

## The Christian Life: In Addition to Augustine and Aquinas

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### Abstract

The paper offers an alternative to the prevailing “discipleship” model of the Christian life that requires self-transformation, considerable effort and self-sacrifice, and tends to make negative judgements against those who fail to live according to the model. The model is illustrated by the example of Thomas Aquinas. A second, complementary model is drawn from the role of the crowds, who followed Jesus in the Gospels. With the help of Karl Barth’s account of vocation, the second model makes it possible for the church to consider those who, for certain reasons, do not live in accord with the discipleship model to be considered good Christians, rather than unsatisfactory ones.

### Keywords

Discipleship, Aquinas, Barth, Judgement, Vocation

### Introduction: Making Judgements about other Christians

What does it take to be a good Christian? In Scripture, in the tradition, and in the view of not a few active churchpeople today, it takes rather a lot. Those who think so often expect everyone to agree with them and to try to live accordingly. They may also suggest that those who do not make the effort to do what it takes are unsatisfactory Christians. Within the Catholic Church, for example, “Cafeteria Catholics” are chided for their supposedly self-serving tendency to pick and choose amongst the Church’s doctrines and moral teachings. More generally, those members of the church whose characters and practices are largely indistinguishable from those of their non-Christian neighbours are considered to have failed to live properly as Christians.

Whatever we may think about such judgements – and perhaps they are reasonable if they are primarily expressions of a concern for the state of the church as a whole – the New Testament indicates that

there are significant dangers in making negative judgements about fellow Christians' way of living the Christian life. So it is useful to distinguish between a judgement that someone is an unsatisfactory Christian and a judgement that someone is an unsatisfactory Roman Catholic (or whatever Church the party belongs to). Whether or not one is a good member of one's Church is usually understood to turn primarily upon one's relation to the Church and its moral rules and established practices. It may sometimes be fairly easy to decide about that. Within Catholicism, for example, people who fail to go to church with any regularity, get divorced and remarried, advocate for choice over life, and so on, and do not seem concerned that all this goes against Church teaching – such people could arguably be said to be unsatisfactory Catholics.

Being a good or unsatisfactory Christian, on the other hand, may well involve your relation to the church, but the primary criterion, perhaps – and let us stipulate it so for this discussion – is one's standing before God, which is distinct from and trumps all other considerations. It is traditional and correct to maintain that we cannot really know what God thinks of this or that person. Who and what we are before God is hidden, even to ourselves, at this time. So to make a negative judgement about someone's standing before their Lord suggests a kind of hubris. Thus it may well be possible for someone to be rightly judged to be a bad Catholic who may yet in fact be a good Christian, and vice versa.

Awareness of something like this distinction may be one reason why the Church leadership has largely avoided making official negative judgments about any particular person's standing before God. Excommunications, the silencing of theologians and episcopal condemnations of Catholic politicians are arguably reflective of a judgement about people's standing as Catholics; they do not imply a negative judgement about their present relation to God. Whilst the Church has a kind of certification process for sainthood, it does not have anything like a similar process for sinnerhood. It never officially makes the kind of judgements Dante made so gleefully as to who is in hell and why.

With the example of Dante, however, we begin to stray towards a distinctly different issue, which we should avoid for the time being. For apart from the practice of canonization within Catholicism, a judgement about someone's present relation to God is not, and, I want to say, cannot be, at the same time a judgement about that person's chances of salvation, even though it is often assumed to be exactly that. Rather, when we say that someone is a good Christian, or when we think someone might possibly be an unsatisfactory Christian, we refer only to their sanctification, to their relation to God here and now. From an assessment of that relation (including our own relation to God) we should not deduce anything as to their (and our) salvation.

We will look into this distinction between sanctification and salvation a bit more later.

### Thomas on the Christian Life

Much of our thinking about what makes a good Christian rather than an unsatisfactory one is influenced by Augustine and Thomas. We will approach the question here in such a way that they are sufficiently in agreement to be taken together as supporting a dominant way of thinking about what constitutes a good Christian life, one that is still very much with us in certain key respects, and not only within the Roman Catholic Church. I want to suggest that although it is a good and useful way of thinking, even probably necessary, it is also significantly inadequate.

So let us begin by briefly reviewing Thomas's description of the good Christian life. We recall the structure of the *Summa Theologiae*, how it begins with an account of God, and then considers God's action outwards, as it were, in creation; how it then describes what is involved in bringing reconciled and elevated humanity back to the Father in the Son by the Holy Spirit, before discussing Jesus Christ, who is both the means to that return and the pattern for us to follow.

Creation, then, is the initial gift that brings about and sustains what is other than God, and is the essential basis for the completion of God's plan, which is creation's eschatological "return" to life in God. Our eschatological completion is God's gift in addition to creation, not exacted by it in any way, but freely and lovingly given. Because of our sinfulness, we also need the grace of reconciliation (*ST* 1/2 114.2). Our way to God, then, requires these two gracious actions that are effected in us through Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, in the church.

This movement towards God constitutes the theological location of the Christian life for Thomas. He concludes from this movement that our present life should be oriented towards our next life. There is for him no real point in talking theologically about the present life as such, but only as the way to the next, for we are not settled here, we are *in via*, on the way as pilgrims. As he turns to consider our response to God at the beginning of the *prima secundae*, Thomas emphasizes this point in his discussion of the goal of our lives and what constitutes true happiness. Happiness is something we all desire; indeed, all our actions are oriented in one way or another to making us happier, even if we seek only to avoid greater unhappiness. The happiness we can have on this earth is never true or complete, of course, and this is not only because of our finitude and sinfulness. Rather, only the happiness for which we are made and to which we

are brought by grace is the true happiness, for it is the vision of the eternally wondrous God, who is infinite beauty.

Unless we remember this and live accordingly, Thomas argues, we will seek passing, second-rate happiness, something which, of course, most of us do to some degree. If we allow our desire for this-worldly happiness to shape our lives significantly, we will become seriously distorted. To live now is, or should be, to prepare for our life in heaven, for “God alone constitutes [our] happiness” (*ST* 1/2 2.8).

Thomas goes on to show how our preparation for heaven requires considerable effort. The effort is not, in the first place, a possibility we have of ourselves, of course. Thomas makes it very clear that all we do, including making an effort, is a product of grace operating preventively and as primary cause. Yet that said, it *does* require effort; we are to work hard at it, intentionally so. To be sure, once you have acquired a virtue, you are likely to be disposed to act appropriately in that area more readily. But Thomas is clear that virtuous habits are only a help and cannot be relied upon. There can be no easing up of our efforts.

For Thomas, effort is always required because the gift of grace includes the amazing gift of our being enabled to merit our salvation (*ST* 1/2 114.3). This does not, of course, mean that by our works we have an alternative route to heaven that bypasses Jesus Christ and what he did for us *extra nos* and *pro nobis*. Without the action of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit nothing is possible for us, even if we had not sinned (*ST* 1/2 114.2). Rather, given our redemption in him, and the grace of the New Law, Thomas believes it is indeed possible for us to act in ways that merit eternal life. He makes a clear distinction between two kinds of meriting. One is a consequence of our free will enabled by grace, which he calls congruent merit, reflecting the fact that our actions considered as such are incommensurate with the actions that would be required properly to justify our salvation as a reward. But then, remarkably, he goes on to indicate a second way when he says that because our actions proceed from the Holy Spirit working within us, they do, on that account alone, merit in a condign way, in a way that *is* commensurate in value, because it is truly God who works in our actions (*ST* 1/2 114.3). In reasoning thus, of course, Thomas has our Incarnate Lord as the paradigm.

For Thomas, meriting is therefore a *necessary* aspect of the Christian life well lived. In this he arguably reflects the axiomatic belief of his time, namely, that to those who do what they can, God does not deny grace. The point, then, is that, in doing what we can with the help of grace, we will receive further grace, or, to put it less abstractly, the Holy Spirit will act a second time within us so as to

enable us to do yet more. And if that is the case, we can conclude that growth in the Christian life is a real possibility. And if *that* is so, then it is obviously incumbent upon us to try hard to grow. We cannot merit our salvation by sitting around as Christians; we are to push ourselves, and strive to change ourselves. Grace is always necessary and always available, but it never comes cheaply or without our making an effort.

Thomas describes the appropriate pattern of Christian living under the rubric of *status perfectionis*. To live in the state of perfection does not, of course, mean that we live perfectly, but rather that we live in a manner that is consistently ordered to the quest for perfection, even if this is never attained. The state of perfection is thus a matter of “binding oneself in perpetuity and with a certain solemnity to those things that pertain to perfection” (*ST 2/2 184.4*). Thomas is perfectly aware that we will very likely not, in fact, become perfect Christians. But for us to be accounted good Christians before God, our task is to try for perfection, and to keep trying, picking ourselves up contritely after each failure, to start anew.

According to Thomas, the state of perfection is the way of life of the religious orders, within which the three vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience are required. Being married, acquiring means of one’s own, and figuring out one’s own path in life, are presented as distractions from the attempt to prepare for and merit the next life; they are not consistent with life *in statu perfectionis* (*ST 2/2 184.3*). So Thomas contends that “the religious state” alone “is a school or exercise for the attainment of perfection” (*ST 2/2 186.2*). Again, the life of Jesus Christ is the paradigm: Jesus was celibate, had no possessions of his own, and was perfectly obedient to the Father.

Thomas knew that not everyone is or can be a religious. Bishops cannot live in monastic poverty, so they must dispense themselves and their priests as necessary. But, note, they must dispense themselves: Thomas is clear that it would be much better if bishops could live in poverty and obedience as well as celibacy, and still do their work, even though he knows they cannot (e.g. *ST 2/2 185.8*). He dispenses kings from *status perfectionis*, for similar reasons. Ordinary lay people, about whom he says next to nothing, are presumably to live as best they can in obedience to their temporal lord and to their priest. We do not find in Thomas’s work any real alternative to the religious life. All conceivable alternatives are unfortunate though practically necessary modifications of the one way that finds its paradigmatic form in the Dominican order.

In sum, then, for Thomas, good Christians seek to transform themselves as they prepare for life with God, and they demand of themselves single-minded and unremitting efforts to merit that life.

## The Discipleship Model

It is arguable that something like Thomas's account of the Christian life remains the dominant model within Roman Catholicism. To be sure, much more diversity in the pattern of the Christian life has been introduced. For example, the notion of the lay apostolate in the documents of Vatican II (e.g. *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 4) makes it clear that the religious life is no longer the only way to be a good Christian, even as the religious life rightly continues to be valued as distinctive and of a special quality. There is also a much greater contemporary appreciation for the goods of the present life, particularly the goods of community and, more recently, of creation.

However, it is evident from official teaching, ordinary Sunday preaching and the work of many theologians that ongoing striving for self-transformation remains the chief criterion for assessing the quality of a Christian life. The counsels of perfection are usually preached as if they apply to all of us, here and now. And while the council fathers at Vatican II seem willing in one place to drop faith as the minimum requirement for "the assistance of grace for salvation", they still insist upon a minimum for all people, namely, "to strive to lead a good life" (*Lumen Gentium* chapter 2, 16).

Let us call this conception of the good Christian life the "discipleship" model. The name reflects the New Testament descriptions of discipleship as wholly-involving, self-denying and highly dedicated (e.g., *Matthew* 16.27–28). It also reflects the emphasis upon discipleship as the ideal form of the Christian life found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Stanley Hauerwas and many others. They agree with Augustine and Aquinas in rejecting cheap grace and in arguing that a good Christian is someone who strives to be self-disciplined, struggles to be exceptional, and seeks to be different from the world not merely in belief, but visibly and practically, in who they are.

The discipleship model is obviously both reasonable and appropriate, especially after its expansion in the modern period. It is valuable, not as an *ideal* of perfection, but as a way of life that *seeks* perfection. As such it may be realized by many, perhaps most, of those who truly dedicate themselves to it, including the laity.

Yet if this is the only model of the Christian life, it makes it very difficult to consider in anything but negative terms those who do *not* strive, or who do so only sporadically or feebly, and who remain untransformed by their faith. If discipleship – not necessarily successful discipleship, but minimally ongoing striving – is required of everyone, then it could be said that those who fail to strive cannot be in good standing with God in regards to their sanctification. Their lack of effort would seem to be a form of sin, whether it be sloth or pride or something else. They must therefore (if they are Catholic)

be judged to be not only unsatisfactory Catholics, but perhaps unsatisfactory Christians too.

This seems to be Thomas's view and, because he linked sanctification with salvation, he agreed with Augustine and most of his contemporaries that the majority of Christians were amongst the *massa damnata*. I will suggest below that we need not make that link. But even without it, the implication, sometimes made explicit, seems to be that the church is made up of true Christians, plus others are not really Christian at all, or only "potentially" so, as Thomas himself put it (*ST* 3 8.3). Consequently, some churchpeople have indicated that they believe unsatisfactory discipleship-Christians are a significant drag on the church's work of preaching the gospel and witnessing to Jesus Christ. Indeed, some have concluded from the discipleship model that it would be better if those who fail to live according to the discipleship model were to leave the church. The church would then become a smaller but more genuine and dedicated alternative to the world, and thus more truly the Body of Christ.

### An Alternative Model

If we are to avoid anything like this conclusion and to rule out negative judgements about someone's relation to God as unwarrantable (following, e.g., *Luke* 18.9–14), a second, complementary model of the Christian life is required. If the discipleship model is the only form of the Christian life, the gospel cannot be Good News for certain members of the church. Nor, following the clause from *Lumen Gentium* cited above, can it be a source of hope for those who fail, for whatever reason, to strive to lead a good life. Instead, the gospel becomes a judgement against those Christians who appear to be more or less content with not being disciples and who give the matter little or no thought, and against those Christians who know – with neither false modesty nor some confused version of evangelical humility – that, for a wide variety of reasons, they cannot rightly or comfortably claim that words such as "disciple" or "witness", "devout" or "dedicated", describe who they are.

Unless it is possible to say that someone can be in good standing with God even without striving, we must consider such people to be unsatisfactory Christians. Against such a conclusion, I offer a sketch of a different model of the Christian life in the form of three brief arguments.

The *first* argument is primarily concerned with the need for a second model. Successful discipleship-Christians might reply to all these concerns by saying, "Surely everyone can try hard if they really want to and put their mind to it?" This may not in fact be the case. It has become common for theologians to move from what Thomas

says about the religious life being like a school to say that the church as a whole is like a school too, in that it trains its members to be good Christians, to live the Christian life well. The analogy is an apt one, and is usually used to emphasize our need to be transformed by living within the church, enacting its practices and suchlike, in order to become better disciples. However, the analogy also helps to reveal some of the difficulties involved in the church's task of forming its members.

In a school there are gifted teachers who nurture their pupils, and there are not-so-gifted teachers who hinder their development. Likewise the church has its good and its bad preachers and teachers, some who stimulate, others who put off. And amongst its members, there are parents and congregations who, whether well-intentioned or not, are not always gifted in their understanding of the Christian life and how to pass it on, sometimes quite the contrary. So the first thing we can say is that there is a bit of luck involved in becoming a discipleship Christian.

Moreover, in every school there are pupils who do very well, who are able to sit still, avoid distraction, and who get so hooked into learning that they find great pleasure in working hard on their homework and the success it brings. They readily and relatively easily acquire the intellectual virtues, and they may go on to become devoted scholars and single-minded researchers. And then, besides the people in between, there are those who find learning at school arduous and would much prefer to be almost anywhere else. As we know, this is by no means always a matter of intelligence. The immature and the rebellious may be able to learn only later in life and by other means. And there are those who find any kind of school-learning difficult. We now know quite a lot about the various disabilities – psychological, physiological and cultural – that can make learning so irksome that the student may merely go through the motions or give up entirely.

It is likely to be similar for some Christians at the school of the church. It may be that some people are so constituted or formed that they cannot acquire the virtues needed to live the Christian life in the discipleship mode. It is not enough to counter this point by saying something like, “Well, within the church, unlike a school, grace will overcome all natural inability”. That brings in God's action to patch up an inadequate theory, and muddles up incommensurate causes in a way that reflects the freedom neither of God nor the Christian. Some Christians learn from the church only the bare minimum, rather like a man who learns only enough arithmetic at school to count his change with difficulty. Their physiological make-up, their psychology, their upbringing or their church-education may make it very difficult for them to see the point of genuine discipleship and apply themselves to it. Moreover, such factors are arguably much more of an impediment



than they are in a regular school, because only a small minority go to the school of the church, and they spend far less time there than being educated by the state and the broader culture.

More generally, we all know people who seem to be born strivers, who thrive on hard work and challenges, and we know people who hardly ever strive for anything. Born strivers will always find somewhere to be exceptional. Some of them strive for reasons that do not derive only from love of what they do: they may seek to compensate for something or they may be keen to display themselves to advantage, or they may even be narcissistic, and so on. The non-strivers may, for a variety of reasons, be content to be run-of-the-mill, average or below average, if that is the way they see it must be. Yet such people may also think of themselves as Christians, not exceptional but good Christians in their own way. It seems difficult to deny them that, given their baptism and their trust in the promise of forgiveness through Christ Jesus. Even though their faith may seem to others to be a feeble and intermittent light within their lives, it would be wrong to say they are not Christians.

A *second* argument begins with the question: Why are we to strive, to put forth such effort, to be willing to suffer hardships for our faith? Frequently the impression one gets from the Roman Catholic Church's teaching, as well as from some aspects of the theologies of both Augustine and Thomas, is that effort and striving are the necessary response to God's offer of salvation and, furthermore, they are the necessary response because our salvation is conditional upon our manner of life. The Christian life of discipleship would then appear to be transactional, rather like, or even identical to, a *quid pro quo*. If and only if we strive – truly strive, however unsuccessfully – to live as disciples will we have eternal life.

In this vein, *Matthew* 25 is often interpreted homiletically as telling us in straightforward terms that, provided we at least strive to do what Jesus wants us to do, we will be among the sheep; but if we do not, we will be among the goats and go to hell. So, too, the *Lumen Gentium* clause could be construed moralistically to say not only that the response of striving is sufficient, but that it is also necessary. If and only if we strive to lead a good life can God in justice bring us into the kingdom. If these interpretations are correct, it would follow that those who do not make any effort are unsatisfactory Christians, whose eternal fate is sealed.

However, another way to understand our response rules out any *quid pro quo* on principle. With regard to the distinction I suggested earlier between sanctification and salvation, we might argue with David Kelsey<sup>1</sup> that there are two narratives in Scripture.

<sup>1</sup> David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2009), e.g., pp. 610–16.

One describes the movement of God's fundamental plan, which is to bring creation to its, and therefore also our, eschatological consummation. The other narrative describes God's work reconciling us sinners through sanctifying grace. These two narratives should not be separated, but neither should they be conflated such that the narrative of reconciliation determines the meaning and outcome of the narrative of eschatological consummation.

Avoiding conflation permits a more supralapsarian interpretation of Scripture than, say, Thomas's, for it gives as much value to both the universal salvific will of God as it does to God's will to reconcile. It thereby suggests some modifications to Thomas's theology of the Christian life. We could discard his assumption that only a few will be saved and stress rather more God's universal salvific will. We can agree with Thomas that the possibility and actuality of merit is a miraculous gift given us by the New Law, the Holy Spirit working within each of us. But we can now say that the Christian life is not at all a *quid pro quo*. Merit is not a necessity, not something we must earn. Rather, it is a gift and response to be taken up in freedom and love. Moreover, we can add that, if grace be given sufficiently for us properly to understand and appreciate the significance of this gift, we could not help but try to respond lovingly and freely in return, and so live as true disciples. Our gratitude does not thereby become the new condition of our salvation but is simply our (grace-enabled) response to God's loving kindness.

However, it is evident that Christians have not been given to the same degree the gift of understanding what we have been given. Accordingly, we can presume that the lack of an adequate or even minimal response is not at all the same as a rejection of God's offer. It *could* be that, but it certainly need not be. For in the majority of cases it may well be the consequence of our not being awakened by the gift of understanding, or awakened only a little. That we Christians are often only barely aware of God's love or forgetful of it, and respond or fail to respond accordingly, *may* be the result of our sinfulness. But it could reflect at least as well the more limited gifts God has decided to give us.

One way to make sense of this notion of varied degrees of response requires a *third*, more substantive move for which we can draw upon some aspects of Karl Barth's theology of vocation and his ecclesiology. In the *Church Dogmatics*,<sup>2</sup> Barth argues that each particular person is called by Christ to his and her very own particular vocation. My vocation and my response constitute my history with God and, with all other particular Christians' history, the history of the

<sup>2</sup> Barth's primary discussions of vocation can be found in his *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), vols. 3/4 pp. 595–647 and 4/3.1 pp. 481–680.

church with God. Each vocation is ongoing, such that we cannot rest in it, thinking we know exactly what God wants from us, for God continues to call us, sometimes to something quite new. Accordingly, though Barth is critically appreciative of the religious life, he rejects the idea that it or any other could be the normative shape of the Christian life. Each Christian life is shaped by that person's vocation and by our response to our vocation, though since this occurs only within and with the help of the church, there are obviously many commonalities amongst us.

Partly on this account, Barth rejects Augustine's *corpus permixtum* ecclesiology. It is not that there is one group that has the right kind of love and another group that has the wrong kind. Instead, first, Barth distinguishes amongst the members of the church by dividing us into those who are true Christians and those who are non-Christians. But then, second, this is not at all a settled distinction, because *everyone* in the church is at various times not a Christian whilst, on the other hand, in God's eyes at least, probably everyone in the church is at times a Christian. Barth is thus able to keep something like the discipleship model as the sole form of the Christian life, but can acknowledge that even the best members of the church fail to be discipleship-Christians at times, concluding that when they do, they cease to be Christians at all.

Roman Catholics arguably cannot follow Barth in quite this way, since we must say that our baptism really changes us sufficiently for us to remain Christians, however unsatisfactory our Christian living may be. But Barth's floating distinction amongst the members of the church can be useful if we replace his Christian/non-Christian distinction with another that permits a wider range of forms of the Christian life.

One possibility is the distinction made in the Gospels between *hoi ochloi*, the crowds who follow Jesus, and the disciples who are called to be Jesus' followers. Barth himself is not particularly sympathetic to the crowds, but he does note there is a "true and deep and strong union and solidarity of Jesus with this people, and of this people with Jesus" (*CD* 4/2 p. 187). This puts them in a different relation to Jesus from those who ignored him and simply went about their own business. Jesus cares deeply for the crowd; he looks after them and ensures they do not go hungry. They have their role to play in the narrative, not only the one before Pilate, but also on Palm Sunday. According to Matthew, they listen in as Jesus teaches the disciples on the Mount, commenting perceptively that he teaches with authority. The crowds are involved in various ways, but they are not disciples, nor are they called to be.

Armed with this distinction, we might explore the idea of the Christian life as a kind of continuum, one which ranges from the crowd members who get things wrong to those who are closer to

the truth, and on to striving disciples *in statu perfectionis*, who truly seek to give everything up for our Lord. While some Christians are called to be disciples, many other Christians, perhaps the vast majority, are called to be disciples only at certain times. At other times, the same person's vocation is to be more like a member of the crowd that followed Jesus. In the latter case, the Christian may rightly be more of an onlooker, live at some distance from the centre of the action, and perhaps get important things quite wrong (as the disciples did and discipleship-Christians still do, too, of course).

Of those who are indeed called to live their relation with God in a way that is more passive than others, we may say it is right for them to live accordingly. Furthermore, we may say that living thus does not endanger their salvation, for if their vocation is to be a member of the crowd, Jesus loves and saves them, just as he loves and saves erring disciples.

This is not to propose the church should give up exhorting its members to the kind of effort commensurate with a call to discipleship. It is to say that being a Christian is a more complex matter than is covered by the idea that everyone is called to strive and be exemplary in their witness. If so, judgements about other Christians' relation to God cannot be based upon whether or not they live up to the rigours of the life of discipleship. We can only assume that all our fellow Christians are good Christians in their particular way, following their particular call, even if they are amongst those who may seem to follow Jesus at a distance.

A final point from John Henry Newman. Newman found it necessary to address the unsatisfactory Catholicism he found in Italy in his day, exemplified in the superstition of "a poor Neapolitan crone, who chatters to [her] . . . crucifix", praying for help and comfort. Could she be a genuine Christian? For Newman, the answer was clearly "yes", for he made the connection between her and the woman in the crowd who touched Jesus' cloak and was cured of her hemorrhage. The old lady from Naples

refers that crucifix in her deep mental consciousness to an original who once hung upon a cross in flesh and blood; but if, nevertheless she is puzzle-headed enough to assign virtue to it in itself, she does no more than the woman in the Gospel, who preferred to rely for a cure on a bit of cloth, which was our Lord's, to directly and honestly addressing Him.

As Newman reminds us, Jesus made a point of publicly praising her for her actions.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, it is very difficult not to conclude

<sup>3</sup> Cardinal John Henry Newman, "Preface to the Third Edition" of his *On the Prophetic Office of the Church* (1837, 1877), chapter 2, section 18. The preface can be found online at: <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/viamedia/volume1/preface3.html>.

that her standing before God was good: she was a good Christian in the way she had been called to be. And, therefore, we may conclude that confused, needy, passive and other kinds of Christians, who do not live according to the discipleship model, may also be good Christians.

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