feasts of the apostles. The feast of the Atonement is succeeded by the feasts of the martyrs and confessors. The feast of Tabernacles is succeeded by the feast of the

consecration of a church. The feast of the Assembly and Collection is succeeded by the feast of the Angels, or also by the feast of All Saints.

#### Article 4

##### Can the ceremonial precepts be observed without mortal sin after Christ's passion?

It seems that the ceremonial precepts can be observed without mortal sin after Christ's passion:

**Objection 1:** It is unbelievable that the apostles committed mortal sin after having received the Holy Spirit. For as Luke 24:29 says, by His fullness "they were endowed with power from on high." But after the coming of the Holy Spirit the apostles observed the Law. For Acts 16:3 says that Paul circumcised Timothy, and Acts 21:26 says that Paul, acting on the advice of James, "took the men and, having been purified with them, entered the temple, announcing the fulfillment of the day of purification while an offering was being made for each of them." Therefore, the ceremonial precepts can be observed without mortal sin after Christ's passion.

**Objection 2:** The ceremonial precepts include avoiding contact with Gentiles. But the first shepherd (*pastor*) of the Church observed this precept; for Galatians 2:12 says that when certain men came to Antioch, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and separated himself from them. Therefore, the ceremonies of the Law can be observed without mortal sin after Christ's passion.

**Objection 3:** The commands of the apostles did not lead men into sin. But by a decree of the apostles it was decided that the Gentiles should observe certain of the ceremonial precepts (*quaedam de ceremoniis*) of the Law; for Acts 15:28-29 says, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no further burden upon you than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication." Therefore, the ceremonies of the Law can be observed without sin after Christ's passion.

**But contrary to this:** In Galatians 5:2 the Apostle says, "If you are circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." But nothing rules out Christ's fruit except mortal sin. Therefore, being circumcised, along with observing the other ceremonies of the Law, is a mortal sin after Christ's passion.

**I respond:** All the ceremonies were a sort of profession of that faith which the interior worship of God consists in. A man can profess this interior faith by deeds as well as by words, and in both sorts of profession, a man commits a mortal sin if he professes something false.

Now even though the faith we have in Christ is the same faith that the ancient fathers had, nonetheless, because they came before Christ whereas we come after Christ, this same faith is signified with different words by us and by them. For they say, "Behold, a virgin will conceive and bring forth a son," where the verbs are future-tense, whereas we represent this same thing with past-tense verbs by saying, "She conceived and brought forth a son."

Similarly, the ceremonies of the Old Law signified the Christ as someone who would be born and would suffer, whereas our sacraments signify Him as someone who has been born and has suffered. Therefore, just as someone would commit a mortal sin if he now, in professing his faith, claimed that the Christ will be born—something that the ancients said in a pious and faith-filled manner—so too someone would commit a mortal sin if he now observed those ceremonies which the ancients observed in their pious and faith-filled manner. This is what Augustine says in *Contra Faustum*: "'Will be born', 'will suffer', and 'will rise'—which those [old] sacraments in a sense resounded with—are no longer permitted. Instead, it is proclaimed that He has been born, that He has suffered, and that He has risen—which the sacraments performed by Christians now resound with."

**Reply to objection 1:** Jerome and Augustine seem to have had differing views on this matter.

Jerome distinguished two periods of time. The one period occurred before Christ's passion, and in this period the ceremonial precepts of the Law were neither dead (*mortua*), in the sense of not having obligatory or expiatory force in their own way, nor deadly (*mortifera*), because those observing them did not thereby sin. However, immediately after Christ's passion, the ceremonial precepts of the Law began to be not only dead, i.e., lacking in power and obligation, but also deadly, in the sense that if anyone observed them, he was committing a mortal sin. For this reason, Jerome claims that after Christ's passion the apostles never in truth observed the ceremonial precepts of the Law, but instead observed them only by a sort of pious simulation, and this in order not to give scandal to the Jews and thus impede their conversion. The simulation is not to be understood in such a way that they did not in truth perform the relevant actions, but rather is to be understood to mean that they did not perform them in such a way as to observe the ceremonial precepts of the Law—as, for instance, if someone were to cut off the foreskin of the male member for the sake of health and not for the sake of observing the legal ceremony of circumcision.

However, because it seems implausible that the apostles should have hidden, out of concern for scandal, those very things that have to do with the truth of life and doctrine, and that they should have made use of a simulation in matters that involve the salvation of the faithful, Augustine more appropriately distinguishes three periods of time. One occurred before Christ's passion, and in this period the ceremonial precepts of the Law were neither dead nor deadly. A second occurs after the time of the spread of the Gospel, and in this period the ceremonial precepts of the Law were both dead and deadly. The third period was the time between the other two, viz., from Christ's passion to the spread of the Gospel, and during this period the ceremonial precepts of the Law were, to be sure, dead, because they did not have power and because no one was obliged to observe them, but they were nonetheless not deadly, because those who had been converted to Christ from among the Jews were able to observe them licitly as long as they did not place their hope in them in such a way that they considered them necessary for salvation, i.e., as long as they did not believe that faith in Christ was unable to justify them in the absence of the ceremonies of the Law. However, there was no reason for those who were converted to Christ from among the Gentiles to observe the ceremonial precepts of the Law.

Accordingly, Paul circumcised Timothy because Timothy had been born of a Jewish mother, whereas he decided not to circumcise Titus, since Titus had been born of Gentiles. However, in order to show the difference between the rites of the Law and the rites of the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit did not want the observance of the ceremonies of the Law to be immediately forbidden for those who had been converted from among the Jews, in the way that the Gentile rites were forbidden for those who had been converted from among the Gentiles. For the rites of the Gentiles were repudiated as altogether illicit and had always been prohibited by God. By contrast, the rites of the Law ceased because they had been fulfilled through Christ's passion; for they had been instituted by God as a figure of the Christ.

**Reply to objection 2:** According to Jerome, Peter put up the pretense of withdrawing from the Gentiles in order to avoid scandalizing the Jews, of whom he was the Apostle. Hence, in this he did not in any way sin. Paul, on the other hand, likewise put up the pretense of reprehending him in order to avoid scandalizing the Gentiles, of whom he was the Apostle.

Augustine, however, disproves this view by appeal to the fact that in the canonical Scriptures, viz., in Galatians 2:11, in which one cannot believe that there is anything false, Paul says that Peter was reprehensible. Hence, it is true that Peter sinned and that Paul corrected him in reality and did not just pretend to correct him.

Still, Peter did not sin in observing the Law for that time period, since he was permitted to observe the Law as someone converted from among the Jews. Instead, he sinned by being excessively diligent in his observance of the Law in order not to scandalize the Jews, with the result that he scandalized the

Gentiles instead.

**Reply to objection 3:** Some have claimed that this prohibition by the apostles should be understood not in a literal sense but in a spiritual sense, so that the prohibition of blood stands for the prohibition of homicide, and the prohibition of what is suffocated stands for the prohibition of robbery and violence, and the prohibition of what has been sacrificed stands for the prohibition of idolatry, and the prohibition of fornication stands for the prohibition of what is bad *per se*. This opinion is accepted by certain Glosses, which expound precepts of this sort in a mystical sense.

However, since homicide and robbery were thought as being against the law even among the Gentiles, it would not have been necessary for a special commandment to be given about this matter to those who had been converted to Christ from paganism.

Hence, others have claimed that the foods were prohibited literally not because of the observances of the Law but in order to suppress gluttony. Hence, in *Super Ezechiel* 44:31 (“The priests shall not eat of anything that is dead”) Jerome says that the passage in question condemns priests who, out of gluttonous desire, do not keep these precepts in the case of thrushes and other things of this sort.

However, since there are foods that are greater delicacies and more conducive to gluttony, there does not seem to be any reason why the particular foods in question were prohibited rather than others.

Therefore, one should reply, in keeping with a third opinion, that the foods in question were prohibited literally not with an eye toward observing the ceremonies of the Law, but rather in order to strengthen the union of Gentiles and Jews who were living together. For as a matter of ancient custom, blood and strangled meat were abominable to the Jews, whereas the eating of things that had been sacrificed to idols could generate among the Jews the suspicion that the Gentiles were relapsing into idolatry. And so these things were forbidden for the period in which it was necessary to bring Gentiles and Jews together for the first time (*de novo*). However, as time went on and the cause ceased to be present, the effect also ceased to be present—once the truth of the Gospel teaching became evident, where our Lord teaches that “nothing that enters through the mouth makes a man unclean” (Matthew 15:11) and 1 Timothy 4:4 says, “Nothing is to be rejected that is received with thanksgiving.”

On the other hand, fornication was specifically prohibited because the Gentiles did not consider it a sin.